"In This Here Place": Interpreting Enslaved Homeplaces

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The simplification and abbreviation of instrumental expressions of core symbols, however, occurs in an internal process that is initially independent of intercultural contact. It is a communicative process that occurs within the expressive range of core symbols within any coherent, shared meaning system. Yet that abbreviation and increasing multivalency yield an instrumental expression that will be useful beyond its initial employment in private rituals for individual interests. Such abbreviation also produces multivalent expressions which can aid those social actors in their later attempts to build new relationships with persons from other cultures in contact settings. For persons abducted from different regions of Africa and brought together on American soil, that interaction process involved individuals from groups in comparably subjugated positions, rather than an asymmetry of power relations between them.

This was not a matter of conservative grammars seeking new lexicons, or of the subjugated making accommodations to their oppressors. Instead, those African and African American social actors creatively blended the more multivalent features of their disparate cultural systems to generate new symbolic repertoires to aid the formation and consolidation of their new social networks. If an ethnicity is viewed as a socially constructed concept of group identity, this process is more aptly viewed as a form of combinatorial and instrumental ethnogenesis.

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“"In This Here Place": Interpreting Enslaved Homeplaces

Whitney L. Battle-Baptiste

It is true that domestic life took on an exaggerated importance in the social lives of slaves, for it did indeed provide them with the only space where they could truly experience themselves as human beings.

—Angela Davis

During a casual conversation with my grandmother about her childhood on a farm, I learned that her family considered the yard an extension of the living room. They ate, played, and socialized outdoors. As a second-generation apartment dweller, I was amazed. I quickly realized that the enslaved household also would have extended beyond the four walls of a 20 x 20-foot dwelling (see also Gundaker 1993; Heath and Bennett 2000).

To understand the lives of enslaved communities, archaeologists often look at the meanings of environment and space. In my analysis, however, the enslaved community occupied a bounded and culturally significant space that was not just the background but the epicenter of black cultural production. The slave quarters were what a number of scholars have referred to as spaces of autonomy and independence (Berlin 1998; Blassingame 1972; Davis 1981; M. Franklin 1997; White 1999; Heath and Bennett 2000; Joyner 1984; Wilkie 2000). The major protected social spaces in which the culture of the enslaved could be developed were largely within the quarters and adjacent yard areas. These were zones of domestic production dominated by women, and it was there that food
Gendered Perspectives on the Black Family

Black feminist scholars like Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, and bell hooks bring a different perspective to understanding the structure of the black family under slavery. The family structure of the mid-nineteenth century, as in the previous century, was a strategic response to the rigors and terror of slavery. Significantly, the role of women was magnified as they labored in the Big House and the fields at the behest of masters but also spent much of their time and energy ensuring the survival of the slave community. While African Americans had alternative family structures, I argue that these were not the result of a pathological black culture (see, e.g., Moynihan 1965) but a consequence of the constraints of enslavement. For example, the practice of abroad marriages, where spouses lived on different plantations, affected domestic arrangements, as did the sale of family members (Berlin 1998; Malone 1992; Walsh 1997).

Consequently, slave families differed from those of their African homelands and also from the Euro-American families who held them in bondage. At the same time, there were some aspects of African cultural and family practices that were reinforced by the conditions of slavery. These included fictive kin networks, premarital or bridial pregnancies, diffuse responsibility for parenting, and women-centered domestic production (Robertson 1996, 18). Yet the typical view of enslaved family formation does not take into account its African roots and the dire consequences that slavery had on family structure. Rather, as Claire Robertson argues, it is the sexist and racist assumptions of the matrilineal/matriarchal arguments that underlie these stereotypical representations of black family structure.

Carol Stack demonstrated how participants in domestic exchanges were defined by one another, not by people from outside of the community. She was able to observe what performances and behavior members of the community expected from one another, who was eligible to become a part of existing cooperative networks, how they were recruited, and which participants were actively involved in multiple series of exchanges. Although Stack’s study was based on a contemporary urban community, there are definite connections that may add weight to the arguments about the black family that hark back to enslavement. For this study, the family is defined as the smallest organized, durable network of kin and others who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and ensuring their survival. The family network was diffused over several kin-based households. That is, each household was composed of more than one family. Further, fluctuations in household composition do not significantly affect cooperative familial arrangements (Stack 1974, 28, 31).

