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## Ep72\_wia-slavery-and-archaeology-edited1

A Look at the Archaeology of Slavery in America with Holly Norton

00:00:12 **Emily Long**

Welcome to the Women in Archaeology podcast, a podcast for, about, and, by women in the field. I'm Emily long, and today I'm joined by my co-host Kirsten Lopez and Sarah Head, and we're joined by our guest Holly Norton. Holly, we're so glad you could be part of this podcast today.

00:00:29 **Holly Norton**

Thank you so much for inviting me. I've been looking forward to this.

00:00:32 **Emily Long**

We're excited that you're here. On this episode we're going to discuss the archaeology of slavery an incredibly important topic that honestly, I haven't seen that much coverage about and even in teaching, so it would be great to get into this topic. But before we do that Holly, if you could please tell our listeners a little bit about yourself and why this topic is important to you?

00:00:54 **Holly Norton**

Absolutely so I currently am the Colorado State Archaeologist and the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer. My PhD work was at Syracuse University and that university has a very strong focus on African diaspora studies in their anthropology apartment. So that's really where I focused on slavery studies. I was also introduced to it in my undergrad at the University of South Carolina. So the anthropology department there with Leland Ferguson whose a historical archaeologist, had a really strong focus on African and African American slavery.

00:01:42 **Emily Long**

That's really cool. Honestly, I was not exposed to the archaeology of slavery in any state whatsoever in the United States or internationally, so that's really cool that there is a focus in that at the University. I mean, it makes sense being in the South, but going to school in Ohio it really was never covered.

00:02:01 **Holly Norton**

Oh, that's so interesting because I feel, to me, the way that I was trained, historical Archaeology is African American slavery studies... because everyone I knew, that's what they focused on. [laughter]

00:02:14 **Everyone**

[laughter]

00:02:20 **Sarah Head**

That's good though. There isn't enough focus on that. I got really lucky and when I was doing my undergraduate at IPU (Indiana Purdue University, Indianapolis) I got to work under Paul Mullins whose focus is on African-American, not slave, but African American history, but more modern era.

00:02:39 **Holly Norton**

Yeah, and I really like Paul Mullins work and there's other folks like him, Chris Matthews and some other folks have done work that, in a lot of ways kind of looks at the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, all of the just kind of crazy racialized, you know, political economic history we have in this country. So that's great that you are able to work with Paul Mullins.

00:03:11 **Sarah Head**

Oh, yeah. I know. He's fantastic and he's very knowledgeable about the topic. He actually runs a Blog that archives the history of Indianapolis because that's where he's positioned right now and he posts a lot of stuff about historical sites, especially African American historical sites, throughout the city. Because, think what you will of Indianapolis, it has an amazing history of non-typical history when it comes to black and white relations in a larger city, and it's always really surprising to me when I find these things out because, I don't mean to take too much away, but I can totally talk about Indianapolis all day because like that's where I grew up [laughter] Tell us more about um, what were the first things that you started working on when you were starting in your slavery studies because we really don't get a lot of that out here, which is odd because we're in the north. I mean, I don't know why we wouldn't have that here.

00:04:13 **Holly Norton**

Yeah. Well, I mean there's just there's so much in that statement right that we that we don't talk about it in the north. So I'm from upstate New York. I returned to upstate New York for grad school and now I'm out west and the linkages and the kind of like spectrum of slavery and like degrees of unfreedom in this country across different, you know what some people consider to be racial classes or you know, ethnic identities different groups of people is astounding. sorry. I actually kind of forgot your question, but the first --

00:04:58 **Emily Long**

That's okay we can come back to it.

00:05:01 **Holly Norton**

Well, so like many of us when I was an undergrad, you know, I really started being trained as a prehistoric archaeologist. And those were some of my first experiences in the field. But as I said, Dr. Leland Ferguson was at the University of South Carolina and Leland is one of the first people to really

start taking a rigorous look at African-American slave sites in the south. He wrote a book called *Uncommon Ground*, and in that book, he talked about the material culture of slavery. One of the things that he was trying to do was look for continuities and link it back to practices in Africa that folks would have brought with them. He was really showing kind of this resilience of culture and of cultural identity despite the experience of enslavement. So I was really fortunate to work in his lab as a senior and at the time he was working at a Moravian Church in North Carolina. So the Moravians were this religious sect out of Eastern Europe and they were very anti-slavery. They began kind of as an abolitionist Church, similar in some ways to like Quakers, except that when they actually got to parts of the Western Hemisphere where slavery was being practiced they ended up adopting the practice as well.

00:06:35 **Emily Long**

Oh really?!

