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NORTH OF THE GRID: THE BLACK EXPERIENCE
OF 17TH – 19TH CENTURY RURAL NEW YORK

by

STEPHANIE E. BARNES

A master's capstone project submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2022

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Stephanie Barnes

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

North of the Grid: The Black Experience of 17th-19th Century

Rural New York City

by

Stephanie E. Barnes

Advisor: Matthew Reilly

In the United States, transatlantic slavery was a racial project and template for race-making which created a country that relied on institutions that were organized and performed through social stratification. Today, the nation still operates on systemically racist institutions that have benefited whites while disadvantaging ‘others.’ The narratives presented in American history are rooted in whiteness and benefit the white community while marginalizing nonwhites. Over two hundred years of slavery history in this country has been purposely manipulated and left out. My research focuses on using an historical archaeological framework to research and share the lives of free and enslaved Africans in 17th – 19th century Upper Manhattan. By revisiting documents and materials in the 21st century, I can apply Black, Indigenous, and feminist lenses with a critical pedagogical approach to counteract intentional misinterpretations of the past. My capstone project is a digital storytelling of the lived experiences of free and enslaved Africans in Upper Manhattan. I challenge cultural institutions to learn and develop best practices for implementing enslaved narratives at their sites.

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DIGITAL MANIFEST

I. Capstone Project Whitepaper

II. WARC file

a. Capstone Project website

Archived version of <https://stephanieebarnes.wixsite.com/northofthegrid>

b. Website Component — Inwood African Burial Ground ArcGIS StoryMaps

Archived version of

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9854fd1f193c42488b7c56778807b14f>

c. Website Component — Cato Alexander ArcGIS StoryMaps

Archived version of

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/04d345fabece484d998a7f64dd453375>

Introduction

One day during an internship at an historic house museum in Upper Manhattan called the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum (DFM), I was giving a spiel of the house and its history to a visitor. I talked about the Dutch family who lived there, when they arrived in the Americas, where they went during the Revolutionary War, and what daily life was like for them and their household. This Dutch family were enslavers, so their household included enslaved individuals who worked on the farm and in the house, cooking, cleaning, and tending to the children. After I concluded my museum introduction, the visitor was eager to hear more about the free and enslaved workers of the house. A native New Yorker, and resident of the neighborhood, they were shocked to find out this piece of history. It is not uncommon to come across New Yorkers who are unaware of the history of slavery in New York City. As an undergrad studying anthropology, I took this interaction as an opportunity to explore missing enslaved narratives in Upper Manhattan for my senior thesis.

Throughout New York City, cultural and educational institutions have been revisiting their narrative to include what has been overlooked for centuries: the lives of the millions of people who were forced to build, work, and live in the Americas, including New York City. The internship at DFM sparked my interest in understanding and learning how to approach research related to African people who were enslaved from the 1600s through emancipation and beyond. Looking at materials from the 17th to 19th centuries, including the work of early 20th-century archaeologists, historical documentation has been found that can share vivid details of their lives in the Upper Manhattan region. Their stories go beyond seeing them as enslaved; instead, seeing them as people who navigated their lives in a Eurocentric cultural surrounding. I present my research in a website titled “North of the Grid: The Black Experience of 17th -19th Century Rural New York City.” The “North of the Grid” site acts as a digital storytelling of their experiences while also challenging

cultural institutions to learn and develop best practices for implementing enslaved narratives at their sites.

There is a large amount of text supporting the realities of slavery in the North, but the narratives that discuss the northern state of New York are tightly based on New York City proper, which is today's lower Manhattan. Rural New York greatly differs from its southern counterpart. Those living in Upper Manhattan provided resources to the city and were part of abolition movements, pre- and post-emancipation. Researching Upper Manhattan and the relationship between the enslavers and enslaved can greatly add to the ongoing research of African and Indigenous lives that have been consistently excluded from curriculum in the past. By utilizing census records, maps, and slave ads in newspapers I have been able to develop short narratives of specific free and enslaved Africans, such as Francis Cudjoe, who lived and worked on a farm as an enslaved man in today's Inwood at the turn of the 19th century and was granted freedom through manumission; and Cato Alexander, who was a freed African in today's Midtown East who became known as a prominent tavern and innkeeper and one of the wealthiest Black Americans at his time in the early 1800s.