Exploring the Enslaved Homeplace

I propose here that a study of the household as a social unit should be given much more attention than has previously been the case. While domestic sites abound in the study of plantation life, there are few works that theorize about the household. Household-level analysis can allow archaeologists to develop a better sense of the everyday actions of a slave quarter community. The concept of the complex household and how that directly influenced the use of exterior areas is crucial to understanding domestic life and social formation among black families. In order to understand the social networks established by the enslaved living in separate families, it is important to focus research on activity areas. I will be focusing on specific activities that occurred around the Kitchen Quarter of President Andrew Jackson’s Tennessee plantation, the Hermitage. Here I will use material evidence to demonstrate functions such as yard sweeping, communal cooking, music, and leisure activities.

The development of meaningful extended kin networks and collective labor and knowledge were integral parts of the enslaved experience. I will also demonstrate how the concept of a nuclear-based household structure differed from the composition of the enslaved household. Using the First Hermitage site as a microcosm of the larger Hermitage community, I argue that archaeological features, material culture associated with specific tasks, and oral and written history support the idea that enslaved peoples lived in a shared and multifamily household.

The domestic sphere was the only place where enslaved Africans could enjoy the comfort and support of family and friends. In this chapter, I bring together theories of “homespace” and “yardspace” in African Diaspora archaeology. These two concepts have been interpreted separately. My research at the Hermitage demonstrates that yardspace and homespace are one and the same. Indeed, the study of enslaved landscapes must include people, and in order to do this, we must take into account the various ways in which members of quarter communities used exterior spaces.

The lives of enslaved Africans were structured by racism, sexism, and oppression. As such, the solace of a place called home takes on an added dimension for the daughters and sons of slavery. It provided a place to regroup, to find the strength to resist. I discovered the concept of homeplace when reading bell hooks’s Yearning. For hooks, homeplace is the foundation in the making of the black subject: “Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid and domination, one’s homeplace was the site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist” (hooks 1990, 42). Similarly,
in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Linda Brent described her grandmother's home with feelings of comfort and nurturing, a place somewhat removed from the reality of slavery (Yellin 1987). When Brent escaped from slavery, she concealed herself for many years in a small crawl space in her grandmother's attic. It was here that she painstakingly regained her humanity.

When I began the archaeological project at the First Hermitage, I was obsessed with learning about yards and how the enslaved population used these spaces to reflect their own social and cultural needs. The fascination with how yards were swept, maintained, and cultivated was a part of my attempt to use archaeological material to study life under slavery. I initially felt that the yard would provide all of the information needed. Yet it was my approach that hindered my original concepts of how significant the enslaved landscape was in the development of African American culture. Although many archaeological studies highlight the significance of Africanisms and African cultural practice (K. L. Brown 1994; Y. D. Edwards 1998; Epperson 1999a; Ferguson 1992; Franklin 1997c; Leone and Fry 1999; McKee 1994; Russell 1997; Thomas 1995b; Wilkie 2000; Yentsch 1994), the role of landscapes in the daily constitution of African American identity formation has not been as thoroughly addressed. Beyond identifying sites and structures, archaeologists must also uncover material on the enslaved landscape to help address how and why people created spaces to reflect their culture and spiritual worldviews.

A part of the problem rests in how archaeologists understand the enslaved family and the relation between the landscape and the domestic realm. My research interprets the landscape as the domestic sphere. It symbolizes the space in which enslaved families shaped the built environment into sites of comfort and support and therefore their homeplaces. A broader understanding of landscape as the cultural and social place shaped by enslaved women and men is reflected in the spatial distribution of material culture. Landscape is more than a visual arrangement; it becomes the backdrop for human action. The relationship between people and landscape is an element in the articulation of everyday actions. It is this connection which allows the researcher to see the landscape as a text, a source of study that enhances the dialogue of people and their lives. Wrote Norreree T. Jones, “When time and opportunity presented themselves, sacred symbols and signs became part of who Africans were in the New World. For the most part, their meanings are now faded from traditional history. African American homes and yards abound with African characteristics of expression which still speak to the power and the protection of the ancestors” (1990, 107).