00:06:37 **Holly Norton**

Yeah. Well, and that happened with quite a few religious denominations across Protestantism, Catholicism, other things-- pretty much the Quakers were the only really good holdouts that I know of. Some of your listeners may be able to correct me on that which would be great. I'm not a religious expert but from what I've seen they were the holdouts. They retained their abolition stance. But so what one of the things that Dr. Ferguson was looking at at this Moravian Church was how slavery evolved in some ways, you know, they didn't just adopt it full on, you know, as soon as they got here they had to reckon with their own ideological beliefs. And then what that ended up really looking like in the material record and a lot of he was focusing on was burial practices because you could see through time how burial practices changed. The Moravians had very culturally specific practices about you know, what ages and genders of people could be buried where in their cemetery and how things were oriented and eventually you kind of see how enslaved people were brought into that, into that culture. But then how they were also differentiated in these burial practices. So that was my first experience.

00:08:09 **Sarah Head**

That's really cool. When I was digging with Mullins. He always used to tell people that he was investigating the archaeology of whiteness by studying the archaeology of African Americans and Black people because what's more, you know, what's the exact opposite and another thing that he would always kind of drill into us was that it's very difficult because you know, we're dealing with the historical period so we're dealing with like, you know, post-slavery and all that stuff like once people started moving people are "free", and you know, they're establishing their lives and Ransom Place historical Ransom place is where I cut my teeth that was a upper class African-American neighborhood for very long time and one of the things that Mullins would always look at in the sites

were, "can you tell just from the archaeology the ethnicity of the people living in the house?" Like, archaeologically, what does it look like to be black? And so again, we're dealing with a much later period than you dealt with with the slavery, but what-- I mean other than you're like, yes, this is a slave cabin which I feel like it's kind of obvious at some points-- how do you know when you're looking at a slave site or early Freeman site just from the archaeology? How do you know you're looking at that and you're not looking at like any other settler compound?

00:09:46 **Holly Norton**

So I think that's something we still really grapple with because there are no telltale markers. I mean, you're right you can say, I'm at this slave cabin so I'm dealing with enslaved people.

00:09:58 **Sarah Head**

right.

00:09:59 **Holly Norton**

Absolutely. And one of the things that used to drive me a little bit nuts about my colleagues, although we've kind of gotten past this but like the blue bead phenomena.

00:10:12 **Emily Long**

What phenomenon? I'm sorry.

00:10:14 **Holly Norton**

Sorry, the blue bead phenomena.

00:10:16 **Sarah Head**

You may need to explain that.

00:10:19 **Holly Norton**

so, you know, you'd be excavating and you find a blue bead. You're like, oh this is a blue bead. So slaves were here. well, you're digging in a slave cabin. So yes, maybe they had blue beads.

00:10:31 **Sarah Head**

Why are they connecting the blue beads to slavery?

00:10:34 **Holly Norton**

So especially early on in African diaspora studies, there were these very specific cultural connectors that people kind of pointed to that seemed almost universal. Blue beads and the use of blue iconography Lori Wilkie talks quite a bit I believe in her book, *If These Pots Could Talk* [actually it is,

Sampling Many Pots: An Archaeology of Memory and Tradition on a Bahamian Plantation] but she's got a couple and so I might be messing that up, but she talks about a blue bird motif on ceramics, blue beads used to be just kind of a go-to material marker for the people. Then also going all the way back to Dr. Ferguson's work, which you know, to be fair to him is 30, probably almost 40 years old now and so it's been complicated and dissected and challenged in some ways. What he would call like, different cosmological signs, like things on the bottom of homemade pots that were incized crosses, other things like that. People kind of pointed to these very specific, but in some ways really vague and cross-cultural items because there isn't a lot of material culture that was specific to enslaved people that would not necessarily have been used by Euro Americans or other people who are inhabiting the same areas. So we don't have good material culture, that says like X Y and Z equals enslaved folks. This makes it both really interesting and really difficult when you move off of these sites that had very specific locations for people. So if you're working on a plantation in the South and you know that you're working on, you know, slave row, then it's easy to start your interpretations there about what's going on. Like, wow, when you're talking about maybe a Freeman Colony somewhere or um, even sometimes like Maroon sites? Are you guys familiar with Maroons?

00:12:58 **Sarah Head**

I am not, no.

00:12:59 **Emily Long**

Not at all.

00:12:59 **Holly Norton**

Okay. So, Maroons are self emancipated enslaved people. They're essentially folks who were able to run away from wherever their enslavement was happening; the plantation or somewhere else. There have been some really interesting maroon studies and people are really finding out that there's an interesting culture. You kind of think of it as like an individual sneaking off, but you have folks like Stacy Camp, and the gentleman who excavated the Great Dismal Swamp [ Daniel Sayers]. There were entire communities and networks of people who were helping and aiding these folks, assisting, and helping them provision, or avoid surveillance and detection, and then also probably helping them to maintain contacts with loved ones, either to maintain the contact or to try to help other people also run away. And so Maroons have this huge spectrum where it's an individual running away to places like Palmares in Brazil, which were essentially cities of self-emancipated people who were able to put together their own society.

00:14:33 **Sarah Head**

That's that's really cool, actually.