Why Upper Manhattan Narratives Matter

I have chosen to research Upper Manhattan because it is often an overlooked area of Manhattan history. One of the last areas to see urban development, the neighborhoods of Upper Manhattan experienced a transition from rural farmland to urban city much later than downtown neighborhoods. Upper Manhattan is full of rich history, including a handful of Revolutionary War battles in the 1770s, vast farmland providing sustenance to the city through the 1850s, and Indigenous Lenape tribes until the early 1920s. Fighting those battles and plowing those fields were enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples. A common misconception of slavery is that it was a

southern phenomenon that Northern Americans vehemently opposed. More locally, it is often assumed that Dutch enslavers in the northern regions of America were more gentle than Southern enslavers. However, there are still considerable differences in the life and treatment of the enslaved between Upper Manhattan and Lower Manhattan, then called New Amsterdam.

How can those who unwillingly and forcefully built our cities and fought our wars be erased from histories taught in classrooms? I can begin to replace these exclusionary histories by focusing on Upper Manhattan and the Black experience in this region by looking at past archaeological records and archived materials. I begin to undertake this research with an acknowledgement of my background as a White woman who has no experiential or cultural connection to the African and Indigenous men and women forced into slave labor. 20th-century historical and archaeological accounts have catered to the white supremacist narratives that are found in cultural and educational curriculum. By revisiting those documents and materials in the 21st century, I can apply Black, Indigenous, and feminist lenses to counteract intentional misinterpretations of the past. Through self-reflection and recentering, I can consider how my research can contribute and assist cultural and education institutions with their struggles of implementing enslaved narratives for reinterpretation.

Dominating narratives have been bounded by white American or European male historians, a demographic historically lacking the empathies needed to tell these stories. Specifically looking at historic sites, including those on national park land, organizations, boards, and foundations are most often founded by white men who perpetuate a white-male perspective into the site's narrative (Horton 2006: 44). The consistent narratives told through a white, male lens erases the histories of nonwhites and whites such as Irish and Italian immigrants who were racially othered during colonization (Guglielmo and Salerno 2003, McMahon 2015). The storytellers promote a white savior attitude, preaching gratitude for Indigenous peoples 'sharing' their land, celebrating a free

North, and Lincoln's noble decision to end slavery. False narratives have been on display at major New York City institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), who exhibit stolen materials from communities without consent. AMNH continues to exhibit Indigenous people's history without consultation of descendant community members, let alone the fact that Indigenous peoples are even displayed in a 'natural history' museum (Rodriguez 2020). They also have sustained their racial history through the problematic Theodore Roosevelt statue that has only recently been addressed by the museum (Theodore Roosevelt Statue 2020). Both these issues have come to light because of an abolitionist movement called Decolonize This Place located in New York City. Through personal research that is featured in "North of the Grid" there is evidence that at one point African remains from the Inwood African Burial Ground were housed at AMNH. It has not been confirmed if these remains continue to be housed in the archaeological collection in AMNH's basement.

The complicated storytelling of United States' history begins with the narratives presented in history books. The language in educational texts permeates subconsciously leaving a society complacent with whitewashed narratives that uphold racist ideals. Donald Yacovone's anticipated September 2022 book titled *Teaching White Supremacy: The Textbook Battle Over Race in American History* showcases years of researching American textbooks that negate black history (Yacovone 2018). Various white male authored and white owned publishing companies such as McGraw-Hill, Abeka, and Bob Jones University Press refuse to introduce Critical Race Theory and have a long-standing history of racist literature (Wong 2015; Klein 2021). Other publishers, school districts, and cultural institutions have introduced Critical Race Theory, but the root of the language and content remains told through a one-sided, whitewashed, racialized Western lens. This history then only pertains to the white community causing intentional exclusionary narratives to nonwhites. Until the 1990s, history courses in high school were inadequately taught due to the

United States Department of Education failing to properly train (Horton 2006, 41-42). With funding by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City teachers received training in the 1990s on a more inclusive history, including teaching about slavery. Horton states “the history of slavery is starting to make its way into public schools because of these important public and private programs that are educating our public school teachers” (Horton 2006, 43).