The manipulation of the natural and built (i.e., cultural) landscape became a part of how slaves communicated social meaning (Edwards 1998, 248). They were able to shape specific spaces into a concept known as “homeplace.” For bell hooks, the concept of houses is more universal than just thinking of home or simply the place she grew up; it shaped her very being and association with the larger world. It was a safe space that was defined by what took place there.

I would argue that this concept of home can also be interpreted in a plantation context like the First Hermitage. It was this space which defined generations; it was this place where activities shaped the various members of the enslaved community.

The Hermitage Plantation

The Hermitage is presently a parklike setting dedicated to telling the story of Andrew Jackson and the many complexities of plantation life. Jackson's Greek Revival mansion sits on more than 600 acres of farmland (see Fig. 10.1).

The First Hermitage was established between 1804 and 1821, and it was a large farm rather than a working plantation. The Jacksons and their ten or twelve slaves lived in cabins less than forty feet apart, and their primary goal was to clear the land and plant crops (R. Jones 2002; Remini 1977). During the “Middle Quarter” (1821–50), Jackson expanded his landholdings, slaveholdings, and financial capabilities. He moved his family into a new mansion and left the cabins to his slaves. These cabins lay midway between the Mansion Backyard Quarters and the Field Quarters (approximately 250 yards north of the First Hermitage site).

Jackson's death in June 1845 marked the end of financial success and growth at the Hermitage plantation. His adopted son, Andrew, had neither the good fortune nor the business sense to maintain the plantation through lean times. The impact this had on the enslaved community is still unclear, and this period (1850–88) has been neglected by archaeological and historical research at the museum.

In 1889, the Ladies Hermitage Association was founded to protect the mansion and surrounding areas. The LHA used the First Hermitage landscape to demonstrate Jackson's humble beginnings before his rise to national prominence.

Excavations

Excavations were conducted at the First Hermitage site for three years. During this period, researchers investigated several areas around the standing cabins. These areas were later divided into archaeological zones. The excavated areas of the First Hermitage site included structural remains of the Southeast and South Cabins (Fig. 10.2), the interiors of the standing structures (the Kitchen Quarter and the Farm House), and areas surrounding the buildings referred to here as “yard areas.” The First Hermitage site was separated into six excavation zones or yard areas. This study will focus on Zone I (the Kitchen Courtyard), Zone II (the Kitchen Quarter backyard), Zone III (the outdoor hearth and cooking area), and Zone IV (the Central Courtyard).
Fig. 10.1. The Hermitage plantation as it appeared in 1834 based on archaeological excavations and surveys. The First Hermitage is referred to as the Original Cabins.

Material Culture Analysis

Artifacts are often overlooked, yet without them it is impossible to find the subtle aspects of people's lives. James Deetz (1993) contends that archaeology has produced a rich body of evidence that, if used correctly, can offer insights into aspects of culture that are often ignored by documentary sources.

Material culture, therefore, can enhance archaeological interpretations of the pedestrian features of life under the system of slavery. Although archaeologists use material culture as the main source of interpretation, the artifacts are not the only sources. At historic sites, artifacts are enhanced by the support of aboveground information, such as architecture and activity areas (Deetz...
At the Hermitage plantation, archaeologists already knew where a number of structures were located. Still, they uncovered additional structures from the earliest Jackson years. After an extensive shovel-test survey in 1996, the main questions shifted from the location of additional structures to the nature of a frontier farm that later served a unique type of enslaved community. The original excavation units dug in 1997 were based on the 1996 survey artifacts.