00:14:35 **Emily Long**

That is very cool, and is there, so I'm guessing then, difficulty in identifying them? I mean, just by the fact that these sites are well away from enslaved areas that you can actually then say definitively, yes this is a free community as opposed to an enslaved community. Is that pretty much the distance from a plantation? Is that the best basis?

00:15:03 **Holly Norton**

Not necessarily. So I was looking at some Maroon communities down in the United States Virgin Islands, and that's where I ended up doing my dissertation. It wasn't on Maroons. I actually looked at slave rebellions, but Maroon communities are really closely related for a variety of reasons. And I found a man who was an archaeologist in Cuba. DeRosa Corzo who was looking at Maroon communities, one of the things that he kept noticing was that yes Maroons were trying to be away from like the plantations or other areas where they had been enslaved, but they were surprisingly close. So he started noticing different variables. So, you know, they still needed to be near a water source. They needed to be far enough away that it was difficult for the dominant culture to surveil them and to recapture them, but close enough so that they could still have provisions and still have communication with family and friends. There's this really interesting tension being a Maroon and having a Maroon community of still being close enough to regular society to be able to access, you know, goods and services. But being far enough away that you can defend your own autonomy. And I think a lot of it came down to different sizes of these communities. So eventually, you know groups like Palmares would have enough economic and political power that it was okay that people knew where they were because they were more defensible. Whereas other people would have really had to have thought carefully about those sorts of issues and where they were. In St. John where I worked, there was actually this cave that is really inaccessible. You pretty much have to scale a cliff to get to it. It had a lot of native, not Native American, excuse me, but like Taino and Indigenous pottery. It was all prehistoric stuff and it was mixed in with some historic trash. At first when it was first found by some colleagues of mine the thought was that it had just been muddled. It was a site that you know, somebody had disturbed and it lost its context. But when you look at it more closely and you look at it in the larger context of what was going on on the island of St. John at the time, this was a perfect place, in a perfect location for people who were attempting to leave the island, to get to and stow away for a little while. We know from the documentary evidence that a lot of people attempted to and did escape St. John during the slave era. So, you know, I think a more appropriate interpretation of that site is that people were reusing this place that prehistoric people had used. It didn't have surveillance. They were able to get to the sea to make their escape in whatever form they were making it. And so then they brought other things with them that they ended up leaving their and so in some ways instead of seeing the Taino and Indigenous artifacts as Taino and Indigenous artifacts only they were reused in historic times. And so, you know, they're also in some ways historical artifacts.

00:19:10 **Kirsten Lopez**

Nice.

00:19:11 **Emily Long**

That's really cool.

00:19:13 **Kirsten Lopez**

Yeah. There's there's a discussion in the West on the reuse of artifacts, especially when it comes to lithics partly because some of the larger lithic items that you'd find around have been reshaped and sometimes removed to other locations. And so there's a lot of discussion about how extensively was that done. Ethnographically, there's some groups out here near the Columbia Plateau that would use what they find because there was so much. It's nice to hear that there's other people that are having that conversation, especially when you get to like reuse areas and I always think of this coming to like historic cabins or other standing structures some of the stone houses or like CCC era stuff. If it's been abandoned it's often used by you know anywhere from people who are wanting to be kind of off-grid, you have the houseless population, and then you also have like campers and teenagers that are seeking to party or get away from surveillance. Basically that same sort of idea, and it's a good thing to acknowledge that and that that has happened in the past as well and the reuse of spaces after they've been abandoned from their original use.

00:20:41 **Emily Long**

That's cool that we can see these different reuse areas. And I'd be interested in the next segment if there are other types of artifacts and whatnot that we see at other sites with emancipated slave populations maybe reusing artifacts to reflect culture and that kind of thing, but first we need to take a break!

00:21:16 **Emily Long**

Welcome back! In the last segment we were talking about reuse of artifacts and Kirsten you brought up a really good point on something that I don't think it's talked enough about either, that so many of the things that we look at may have been reused by a completely different culture and group and Holly I'm interested in seeing, are there other sites where we see this type of thing happening? Where you may have a certain kind of pottery or whatnot that then we can see cultures of slaves coming through in a reused object or artifact.

00:21:52 **Holly Norton**

So that is a really interesting question. And actually I think you know without running out and doing all the research, my answer would be no. I think what archaeology shows is that after emancipation,

a lot of African-American communities did everything they could to distance themselves from slavery. So I think that's when people like Dr. Mullins and Chris Matthews and these other folks' work becomes so important, showing how African-Americans experienced, you know, living in the United States. There's quite a few studies where you see the material culture is very appropriate middle-class American stuff and that that's kind of the direction that they're pivoting to instead of some continuity with that past, with that enslaved past.

00:22:53 **Kirsten Lopez**

That makes sense.