Despite the prominent one-sided history that is commonplace in educational institutions, there has been and continues to be a resistance of white narratives by telling a more complete and rounded history, particularly the history of slavery and the African experience in America. Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Booker T. Washington are among the most prominent historical storytellers of American Black history. What needs to be asked then is why is there a consistent white narrative? How has slavery in New York City been taught in its schools and cultural institutions? How has slavery perpetuated a racialized retelling of New York City’s history? I’ll begin to answer these not-so-simple questions by explaining how and why I’ve decided to study the history of slavery, particularly life of African enslaved people who lived in Upper Manhattan. Through my research I am discovering the evolution of enslaved narratives in educational and cultural institutions. With this, we can understand how America’s white supremacist system has inhibited educational institutions from the inclusive retelling of slavery. I use theoretical frameworks under the umbrella of historical archaeology to explain how and why enslaved narratives are portrayed, including whiteness, black feminist archaeology, and critical pedagogy. My capstone emphasizes that it is necessary to acknowledge not only what is being told, but more importantly, what is missing. With my theoretical framework, my capstone explores the lived experiences of free and enslaved Africans in Upper Manhattan and critiques how educational and cultural institutions can do the same.

Research as an Outsider

Whitney Battle-Baptiste, in *Black Feminist Anthropology*, instills the importance of continuing an ongoing, honest dialogue with colleagues. Baptiste hopes this would lead to more archaeologists who can “openly discuss our personal influences, the impact of our backgrounds and experiences, and how these factors could be assets if added to a collective (Battle-Baptiste 2011, 22-23). It is not easy researching a community whom I do not belong to, and I often wonder if I have the right to do so. Who am I, a white woman, to decide what materials and artifacts represent African and Indigenous lives and how they are to be interpreted? How can my perspective be helpful in the understanding and analysis of enslaved narratives? I can explore these questions and conversations among my peers and Black and Indigenous community members to achieve a research undertaking with well-reflected narratives through a healthy dialogue and analysis. At the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum, we have restructured our mission to put the community first and have funded the DyckmanDISCOVERED initiative to research the lives of the free and enslaved people who lived and worked on the Dutch farms in what is now called Inwood. I have used this model by DFM within my own research by sharing inclusive histories of Upper Manhattan. Today, with the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement, it is imperative to ask these questions. Doing so assists in understanding that having an awareness of my identity and perspective is important and relevant for my research findings.

Being an active accomplice means challenging institutional racism, and I strive to do so by providing a more inclusive narrative of our history. As Barbara L. Voss notes in "Between the Household and the World System: Social Collectivity and Community Agency in Overseas Chinese Archaeology," recentering in topics of race is one thing, but recentering in anthropology is another. One must also examine common threads in material items or language from “unusual or underused perspectives” (Voss 2008, 37). Recentering in anthropology therefore aids in breaking

the unconscious act of postulating assumptions of item use, cultural activities, or daily tasks. These tools are helpful when organizing and analyzing documents and materials on the Upper Manhattan enslaved population. Connections can be drawn between church records and manumission records to see if enslaved remained in the same neighborhood after being manumitted. Property inventory lists and runaway slave ads can be cross-checked to discover partial or full names of enslaved who are otherwise listed by merely a number on census lists as well as their relocation throughout North America. Perhaps there are parallels in movements that haven't been discovered yet in the Upper Manhattan and Hudson Valley region and the reasonings behind these migration patterns.

There are many components to seeing outside one's own culture, but it can also be said that there is no total removal of bias. There are various techniques to implement a perspective with the least amount of bias possible, such as Voss who approaches Chinese households as a community, not as a single-family unit, through various scales and lenses (Voss 2008, 39-40). Tara Million is a great model of implementing an Aboriginal lens through every step of her archaeological process as well as ensuring "Aboriginal and mainstream Western archaeology be interrelated and collaborative" (Million 2004, 46). Early archaeologists laid white supremacist foundations which today, white archaeologists need to challenge using a pedagogical approach to adjust teaching practices. Michael Blakey, Cheryl Matias and Janiece Mackey agree that the omission of whiteness will only lead to reverse racism and racial ignorance unless whites understand not only their racial privilege but use a transdisciplinary approach to understand the foundations of whiteness to dismantle white supremacy (Blakey 2020, 186; Matias & Mackey 2015, 34). I can use these approaches that have been part of a growing movement in 21st century archaeologists and anthropologists to steer away from and decolonize the white-male perspective from which white supremacist and eugenics movements grew.