African Diaspora archaeologists in the United States have moved well beyond the search for artifact patterns or African cultural continuities reflected in African American material culture. More recent research has focused on the analysis of material culture and its relationship to social relations. Shifting from the oversimplified concept of hand-me-downs, I argue that slaves used various methods to obtain materials, whether it be a bowl or glass, than simply waiting to receive discarded objects from their masters. In the case of the Hermitage, the diversity of material assemblages throughout the property supports this notion.

"Home" Is Where the Hearth Is: An Archaeological Example

The idea of a communal cooking area seems logical based on the fact that Jackson never assumed responsibility for feeding the enslaved population. Many nineteenth-century plantation owners complained about how their workers were not knowledgeable about proper nutrition and how to eat a meal properly. "It cannot be expected that the slave who is all day at hard work can pay a proper attention to preparing his food after the day's labor. He generally comes home tired, and before he has half cooked his meal, hunger induces him to devour it" (Breeden 1980, 92).

Certain plantations would have found it impossible to feed large numbers of people, even just concentrating on field-workers. And although some planters were wary of how and what workers were preparing to eat, it was the planter's decision whether to employ a cook to prepare two or three meals per day or to leave that chore to the workers themselves. Even when the planter chose to stay independent of the daily food preparations, there was always concern about the time that enslaved workers gave to eating and their attention to maintaining proper health.

"The great object is to give them out enough, have it well cooked, and give them time to eat. Negroes cannot, or will not— they do not— eat in as short a time as whites; I can and do eat my meals in from ten to fifteen minutes; they will eat thirty by watch, and oftentimes forty-five; but I have timed them and know it to be a fact" (Breeden 1980, 95). Eating was a social activity for slaves. So much of their time was spent working, yet it was after the work was done when interactions between community members became a reality. "At night, especially in the summertime, after everybody had eaten supper, it was a common thing for us to sit outside. The old folks would get together and talk until bedtime. Sometimes somebody would start humming an old hymn, and then the next-door neighbor would pick it up" (Raboteau 1980, 220).

Faunal Remains

A brief overview of the faunal remains from the Communal Cooking area indicates the presence of a massive amount of material, spread thick and heavy over the area, through several layers. The species present were pig, turkey, chicken, sheep, cow, fish (catfish, gar, most likely from the Stones and Cumberland Rivers), horse, cat, squirrel, groundhog, and rabbit. The most abundant was pig. Pig bones from all parts of the body were present. This represents carcass-processing activity in the vicinity (six skulls, two split down the middle for brain extraction) or the gathering of elements left over from carcass processing to trim remaining meat scraps. There were a lot more heads, spines, ribs, and feet than limbs.

Cow bones were "randomly" present with no set pattern. There were a few ribs, some broken limb bones, a few teeth, and no skull fragments. Most likely this indicates that no one on the plantation was eating large amounts of beef and may represent opportunistically gathered or acquired cuts of meat from the occasional slaughter of surplus animals (typically a young male) from the dairy herd, eaten on a special occasion or to give a little variety to the pork-heavy mansion diet. A more detailed analysis is being conducted on the material from several archaeological zones.

The social nature of the cooking area is reflected in some of the material remains. For example, three mouth harps and part of a harmonica were recovered from the area (Fig. 10.3). The fact that there were no instruments found in other regions may support my contention that this space not only was used for cooking but was also important in the social lives of Middle Quarter occupants.

Archaeologically, it is the outdoor cooking hearth that I believe is the center and social heart of the First Hermitage extended household. Barbara Heath and Amber Bennett (2000, 53) have noted that "together, house and yard form a nucleus within which the culture expresses itself, is perpetuated, changed, and reinterpreted." Similarly, the yard served as an extension of the house at the Hermitage (Y. D. Edwards 1998; Gundaker 1998) and household activities were carried out in these yard areas. This area was a space where multiple families would meet and engage in various activities beside the warmth of the fire. It was the type of space that masters would either restrict or ignore. In other words, the enslaved community often used space around their homes in a way that was not understood or even appreciated by slave owners.
The Cooking Pit

Feature 820 was a food-related pit. In addition to all of the bones found, this area addresses the probability of in-ground cooking and adds to the evidence of this area as an active social space. It was because of this feature that Zone III is described as the BBQ area, for lack of a better expression. Within these cultural layers are several significant finds. This area is described as a social space not only because of the evidence of cooking but also because of the presence of leisure artifacts such as clay and ceramic marbles, straight pins and buttons, mouth harps, and fish hooks.