00:22:55 **Holly Norton**

There's another study that was interesting: so, there's the Colonoware studies where people look at essentially handmade ceramics and they're mostly out of the Carolinas and some into Georgia and I think maybe a little bit up into Virginia, but Colonoware is really as a pottery type, is really focused on the Carolinas, but it was made by enslaved people. It was used often by enslaved people within their own like domestic spheres. But you also find it kind of in the planters or the plantation owner contexts. What we think was going on was that this was also an economic item that enslaved people were probably making and selling to help sustain themselves. What's interesting is after emancipation, Colonoware ends. It's incredibly difficult to find any Colonoware post-emancipation in any context whether it's an African American context or Euro-American context. There is another archaeologist, Chris Epsenshade, who wrote that his theory is that Colonoware was the pottery of enslavement and that they didn't have to make it anymore. So that they were (they being African-American communities and these potter's who probably made it) were going to pivot towards more mainstream middle-class ceramics to show their status as free people who were you know citizens.

00:24:37 **Sarah Head**

I find that really interesting because I recently worked in Virginia on a site that we had located and (this was a great experience for me and it kind of ties into that you were just talking about) we were doing a historical recovery on a site that the locals had told us about and they had said yes, this was a Free Black site. So this house, you know, the people that owned it they were Blacks and I was like, okay. So we're going through there and we're finding all of these really great markers of status and wealth, you know, you're finding all the fancy pottery, the fancy ceramics, you're finding the glass stuff. But anyway, we're finding all this stuff. The area that we had been investigating was privately owned because that's how CRM works. We were showing the artifacts to the owner because technically we have to turn them over to the owner and blah blah blah. So we were like, here's what we found and they were like, "you know, we don't really want to keep any of it. But I want to know what what the stuff is." So we're like, oh okay. Well we're explaining it to them and I'm like, you know, there's these objects here and see I didn't know about the African-American connection yet.

And so I'm like, yeah, you know this glass, these glass objects, you know, they're they're kind of high status, high quality. They're a little expensive and you know, some of these patterns of the ceramics that they have and the quality of the ceramic, so this is all very indicative of not, super well-to-do, but probably more like what we would consider middle class today, and the woman was like, "Oh no. No that can't be right." I'm like, okay... So she goes on, "No that site, that's supposed to be where the the first Black settlers in the area were. They had been gifted the land by their masters after they had been emancipated, and that's where they lived. I was just like, huh? Somebody, somebody somewhere doesn't have the right information. Like the whole story isn't here yet because it was just like, oh no those objects are obviously white objects. This can't be associated with this African American family that I think lived here. I didn't see the land-use record. So, I don't know if there really was or wasn't an African-American family living there, but just looking at the artifacts I can tell you their wealth status and that doesn't correlate in people's minds, you know higher wealth and being Black especially in the South. It just doesn't overlap for people.

00:27:01 **Holly Norton**

Yes.

00:27:03 **Emily Long**

Yeah. It is such an interesting connection. I mean, it makes sense that you would have these other types of associations like own only these people could have had this artifact if we can, you know, just be like know these tools had to be made by men, could have been made by women. It's interesting that you see that a racial scale.

00:27:24 **Holly Norton**

Well and I think some of the best work that's coming out of historical archaeology is looking at how those erasures have occurred. So especially like in the early 20th century, there were a lot of what historically have been called race riots, but were essentially white people having a reaction in backlash against African-American communities who would accumulate wealth and had created these, you know healthy stable, successful communities and I think the most famous one is probably Rosewood in Florida, and I can't think of his name right now. I'm sorry. I'm terrible with names you guys. I also apologize for always saying guys, it's something that I'm trying to work on but as a New Yorker I swear to god it'ss gender nuetral.

00:28:16 **Sarah Head**

I just roll with y'all, it's already gender-neutral.

00:28:21 **Emily Long**

I use it the same too.

00:28:25 **Holly Norton**

I know well and I spent enough time in the south and my husband is Southern but I've never...y'all isn't as natural to me as guy's

00:28:34 **Everyone**

[laughter]

00:28:39 **Holly Norton**

but yeah, and so looking at how those communities like how wealth was taken from them and hope, their lives, and their livelihood, and their communities but and so then we you know, society has erased that and so we have these little really stereotypical ideas about who could have wealth and who could have material objects of status and who couldn't and how that falls along racial lines and it's fascinating but it's it's exhausting because it's still you know, like we're still living with that in 2019. It's not just

00:29:20 **Sarah Head**

oh, we totally are

00:29:21 **Emily Long**

That makes sense.

00:29:22 **Sarah Head**

I mean, you know, you can totally see that hooen today when we have discussions about welfare and what you're allowed to purchase. Like how dare you buy steak with your welfare money and it's like I can buy whatever the fuck I want my money. I mean, it's you gave it to me, this is what it's for, you know, but that's the same kind of thing you and of course, you know, the stereotypical welfare recipient is like Black mother of many righ And so what we're .Right. Yeah. Well, I mean it's not an accurate stereotype at all. It's like exactly the opposite actually but what we're saying there is, you know, there are certain privileges that we don't associate with that person or that we don't think that person should have based on race and economics. And it's the same kind of thing. The further back in time you go the harder it is to like convince people that there were Blacks and people of color who were not poor right

00:30:27 **Holly Norton**

Right.

