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Patterns of Enslavement and Economic Oppression of Central Virginia

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Introduction

I address how anthropologists can identify the patterns and development of slavery and economic oppression through archaeology and the visualization of Virginia enslavement. I focus on the enslaved people of James Madison's, Montpelier. I use 3D modeling as a foundation for integrating enhanced visuals with the goal of presenting a tangible understanding of the enslaved individuals in relation to the artifacts and history of the archaeological sites. I intend to show a common theme in economic oppression by comparing modern themes in slavery and examining Fraser D. Neiman's synthesis of the evolutionary perspective of slavery, and how little has changed in economic practices.



Figure 1: James Madison's Montpelier



Figure 2: Blue Willow Rim, Virtual Curation Lab, VCU

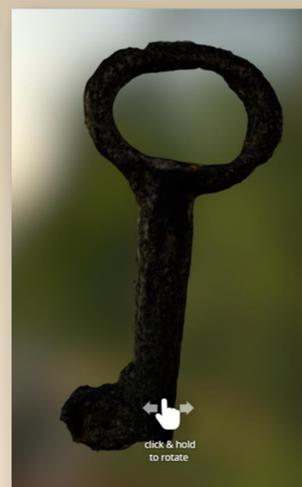


Figure 3: Iron Key, Virtual Curation Lab, VCU

Research questions

- How can patterns of economic oppression and slavery be identified through archaeology, artifacts, and comparative literature?
- How can we use this information to examine current trends in oppression and slave-labor?

Data

In Colonial Virginia, members of minority communities (such as the African Americans) were often seen as disparate to their European contemporaries (Watkins 2013:600-601). The slave-owners would force them into various skilled and unskilled labor positions, such as cotton and tobacco production (Neiman 2008:165). Decisions about these individuals were based on degradation and profit – the amount of labor achieved with least profit lost; a commodity to be purchased or spent with no moral obligation to give them the benefit of education or payment (Shackel 2003:139). Their identities were stripped, creating an intense emotional dilemma and carelessness for their own lives (Snyder 2010:48), and the slave quarters were sparsely decorated and designed to reflect the European aesthetic with few allowances for personal items (Singleton 1995:123-124).

Some slave owners may have recognized the unethical practice of owning people, however, hidden by their justification of slave ownership for political means (Kelso 1986:31). Physical abuse and discipline were often used to reinforce status and as a reminder of subservience (Blackburn 2015:51); often the idea of hopelessness was used to manipulate the slaves, blurring the line between oppressive sovereignty and affection (Osborne 2003:591).

In the current economic system, labor is often forced through manipulation of employers, unpaid and underpaid work, physical and, or, mental labor not outlined or explicitly agreed upon. Members of the lower economic class, such as labor workers or unskilled trade workers are commonly susceptible to this treatment in the modern Western economic system (Yeoung 2013). In more extreme cases, individuals may be trafficked through physical force or intimidation and enslaved with no predictable chance of independence (American Civil Liberties Union 2017).



Figure 4: Gilmore cabin, interior

Results

We can use this information by comparing the trends of Colonial enslavement practices and identifying common patterns seen in the current labor industries. We can equip the public with a general knowledge of the past through archaeology, taking us beyond the biases of written accounts and into the lives of those who were enslaved and awareness of our surroundings in the workplace (Patten 1997:132). By integrating 3D printed artifacts into the presentation of research, we are able to give the general public, enthusiast, and colleague a way to investigate the archaeology in a casual and educational way. As they learn through encountering replicas of the possessions of the individuals, we may bring a personal relevance to the community at large.

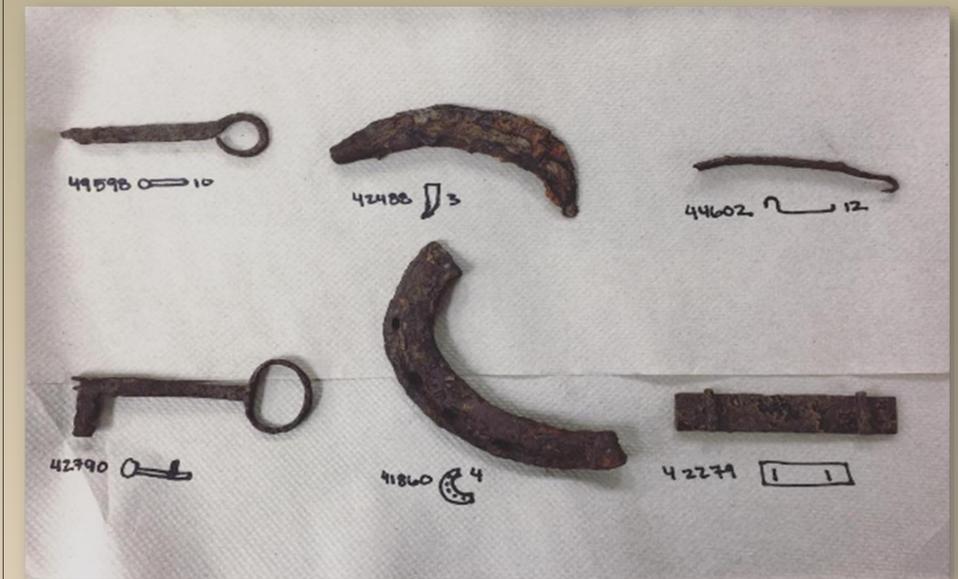


Figure 5: Metal artifacts excavated from James Madison's Montpelier

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