When exclusively enslaved families occupied the First Hermitage site, the central yard, (area between the Kitchen Quarter and Farm House, see Fig. 10.2) served as what I would term the “visible” center of the community. Yet within the confines of the four standing structures was an area surrounded by multiple ash deposits and evidence of a variety of activities. Feature 820 was surrounded by dwellings, which obscured its view from the Jacksons and possibly the direct view of the overseer. It was well within the boundaries of the complex Quarter Household and could serve as the space that tied the various dwellings together, providing a gathering space where multiple families participated in daily functions of the extended household. The importance of looking at the enslaved landscape has several dimensions. At the forefront of the

elite plantation during the Middle Quarter was a demonstration of prestige, power, and mastery in general. In this case, a large brick mansion complete with white columns and a guitar-shaped driveway was the means of conveying the message of dominance. Beyond that initial realm was the private mansion backyard, where entry was not given to all. There had to be a reason to be in this space. Associated with the brick mansion were the garden, main kitchen, smokehouse, and orchard. As the plantation system took off, the workspaces became the sphere of influence of enslaved peoples, yet the disconnecting of the plantation landscape and plantation power was constantly reinforced. Separating Jackson’s private backyard from the working plantation was a white picket fence. This fence provided a physical and social boundary between the protected space of the Big House and the workspaces of the larger plantation. This also ensured that there would not be a mistake about where one ended and the other began.

However, the enslaved community at the First Hermitage created similar forms of boundaries. These boundaries may not have been in the form of a white picket fence of the later Middle Quarter, but they were shaped in a way that was meaningful to the inhabitants of the quarter. The visually and culturally hidden aspects of life under slavery were a daily negotiation of all enslaved populations. The ability to construct an outdoor hearth was very real for the members of the First Hermitage who sat outside on warm nights and shared music, gossip, stories, and good food cooked in ways distinct to the families sharing the space and in ways appreciated exclusively by its community members.

Jackson or any overseer might not have found any of these activities threatening or dangerous. They most likely appeared as one less obligation to provide for or worry about for effective plantation management. For the First Hermitage community, however, these actions were the very foundation of their complex household. Therefore, slaves were active participants in their own cultural production.

Before enslavement, African people had family and kinship structures that were altered once they arrived in the Americas. Jackson’s belief in simple family units was practiced on a surface level among the enslaved community. In order to accomplish daily goals and tasks, enslaved workers pooled their resources in order to maintain a communal way of living. For the inhabitants of the First Hermitage site, communal living was not simply a choice but a necessity.

The Enslaved Family

Different people define landscapes differently. John Michael Vlach (1993) sees a landscape not only as a visual scene or an environmental setting but as a cultural construction. The enslaved inhabitants of plantations may not have had a say in the design, construction, and location of their individual dwelling.
structures; however, they did shape the way landscape functioned. By the nine-
teenth century, southern agricultural journals suggested various reforms to main-
taining quarters. There was a call to “promote orderly family life within the slave
community” (McKee 1992). Health and housing were among the top priorities of a slave
owner, yet overcrowding was mentioned often as a main concern in several
planter documents and letters. For reasons of health and happiness, masters
believed that only one “family” per structure was the proper formula for success
(Breeden 1980).