00:30:28 **Sarah Head**

and when you start showing these objects of wealth, like people don't want, it's not like they're being mean they just, it doesn't click that, you know back in the day you weren't necessarily poor just because you weren't white

00:30:43 **Emily Long**

Exactly.

00:30:44 **Sarah Head**

You had a harder time at life. Don't get me wrong. But the magazine you're ordering from doesn't care as long as you can pay the money

00:30:52 **Holly Norton**

Well, and that's the thing too about you know, we're talking about historical archaeology, we're talking about the era of mass produced culture and we've been mass producing material culture for a wicked long time and you're right the Black family down the road was ordering out of the same Sears and Roebuck catalog as the white family. So yeah,

00:31:15 **Sarah Head**

so I think one of the most interesting developments that I learned about when I was in school and again, this is because of Mullins, was that standardization in shopping brands in particular like well, I guess one of the ways you can sort of start to suss out if you're looking at a white early historic site versus a Black historic site or a non-white because it didn't just happen to Black people it happened, anyway was how many brands they purchased because branding when they first started doing it, and again we've been doing this for a long time. I mean the history of commerce is just fascinating to me in general. But the reason that they were using brands was because brands were standardized. You would go to the store and you bought an eight ounce can of beans and you got 8 ounces of beans whereas if you went to the General Store and you told the guy behind the counter. I want eight ounces of beans it was pretty common for them to short you if you were non-white, so if you were non-white and you bought branded stuff you were guaranteed to get what you were paying for or

00:32:28 **Kirsten Lopez**

that's really good point

00:32:29 **Sarah Head**

you know, and so that's where the rise of brands came from was because of racial inequality in the grocery store

00:32:37 **Holly Norton**

That's fascinating and I did not know that

00:32:40 **Emily Long**

that's crazy.

00:32:41 **Sarah Head**

Oh, yeah. No. Yeah, Yeah. It wasn't like it was targeted at non-whites. It was the way to make sure that they were getting what they paid for.

00:32:51 **Holly Norton**

Wow.

00:32:52 **Kirsten Lopez**

That's that's really cool.

00:32:53 **Holly Norton**

That's interesting.

00:32:54 **Emily Long**

That is fascinating.

00:32:55 **Holly Norton**

Yeah,

00:32:55 **Emily Long**

I have a question. I mean it's taking us back a little bit but I'm just kind of curious. I know there's some artifacts associated with ancestral Puebloans and going into the historic period with the Spanish and the mission period and so forth, there are certain kinds of artifacts that show resistance and even in a small way. It's like making pottery that still had religious symbols associated with the specific Clan and whatnot, even though the form is like a Spanish soup tureen. And so it's trying to have these like small symbols of resistance in a way to show like our culture- we're still holding on to it in a way and I didn't know if there's anything like that that we can see or that is even known of looking at the actual slavery period that we can be like this is at least a small form of resistance or trying to have resilience in a way.

00:34:00 **Holly Norton**

Yes.

00:34:03 **Emily Long**

Cool, okay moving on. [laughter] no

00:34:07 **Holly Norton**

Okay, sorry hopefully you can hear me, I'm coming back. My bookshelves are behind me and I was wondering if I had, if I had a particular book behind me or if it's in my office and it's going to take me too long to look and I and excuse me if this seems boring and you want me to like move on let me know,

00:34:26 **Emily Long**

please go on, give us the info!

00:34:28 **Holly Norton**

In Uncommon Grounds. I think that was one of Leland Ferguson's arguments. It was that enslaved potter's were using these symbols on their handmade pottery even some of the stuff that they were either making for or selling to Euro American families. That were, a lot of it were these kind of cosmological religious symbols that trace back to West Africa. And so one of the contexts that this Colonoware where is found a lot is in rivers. It's in the bottom of the riverbed. Yeah, and so a really common, a really common cosmological symbol is a cross and it's almost like an X and some people have said like more like an X than like a Christian cross.

00:35:32 **Emily Long**

Oh, okay.

00:35:33 **Holly Norton**

Yes that there's equal equal size legs

00:35:36 **Emily Long**

Like a little plus sign?

00:35:38 **Holly Norton**

Exactly. Thank you. So it looks this plus sign and what it symbolizes is this western African idea and I'm being really brought here. He was a little bit more specific than I'm being in terms of West Africa, but these West African ideas of the current life on our plane and then the life on like the spirit plane and you know life versus death. And so there's this whole kind of cosmological wheel that's bound up in that and in Africa those symbols were put on different pieces of pottery or other items and

then in different ceremonies, they were deposited in water because water was seen as this gateway between you know, our world and the spirit world and our world and the afterlife

00:36:33 **Emily Long**

That's really interesting.