Since my research focuses on the lives of free and enslaved Africans in 17th – 19th century Upper Manhattan, my white privilege and perspective have biases and limitations to capturing their lived experiences. I've been privileged to have an education focusing on historical archaeology, a niche branch of archaeology that emphasizes the importance of Black feminism, intersectionality, and pedagogical approaches. Part of this field focuses on community involvement, such as involving Indigenous communities in an excavation on a sacred site. DFM has implemented this practice by developing a diverse board with African and Indigenous representation for a site facing new development that was previously an Indigenous ceremonial site and enslaved African burial ground. My white privilege can be used to advocate for racial justice, but through this capstone project, I'm learning to understand and have self-awareness of one's white agency that is necessary in maintaining the focus on the outcomes for the oppressed group and not self-assurance.

Choosing an Historical Archaeology Framework

As someone who works in an historical house museum that has a history of slavery, I find it very useful to use an historical archaeology framework to accurately research and present enslaved history to the public. As defined by James Deetz, "A popular definition of historical archaeology is the archaeology of the spread of European culture throughout the world since the fifteenth century and its impact on indigenous peoples" (Deetz 1977, 5). This initial definition from the 1970s emphasizes the importance of the effect of colonization in the field of archaeology. While in recent years it is becoming more commonplace to utilize a sense of understanding of a Western perspective, historical archaeologists structure their work around subjects that have been disadvantaged by colonization.

Dr. Christopher Matthews has been conducting archaeological research in the town of Setauket on Long Island, New York. Today, Setauket is an upper middle-class town of mostly

white demographics but has a longstanding history of rich Indigenous and enslaved history. This community has ancestors living in Setauket today, but many are slowly disappearing due to the change in demographics that are inflating the cost of living. Matthews critiques whiteness through the community members who have a silent struggle that “largely derives from the idea that the American citizen is an autonomous actor who is ultimately responsible for his or her own well-being” (Matthews 2015, 255). The strong ethic of individuality among Americans then is a driving force for whites who then understand whiteness as white people being free not because of enslavement but because they do not require social support, and therefore, are autonomous (Matthews 2015, 256). Using Matthews’ understanding of whiteness through the eyes of community members is helpful for me to know how I can portray enslaved narratives in the museum with an approach that connects and can possibly destigmatize those notions and values.

Black feminist archaeology is a necessary framework that I’ve chosen to implement not only within my research but in understanding anthropological and archaeological trends today. This Black feminist methodology, as described by Whitney Battle-Baptiste, “combines aspects of anthropological theory, ethnohistory, the narrative tradition, oral history, material culture studies, Black and African-descendant feminisms, and critical race and African Diaspora theories” (Battle-Baptiste 2011, 29). Not only does it offer an interdisciplinary approach, but a perspective of understanding the lives of these communities by looking at environment and space. Within historical archaeology, black feminism aids in breaking down the formation of feminism, intersectionality, and talking about race and ethnicity in academia. As Kathleen Sterling points out, it is most commonly historical archaeologists “who have done work they define as Black feminist archaeology” and is a niche field “where most Black women are in archaeology” (Sterling 2015, 101). This statistic helps me reiterate the white privilege I have in my education at CUNY, which is a diverse school system and focuses on inclusive teachings. Surprisingly, Black feminist

archaeology is not practiced throughout archaeology, or in anthropology. It is important to note that Black feminist scholars tend to focus on African diaspora, frequently looking at Black women in African diaspora. While my research is on African communities, my work can continue to make the historical archaeology field strong with intersectionality and Black feminism which will hopefully be carried out in various archeological and anthropological works. Those researching white culture can benefit by these theoretical frameworks to bring in a non-white perspective on white culture.

Working at a historic site with a small staff leaves little time to developing refreshed narratives that can highlight stories that have been excluded in the past. While different from plantations in the South, heritage sites throughout the United States struggle with responding to the institutions that often govern or regulate the historic site, such as the National Park Service, or in New York, New York City Parks and Recreation. Ayana Omilade Flewellen uses the Floridian Kingsley Plantation as her case study for understanding the marginalized narratives of the enslaved at this site and how outside forces affect the implementation of historical narratives. The complexity of African diaspora work that Flewellen undertook was showcased as “central to project design and the interpretation process” (Flewellen 2017). Flewellen utilizes a framework combining critical pedagogy with Black feminism archaeology to highlight enslaved narratives at heritage sites. Though not a Southern plantation, my work in Upper Manhattan is inspired by Flewellen’s approach and has proved to be beneficial when developing narratives with very little material culture and archival material pertaining to the enslaved people and their lives.