Several leading scholars of black family life have argued against viewing
the black family structure as “pathological” in comparison with the Eurocentric
concept of the nuclear family (Davis 1981; Stack 1974). However, black
feminist scholars have long understood how domestic production was directly
linked to black cultural production and the formation of African American
identity (Carby 1987; M. Franklin 2001; Gray White 1999; Hill Collins 2000;
hooks 1990; Steady 1993). As Angela Davis explains, the significance of the
quarters for enslaved women and men was that they became the single space
on the plantation that could possibly facilitate any sense of autonomy or sem-
blance of safety. The homeplace, or quarter, served as a setting where activities
of resistance occurred with greater frequency, and therefore it represents a use-
ful line of evidence with which to use a gendered perspective of the enslaved
landscape.

To unravel these landscapes, it is important to see how spaces were trans-
formed into sites of comfort and safety. According to Edwards-Ingram, “The
slave landscape incorporated both the apparent and the hidden” (1998, 270).
The quarter, therefore, was formed into the “homeplace,” where there is relief
from the stresses of everyday hardships experienced by enslaved people. My
reading of homeplace in the case of the First Hermitage is an example of how
one enslaved community transformed the landscape into a location of reprieve
from the daily rigors of enslavement. Although physically there was no “real”
place away from the master’s gaze, there were spaces constructed and under-
stood by those who lived there as protected.

Several circumstances led me to concentrate on the exterior spaces at the
First Hermitage site. The confining dimensions of each cabin forced a great
deal of activity to shift outdoors. I believed that the yard was not empty space
between the two structures but a bridge connecting several families. The yard
can therefore be understood as an extension of the house, a “living room,” so to
speak (H. Lawrence Jones, Chesapeake, pers. comm., 1997). Edwards-Ingram
further explains how “African American houses and yards also embodied com-
plex and simple rhythms of time, space, energy, and change during slavery, as
they do today” (1998, 249). The courtyard was not only socially significant to
inhabitants of the Middle Quarters but also served as a connection across a
culturally defined landscape.

To move toward an analysis of the centrality of landscapes and homeplace, the
role of material culture used in activities associated with these symbolic spaces
will enhance the study of enslaved domestic organization and the related social
relationships. Further, it is pertinent to emphasize the connection between the
enslaved household as a complex social unit and the yardscapes. As enslaved
individuals were inextricably tied to all plantation affairs through forced labor,
they were members of multiple “households” simultaneously. They were mem-
bers of their own simple family units, the larger plantation household, and,
in my research, the complex household of the First Hermitage quarter. Thus
the enslaved household of the Hermitage plantation (Franklin 1997c, 53–54)
“was a domestic network which served to mediate the social relations that
revolved around production, distribution, and reproduction,” whereby mem-
bers “variously contributed their efforts and resources to the subhousehold as
circumstances and needs varied.”

At the First Hermitage site, daily activities connected the household by
linking multiple families living within the quarter, not necessarily under the
same roof. Thus there existed a system of cooperative individual families work-
ning together, forming a single complex household. As follows, the “yardscape”
(or transformed exterior spaces) functioned as the nucleus of this household
structure. The yardscape was central to the quarter, a significant component
to all the members of the complex household. The analysis of the natural and
built environment has proven to be central in the comprehension of how peo-
ple actively shape and are shaped by the places they occupy. The First Hermit-
age provided the material and archaeological evidence to address methods
employed by slaves to form semiautonomous, secure spaces, where various
forms of black cultural production were taking place.

My interpretation of the enslaved household seeks to add a new dimension
to how daily life differed from Jackson’s emphasis on a “simple” family structure.
As they performed household-related tasks throughout the plantation, individ-
ual families constantly shifted social divisions to meet their varying needs. In
doing so, the typical divisions of “field, skilled, and house” were not meaning-
ful to workers when it came to household performance. All were involved in
Middle Quarter domestic-related activities such as gathering wood, cultivating
herbs and vegetables, sweeping yards, or watching small children and the sick.
These individuals were not listed on inventories as domestic occupations, but
they were central to the well-being of the quarter subcommunity. The owner’s
records do not take into account the layers of domestic responsibilities per-
formed by slaves.