00:36:34 **Holly Norton**

Yeah. That was his interpretation of why so many of these, and the whole like whole pots like we're not talking somebody took their kitchen refuse and dumped it in the Ashley River, but somebody was placing these whole pots

00:36:49 **Sarah Head**

sort of like votives or offerings

00:36:51 **Holly Norton**

exactly exactly.

00:36:53 **Sarah Head**

So it's a maintaining of possibly a folk, I hate to use the word folk tradition but bringing over of their traditional religion and their way of practicing that religion while being enslaved.

00:37:08 **Holly Norton**

Yeah, that was that was Leila's room for confusion. And it was really done under under the eyes of the plantation owners who never seem to know what was going on or didn't care right, as long as it wasn't being disruptive to their economic operations. So they never recorded it or talked about it, but that there seems to be have this, these symbols that that they were continuing certain traditions.

00:37:40 **Kirsten Lopez**

Hmm. That's really neat.

00:37:44 **Emily Long**

Oh interesting.

00:37:45 **Sarah Head**

So that kind of ties back to like, I know them as gris-gris bags, but I don't think that's like the dominant name of the, the little witch bags maybe is maybe what they're called they were hidden

underneath the house the the slave KS. Gosh darnit. Little, little bags, little magical bags were hidden under the floorboards of the slave cabins. And that was...

00:38:15 **Emily Long**

Don't they have things like pins and feathers?

00:38:17 **Sarah Head**

Yeah, sometimes things like that kind of stuff. Yeah. It's kind of where we get the idea the concept of, some of the concept of stereotypical modern Voodoo not actually like

00:38:34 **Holly Norton**

Right well. Way, like a thousand years ago when I was still a little baby undergrad

00:38:38 **All**

[laughter]

00:38:52 **Holly Norton**

But I went to my first historical archaeology conference when I was a senior undergrad at USC and that's how I learned about Chris Matthews work because he was talking about that. So he had and I forget exactly where he was. He was closer to the to the Mason-Dixon Line than he was down in the Deep South, so he may have even been like in Maryland, Pennsylvania, like somewhere up there in the Mid-Atlantic and he had this little deteriorated cabin out in the middle of the woods. And he founds essentially one of those like grisgris bags that you're talking about and he found, all of you know, like the iron nail and you know, a shoe and some other stuff and this little clay symbol that had very similar to that cosmological plus sign that I was talking about earlier in that bag. And so he had this beautiful interpretation and he talks about this whole site and this bag and he said, you know under normal circumstances we would think that this was an African or African-American cabin and he's like, but you look at the greater context of it. It actually belonged to a German immigrant

00:40:25 **Emily Long**

Oh,

00:40:26 **Holly Norton**

Yeah. These were like ancient European pagan symbols that people have found in a lot of American houses and that is another like belief system that endured especially among, you know, the kinds of people who are coming to the United States from Europe and I just thought that was really interesting because we do talk about those so much in terms of like African-American or like non-

white people and cultural systems and you know, as archaeologists like to do, he was kind throwing a monkey wrench into those interpretations and just reminding everybody especially to be careful.

00:41:13 Sarah Head

That's a good really point like just because you're finding, and that's kind of like the point we were making earlier is like, just because you're finding certain objects doesn't mean it immediately points a finger in one direction because it's, it's very ambiguous. You can see the economic status of people from their stuff. But unless they're throwing away little notes in their trash that says, oh by the way, I'm African-American. There really isn't a way to tell.

00:41:43 Emily Long

Wouldn't that be handy!

00:41:43 Sarah Head

When we're talking about, you know we mass assimilated entire cultures into basically white culture and like that was all the culture they had. I mean things aren't going to look very different because they're eating the same thing we ate, they're using the same products we use, they're doing the same things we did, you know, they're just a lower socioeconomic class or no socio-economic class than their white counterparts for the most part.

00:42:22 Emily Long

Mmm. I think that's an excellent point and we can dive more into that in the next segment.

00:42:49 Emily Long

Welcome back! In the last segment we were talking more about how we can see the different kinds of material left behind by emancipated slaves, by slaves during enslavement, and the different types of things we can see with resilience of culture within slave communities. On this segment we're going to just jump right back in and I know we were talking about, what were we talking about?

00:43:17 All

[laughter]

00:43:19 Sarah Head

I don't remember but since this is our final segment, I would like to ask Holly. How do you feel like this particular type of archaeology benefits ethnic groups today?

00:43:31 Emily Long

Oh that's a good question.

00:43:32 **Sarah Head**

And how do you think it would look different, if and I don't know your ethnic background Holly at all, but I know that I like am mostly white, so how do you think archaeology of African-Americans and slavery would look different if the people studying it we're actually like Black and African-American archaeologists.