These building blocks have been important during my research, as well as learning about the processes of other archaeological work of enslaved communities in New York City, such as Seneca Village and the Lower Manhattan African Burial Ground. Unlike these sites, however, I am working in a region that has been predominately excluded from New York City proper, earning the

name “Upstate Manhattan.” The historical research in this neighborhood is less extensive than its southern counterparts, but there is still much to learn from what is available.

Revisiting a Misinterpreted Past

Part of the process of researching these Upper Manhattan narratives is exploring past archaeological findings. Oftentimes the research has been done, but, in this case, over one-hundred years ago. Therefore, in addition to locating primary sources from the mid 1600s to the early 1800s, I have located manuscripts and other forms of documents by amateur archaeologists in the early 1900s that provide details into the lives of enslaved Africans in Upper Manhattan. While seemingly thorough, by revisiting these works, there are problematic views of the elite, white men, often called “relic hunters” who stomped around Upper Manhattan looking for Revolutionary War artifacts for their own personal interest. Reginald Pelham Bolton and William Calver were two important and well-known amateur archaeologists of Upper Manhattan who preserved Lenape, Revolutionary War, and colonial farm history. Of their time, these two could be considered historical archaeologists, particularly Bolton’s perspective of the discovery of an African slave burial ground:

“The remains of these humble workers of the past reminds us of the time when, even in this neighborhood, the practice of slavery was customary. Perhaps no other relic of the past could more decidedly mark the difference between the past and the present than the bones of these poor unwilling immigrants, whose labors cleared the forest, cultivated the unturned sods, and prepared the way for the civilization that followed” (Bolton 204).

The preservation of this history by Bolton and his team have provided researchers and historians with most, if not all, the details of lives of these enslaved Africans in this region. That said, their

intentions were still driven by archaeology as a hobby. Sonya Atalay gently puts the perspective of these archaeologists and their contemporary lens in “Indigenous Archaeology as Decolonizing Practice.” Early archaeologists were fascinated by the “study of the unknown” who have been lost, which distances the archaeologists from these past cultures, leading to the “sense of ‘othering’” (Atalay 2006, 284-285). Reflected in the archaeologists’ writings, there are instances of information being left out or facts not lining up between each of their accounts. This leaves me discerning why, which is occasionally due to human error, but often because of their personal biases, white perspective, othering, and their intent to leave out certain details pertaining to African and Indigenous narratives.

My solution to this is to highlight the issues in these findings by revisiting their research with my historical archaeology theoretical frameworks. This allows for others to see the research process that is necessary in dispelling the inaccuracies that hinder the African and Indigenous narratives. Applying these frameworks leads to opportunities to bring these histories to the African and Indigenous communities today. Archaeology has been driven by Western ideologies that enable the findings to be secluded from those communities and put on display, oftentimes in institutions frequented by Western society looking to grasp an understanding of people of the past. Atalay states that by privileging material findings, archaeologists are therefore grounded in a practice that applies “Western ways of categorizing, knowing, and interpreting the world” (Atalay 2006, 280). It can be frustrating working with problematic archeological works from the past, but it is necessary to revisit their research to discover things that they overlooked. I hope that not only will there be more like-minded archaeologists today utilizing these practices, but also using these practices to revisit works of the past. It is our responsibility to correct the destructive Westernized approach used in the past (and still today) to honor and seek justice for those communities who have been othered for centuries.