When the First Hermitage shifted from the center of a small plantation to
one of three large quarter areas, there was a gradual and visible transformation
of how the landscape looked. Among the Middle Quarter community, there
was a need to reshape the natural environment to support the physical, spir-
itual, and functional needs of the increasing populace. For example, the grow-
ing numbers of enslaved children and long lives of elders meant that there
probably were networks of support and exchange only available to a coopera-
tive community structure.
Spiritual Dimensions of Landscapes

Courtyards also served the needs of the living and the dead (Heath and Bennett 2000, 39). By this I am referring to the spiritual aspect of landscape. There has been a strong connection among peoples of African descent to the ancestors. Family members provided stories and lessons to shape the needs of successive generations. For example, the importance of connection to nature was a real aspect of how people from western Africa, the Caribbean, and ultimately the plantation South organized daily actions. It was this spiritual connection which remained beneath the radars of Eurocentric modes of behavior and understanding. Heath and Bennett contextualize this spiritual connection with the earth: “Among the Bakongo of Central Africa, ‘sweeping is an ordinary ritual gesture for ridding a place of undesirable spirits’ in a landscape populated by day with ghosts of witches and others who have not been accepted into the villages of the dead, and by night with the ancestors” (2000, 43). African American spirituality is often couched with religion, specifically black Christianity, yet I would argue that much of what enslaved Africans experienced and practiced was beyond what their masters or white counterparts would have considered spiritual.

There are several discussions in historical archaeology about ritual and items that demonstrate the presence of alternative forms of worship among enslaved peoples. The connections to African worldviews have long been discussed and debated, yet it is obvious that African spirituality has continued to influence black cultural production throughout the Diaspora (R. F. Thompson 1983). Music, folklore, and conjuring demonstrated the direct connection to the African continent (Paris 1995). Black literature, however, adds another dimension to this interpretation of the spiritual diversity of enslaved Africans. In Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987), the spiritual realm is a very real aspect of everyday life for Sethe and her daughter, who live in a world filled with ghosts of the past.

The yard is an excellent place to conceptualize how enslaved communities maintained a complex balance between work, spiritual, and communal efforts. When former slaves remembered their lives in bondage, a common point of discussion for interviewers was how their cabins looked. This emphasis on domestic sites seems logical when researchers think about where African American culture was in constant motion. The yard was for socializing, playing, performing household chores, raising animals, gardening, and “spiritual and cultural expression” (Heath and Bennett 2000, 43).

I have argued that enslaved landscapes are imbued with meaning. As homesites, they are sites of human action, the location of culturally prescribed and understood action, yet the power of these spaces must not be overlooked. In contemporary African America, the yard can be the site of conformity or resistance. For many, the yard and soil around the home is private, protected, and in many ways sacred. Included in the function and meaning of household are the spiritual and cultural needs that the collective household fulfilled for enslaved peoples. The connection is more substantial than simply recognizing how enslaved men and women used exterior spaces to reflect and meet their cultural and social needs. It is an argument to demonstrate how archaeology can be a tool in the understanding of the dynamics of enslaved homelands or alternative notions of how home functioned in the everyday lives of slaves.

Communication of ideas and meaning is also directly connected to the notion of identity formation. For Africans, slavery became the “root of an emergent collective identity” and therefore an emergent collective memory. Although the individual experiences differ, the overall impact on African American identity has to be linked to the collective nature of the system of slavery, for it was slavery that “distinguished a race, a people, or a community” depending on the level of abstraction (Eyerman 2001, 1). It was also slavery that informed generation after generation of the details and rules needed for survival. Without the ability and social space to communicate these details and rules, the social reproduction of African American identity would have been impossible. The collective memory of the older generations nurtured the succeeding generations, but the social spaces of yards made the articulation and the “passing on” of these memories possible. Although I posit that communication between enslaved peoples often went unnoticed by slaveholders, landscape was a meaningful aspect of plantation construction in general. Slaveholders were very specific in how they ordered their properties. The placement of the main house, outbuildings, crops, workspaces, and quarter areas was a concept prescribed to maintain order and the display of power.