00:43:54 **Holly Norton**

Yes. So oh my gosh, those are both really good question.

00:43:57 **Sarah Head**

Yeah. I know. I'm sorry to like slam you with both of them.

00:44:00 **Holly Norton**

No that's really fine. And I kind of already forgot your first question.

00:44:07 **Sarah Head**

Let's just focus on the second one then, don't worry about it

00:44:11 **Holly Norton**

I was thinking actually that there are African American archaeologists who work in this field. So one of my advisors or committee members that I was really privileged to learn from is Theresa Singleton, Dr. Singleton, and she, so when this kind of sub-discipline began like back in the 70s, like this was her dissertation topic, you know, she was one of the first people to go out, and I think she was a student actually, but to go out and excavate African-American sights on a plantation. She now does like really interesting work in Cuba and in other places. Then and there's you know, some really prominent kind of high visibility African American archaeologists, like, Dr. Whitney Battle-Baptiste. Yeah, and so there's, there's a whole group, like a Twitter professional group of African-American archaeologists and they are like, there's way more people who are not just white girls like me, and I am very white, like I'm so white. I love mayonnaise.

00:45:40 **All**

[laughter]

00:45:42 **Sarah Head**

Well, that's very white.

00:45:53 **Holly Norton**

But I think as with anything a multiplicity of voices allows people to ask different questions and has them, and allows them to think of different question, not just ask different questions, but you know, we all come with baggage and biases and I think we've talked about that quite a bit in the previous two segments, about assumptions people make about who could and couldn't have certain types of material culture and I think that the multiplicity of voices and having people who are, who are African or African-American who are looking at African diaspora studies, you know, they just add more interesting layers to the information that we are finding out and that we're seeing. Unfortunately, since you know I have, I don't really live in this world anymore because I'm not at a university. This isn't my primary focus of research. I haven't kept up on those new voices as much as I probably should or I would like to but I'm going to send you guys a whole ton of links. I do kind of remember your first question and it just goes back to Theresa. So one of the things that Theresa said recently to talk that she gave here at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science a few months ago was that because of kind of this sub-discipline of study that we now know more about the the life of the enslaved then we do the life of the plantation owners.

00:47:35 [Sarah Head](#)

Hmm.

00:47:37 [Holly Norton](#)

Yeah, and I think that's really fascinating, you know, like what you're talking about, you know, Dr. Wilke has a book on African American Midwifery, like that's fascinating. That we know that right. Yeah, and there are people who've written articles on really seemingly mundane topics like seamstresses and just these really everyday things that both enslaved and not enslaved people did and you know, what did it look like being an enslaved person, doing those jobs or those tasks and you know doing it for your family versus doing it for the people who were oppressing you.

00:48:27 [Emily Long](#)

Can you see a difference?

00:48:29 [Holly Norton](#)

You know, I don't know but I think that those are the sorts of things that as archaeologists, I'm not sure we can see in the material culture but I think we always need to keep asking those kinds of questions like how would we see it? Is there a difference? And even if there isn't a difference, if the seam your selling on a skirt for your daughter versus the seam your sewing on the skirt for the plantation owner's daughter, you know, essentially look the same archaeologically, you know, what was the what was the emotive experience of doing that?

00:49:07 [Sarah Head](#)

right which of those you meant more to you?

00:49:11 **Holly Norton**

Right, exactly, and I don't know how we get there as archaeologists and sometimes maybe that's not, that's not our role. But I feel like we need to keep those kinds of questions in the back of our minds.

00:49:26 **Kirsten Lopez**

Well, it also says a lot about the written records too, because if at this point, we're at this juncture to where we know from archaeology more about the lived experience of the slave versus the lived experience of the plantation owner which was thoroughly documented. It tells you a lot about what was documented and where those really big holes are and why the historical written record is not enough.

00:49:58 **Sarah Head**

Oh, yeah.

00:49:59 **Holly Norton**

Definitely. Absolutely.

00:50:01 **Sarah Head**

So here's another question. I want to throw out here since we're talking about race and archaeology. At the most recent SAA's (2019) after a panel that I sat in on, I had some individuals come up and talk to me about doing archaeology as people of color and it wasn't just Black people, there were also Hispanic people who spoke with me and I'm sounding like that person. But anyway, one of the really interesting things that one of them brought up to me was he didn't feel comfortable doing archaeology about his own culture group because he felt that his archaeology would be judged as too biased because he's part of that group. And then I spoke with another person who was a different ethnicity who said that she felt like she had more of a connection to the archaeology and that it was expected of her because she was of that ethnicity. So my question is, not I mean because should we judge people's bias based on their ethnicity is complete crap and no we should not be doing that, but should we expect Black archaeologists to even want to do Black archaeology? Like we as white archaeologist, no one bats an eye if I want to go study a culture group I have absolutely no connection to in any other part of the world. It's just expected that I'm going to go do that but when it comes to people and color in archaeology we kind of expect them to default to the archaeology of their ethnic groups and then we're going to judge them for it. But should we be? Why can't a Black archaeologist study the archaeology of whiteness? Why can't they study the archaeology of

anything? You know, why do we kind of subconsciously pigeonhole them and then punish them for that pigeonhole as a group. How do you how do you feel about that? I guess is what I'm asking.