As I briefly mentioned, it is imperative to involve Black and Indigenous communities in the research process. Some of the archaeological reports I've read by Bolton and his team cover the discovery of an enslaved burial ground. There is brief mention of these archaeologists asking only one local about the burial's possible history; the rest of the manuscript is mere speculation of these White relic hunters. Their analysis not only lacks historical context, but the research is conducted by those (free whites) outside the group being studied (enslaved Blacks); "the cultural heritage and history...is now written and interpreted by those who are 'others' in one way or another" (Atalay 2006, 282). Atalay rightfully shifts the perspective of archaeologists as the "other" as there is no hierarchical system between cultures. Unfortunately, the colonial Western approach of archaeologists has been commonplace when studying African, Indigenous, and other colonized communities. These scholars "have held the political, social, and economic power to study, interpret, write, and teach about Indigenous pasts" (Atalay 2006, 283). Steering away from a Western framework and applying other lenses means a shift in the intentions of archaeologists' work. This includes no longer contextualizing past cultures to suit Western knowledge growth and instead providing an ethical undertaking with active involvement and contribution from these communities. The African Burial Ground excavations in 1991 became a prominent example within archaeology of involving descendant communities in the excavation process (LaRoche and Blakey 1997).

The field of archaeology has grown over the past century since the excavations in Inwood in the early 20th century, so their problematic approaches involving excluding Indigenous and Black communities in their work would likely not be repeated today. We are grateful for the discoveries made by Bolton and his team which were meticulously recorded in journals and photographed. Part of my work at the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum has been to organize the museum's collections room which houses nearly 5,000 artifacts from Bolton's excavation.

Hopefully in the future the museum will have funds to hire a collections manager to digitally archive and analyze all of Bolton's work.

Navigating Narratives for a Public Sphere

I struggle with the process of telling these stories and know I am not alone as cultural and educational institutions also wonder how to implement enslaved narratives for reinterpretation (Horton 2006, The National Summit on Teaching Slavery 2018). No matter how big or how small an institution, these struggles are present, and I hope my research can help close the gap in Upper Manhattan history which can assist the implementation of adding these narratives in already existing exhibitions and curriculum. It can be challenging to discuss slavery while being both receptive to the audience and maintaining boundaries for all backgrounds and age groups in a respectful manner. There are still many who are unfamiliar with the history of slavery in the North or have a perception that slavery in the North was less harsh. There are ways to incorporate the enslaved narrative over time or to take a more direct approach, such as The New-York Historical Society (NYHS). According to Kathleen Hulser in *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space*, NYHS used the presence of black violence in the media to create an exhibit that was “a bold step away from long-standing cautious attitudes about exhibiting controversial and disturbing subjects” (Hulser 2012, 235). Many museums in the South and some in the North have completed their reinterpretation process which we can use as an advantage to understand what does and does not work in this setting.

The research of 1600s to 1800s colonial America is already difficult for rural areas, so research on African and Indigenous lives proves to be exceptionally difficult as there is very little documentation available. This can also pertain to museums who have limited collections that are attributed to enslaved experiences. Though collections may be limited, there are creative steps that

can be used in discovering enslaved stories. Hulser states that even “in the absence of a wealth of... the customary artifacts that comprise most museums,” (Hulser 2012, 235) a more innovative way of thinking is necessary to convey these themes. In addition, institutions must also consider how this narrative is presented to the public. According to Anne Marie Lindsay in *Reconsidering Interpretation of Heritage Sites*, the ideal way to share these narratives effectively is to develop and execute an “historical narrative that speaks to many types of guests while remaining true to the established goals of portraying everyday life in an approach which educates and informs in a lasting manner.” (Lindsay 2019, 118-119). By taking even small steps towards adding these new narratives, an institution is opening a new dialogue and holding other institutions accountable to also progress in this manner. By being honest and inclusive, cultural and educational institutions can aid in fighting systemic racism.

How an institution provides these narratives can also be tricky. As Lindsay describes, several plantation museums and other historical house museums have started to introduce enslaved narratives in their museum. However, with the introduction of a new narrative, rather than restructuring the whole narrative, many museums choose to select certain areas of the museum or provide specific tours that introduce the history of the enslaved. This gives the appearance of a specialized topic or temporary exhibit, which can do the opposite of the intention which is to highlight the lives of the enslaved. This artificial separation in narration gives a false interpretation of the lesser importance of African American history. Lindsay elaborates this as, “One, the white narrative, is presented as the narrative of American progress. The secondary narratives are presented as existing concurrently, but without impact or significance to larger American themes” (Lindsay 2019, 211-212). While this message is not the intention of many museums, there can be a lack of funding or resources to initiate a full reinterpretation plan. There needs to be some credit given to those institutions, particularly smaller or underfunded ones, who are doing the research

and are telling the stories of those lives they have discovered. As an employee of a 1784 historic home that has been a museum for over one-hundred years, and has three full time staff members, the challenges of exhibiting slavery are very real, and every small step can have huge consequences with how the presentation is received.