Conclusion

Ultimately, my research supports the understanding of how central the domestic realm was to the foundation of African American cultural production. Therefore, this analysis contributes to the fields of African Diaspora studies and African Diaspora archaeology in a number of ways. First, I seek to emphasize the connection between the enslaved household and the landscape. I argue that archaeologists typically take on two methodological approaches. One is the exploration of the enslaved community or family, and the other is a focused interpretation of the enslaved landscape. However, I seek to combine these interpretive methods to emphasize the daily importance of the enslaved household within the context of, and with regard to their relationship to, the landscapes.

The reason that the social group and the landscape must be considered together is because landscapes only have meaning when used and given meaning by people. Further, my research reveals that in order to interpret enslaved social groups from a more comprehensive and meaningful viewpoint, one should take into account what these groups practiced and within
what specific spaces. At the Hermitage, the center of the complex household was the courtyard. The exterior areas were the sites where domestic production took place. The outdoor cooking hearth came to symbolize the social center of the compound. It was where meals were prepared, stories were told, music was performed, and games were played. Therefore, there is no way to separate the landscape from the household, since they were parts of a whole.

Second, my research supports understood notions of the protected social spaces of a quarter. For the enslaved, the domestic realm was the site of comfort, love, and support. Yet by the Eurocentric standards, it was also supposed to be the domain of women based on patriarchal concepts of gender-specific spheres and racist notions of a black pathological culture. The centrality of enslaved women, however, was not the result of pathological culture. Black women played an important role in black social life, partly as a response to African-influenced cultural practices and family organization and partly in response to the rigors of slavery, which deeply influenced enslaved family formation. Third, although historical archaeology has traditionally been an interdisciplinary field, I employ oral histories and African American literature in order to interpret enslaved life. These significant sources have yet to be used to any large extent within this field. Further, I conceptualize the black family and black women's roles using black feminist theory. This body of scholarship has not had much influence within historical archaeology, although research on African Americans has grown tremendously over the past thirty years (for exceptions, see M. Franklin 2001; Wilkie 2000, 2003).

The social memory of people of African descent is linked to the experience of slavery from the way a community shaped its built environment, to the material remains of social and cultural activity, and how the distant past acts as the foundation of contemporary notions of black identity. This being said, the potentials of African Diaspora archaeology are yet to be fully tapped in the fields of African American and African Diaspora studies. The material and expressive elements of enslavement should not be used simply to enhance the written word or oral testimony. By combining these elements, the potential for a wider reading of life under slavery should contribute to the ever-expanding notion of black cultural identity.

Isaac Royall Sr. (1677–1739) was born of modest means to a carpenter and his wife in the wilds of North Yarmouth, Maine, but he made a fortune as a young man through his participation in all three of the principal elements of the Triangular Trade. For thirty-three years, he had a sugar plantation and rum distillery in Antigua and one foot in the slave trade. Years of hardship on the island, however, involving drought, failed crops, epidemic disease, and slave insurrections in which two of the Royalls’ own were implicated, brought the Royalls and a number of their slaves back to New England in 1737. The Massachusetts tax valuation of 1771 (Massachusetts Historical Commission [MHC]) shows that the New England estate, known as Ten Hills Farm, was a very different operation from the sugar plantation in Antigua, being engaged in wool and cider production, the raising of livestock, and the growing of English and Upland hay (Fig. 11.1). The Royalls seem also to have rented at least two slaves in town, perhaps more, and transported others between their farms in Medford and Stoughton, Massachusetts, wherever work was needed (Royall account book, June 25, 1737, Royall House Slave Quarters; Hoover 1974, 83).

Twombly and Moore (1982, 154) have called the dispersed task system of New England slavery a “lack of repression.” And indeed, while no serious scholar today would claim that northern slaves were happy, substantial differences in population structure and economy, as well as in religion and law, have led some scholars to conclude that slavery in the North was somehow gentler than in plantation settings (Berlin 1998, 57; Greene 1942, 219). Some have also argued that the close working and living conditions of New England masters and their slaves made relations in the region more incorporative or “familial” in nature than elsewhere (Piersen 1988, 26). And it has