Capstone Project Evaluation

My thesis capstone “North of the Grid: The Black Experience of 17th -19th Century Rural New York City” is a website that is created to allow for change and growth. While I’ve instituted what I’ve so far researched, there are more stories that can be told and those that have yet to be brought to light. I’ve used Cato Alexander and the Inwood African Burial Ground as two case studies to showcase how my historical archaeological framework has interpreted these histories. These case studies also aid in providing examples for the dichotomy of how New York City institutions including museums, historic sites, and schools have both failed and succeeded in interpreting slavery for the public.

My course load at CUNY Graduate Center in the Liberal Studies program led to a fantastic interdisciplinary approach to understanding how to interpret inclusive narratives in cultural institutions. With a New York Studies concentration, my prerequisite courses provided an interesting perspective on understanding New York City’s history through its grid development and involvement with the world’s fairs that were deeply rooted with white supremacy and othering of marginalized peoples. A first for the program was the option to get class credit for an internship, which I took advantage of with an internship through the Gotham Center. This internship involved researching lesser-known histories of the Revolutionary War, a topic I knew little about. The internship class itself was fantastic as it focused on health and unhealthy work environments, helped us develop interview skills, and reevaluate our expectations for careers right out of college.

My various elective courses all contributed to my capstone project. An “Introduction to Digital Humanities” course opened my eyes to open-sourced academia and the ability to explore my creative side by developing technical skills with digital programs. I took an “Introduction to Race and Ethnicity” course in the Africana Studies department that was helpful in learning about racial topics in a field other than anthropology, where most of my undergraduate and graduate (historical archaeology) studies were focused. Additionally, I took an English course that was focused on ‘mining the archives,’ and even though my CUNY Graduate Center academic career was mostly online due to the pandemic, I was able to develop my skills in researching primary sources and developing a biographical chapter on Cato Alexander, who is featured in my final project. Finally, I took two historical archaeology focused courses in the Anthropology department that resonated the most with my research and interests and helped develop my theoretical approach.

My academic career with my position at an historic house museum paved a path to my interests in understanding how cultural institutions can implement inclusive narratives at their sites. A hinderance to my project has been the inability to visit archives in person and being limited to mostly digital collections. With a topic that is already disadvantaged by having little material and archival works available, I feel like I could have been able to discover more about the lives of the enslaved in Upper Manhattan had I been able to visit sites such as the New York Public Library, Schomburg Center, and New-York Historical Society where I know material exists. Thankfully, at the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum, I have been able to dig up information by past researchers who have been able to visit these sites, which allowed me to find newspaper scans, Dyckman papers, and census records that haven’t been digitized.

Despite the lack of accessibility of archives in person, many institutions and libraries have staff that was more than happy to help. I was able to contact the New York Public Library for a map that had not been digitized and received a warm response with high resolution images and a

sendoff saying they were happy to send more pictures. CUNY Graduate Center's Mina Rees Library is another great resource for a starting point for research; the website is highly organized with an array of databases for all research topics. I was also able to attend a few virtual workshops that helped me learn best research practices, an introduction to Zotero, grant writing, and more. Outside of class, I was not involved in any other school activities, but I did take advantage of paid opportunities as an undergraduate grader and a research assistant. While I had no exposure to really getting to know fellow classmates during the pandemic, I have stayed in contact with a few of them. I've only been able to get to know many of my professors virtually so, being an introvert, I made sure to be extra communicative outside of class to make sure I was on course. Through a pandemic, I'm happy that I have been able to create a network from my two years at the CUNY Graduate Center in the MALS program.

Conclusion

I will continue to ask myself, "what does my research contribute?" These are narratives that have been overlooked and my research provides an opportunity for understanding the day-to-day livelihood of African and Indigenous people in Upper Manhattan during those years. Being aware of my struggles of interpretation will only make my research stronger while utilizing an historical archaeology framework to hold myself and others accountable for the problematic undertakings of the past, and unfortunately, present. Today more than ever, it is important to research these underrepresented narratives with the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement. Instilling these narratives in public spaces opens an inclusive dialogue that can grow and lead to a pattern of inclusionary narratives throughout other institutions and personal lives.

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