00:52:10 **Holly Norton**

I think that that is a really timely question. I think that, I feel as archaeologists sometimes we have to remind ourselves that we are still part of mainstream society and again come with those baggages and we are not always as progressive as we would like to think we are.

00:52:33 **Sarah Head**

The hell you say.

00:52:34 **Holly Norton**

Yeah. I know it shocks many people. And yeah, I feel like we need to stop twisting ourselves and we need to stop twisting our colleagues up into these knots and that kind of expectation that archaeologists of color would always automatically default to studying their own group as it were, you know comes out of a larger expectation in our society that I think, and again somebody who's listening to this podcast will probably end up arguing and correcting me, which is fine. But goes back to that, you know, like talented tenth idea where when, and I believe it was Du Bois who was really trying to push African Americans who had education and privilege to be the ones who had to lift up the rest of their community and to be the ones that kind of give back and I worry that we've, that kind of saddles scholars who come from some of these communities, and I don't want to blame it on Du Bois and like put it back on the African-American Community because I'm not trying to say that at all, but I'm just saying that we have this really long history and relationship of if you're from if you're from a marginalized community in the United States, then you are expected to, to have to turn around and work harder to represent that community and do everything you can to lift them up instead of just going out and enjoying

00:54:28 **Sarah Head**

and do the archaeology you want to do.

00:54:29 **Emily Long**

And just live your life.

00:54:31 **Holly Norton**

Right? And so and that's, that is a huge privilege

00:54:37 **Kirsten Lopez**

Interesting to think about cuz as I'm after the question, I started thinking about all the archaeologists of color that I know, which is of course obviously still a minority but like

00:54:47 **Sarah Head**

Can you fit them all on one hand because I can.

00:54:49 **Holly Norton**

I know.

00:54:52 **Kirsten Lopez**

No, they are more than one hand.

00:54:53 **Sarah Head**

That's good. That's good.

00:54:55 **Kirsten Lopez**

I don't know if that's West Coast or what but like

00:54:57 **Sarah Head**

I think it is honestly

00:55:00 **Kirsten Lopez**

Most people study Indigenous archaeology and I've met a few historic archaeologists and they're almost all white. It may be that historic bias, I don't know but like the Japanese archaeologists that I know are Indigenous archaeologists and then the people who study the history of the Japanese or the Chinese diaspora on the west coast are all white. So it's interesting to think about and I'm like, huh, I hadn't actually cycled these ideas through my head fully before and it's interesting also to see how that, you know varies across the country. I mean, I know you Sarah and Holly have been a little bit more widely mobilized in your careers than I have and I haven't spent a lot of time on the East Coast or in the South but the little time I have been, just culturally is shockingly different from...

00:56:06 **Sarah Head**

Yeah makes sense.

00:56:07 **Kirsten Lopez**

It's really it's really interesting to see that contrast and how it's reflected in not just daily life but like you're saying Holly, we are of our larger society and those cultural differences regionally I think are also probably reflected in the schools. And in the region that we work in.

00:56:34 **Holly Norton**

Yeah, I would agree with that completely.

00:56:36 **Sarah Head**

Yeah, and it's very different. Again, the SAA's you know, I went to the one in DC two years ago and I went to the one in Albuquerque this year and the type of archaeologists that I saw was radically different and I don't mean that in a derogatory manner towards either group. It's just you know, when I was here in DC, there were a lot of archaeologists here in DC but you know I could count on, I could sit down and count comfortably how many non-white archaeologists I encountered and saw and that's not like slamming it. I'm just saying that just happened to be the demographic that came to Washington DC. I get out to the SAA's in Albuquerque and not only are there a bunch of white archaeologists there, but there were, there was a contingent of I think Chinese or Korean archaeologists there. There were more Hispanic and Latinx archaeologists than I've ever seen in any one space, there were African American and Black archaeologists. I mean, it was so much more multicultural in Albuquerque than it was in DC. It's unfortunate that that SAA had to have such a crapshow happen at it because I honestly like, had that not happened that would have been my favorite SAA because there were just so many different kinds of archaeologists there that I had never in my entire career encountered. I mean I can count on three fingers the number of Black archaeologists I've worked with and I can count on two hands the number of Hispanic and Latinx archaeologists that I've worked with and I can count on one hand the number of Native American archaeologist, I've worked with, you know and don't ask me how many white archaeologists I've worked with. I don't know most of them.

00:58:39 **Holly Norton**

Yeah,

00:58:40 **Emily Long**

So at least, I mean if there's a silver lining at least it seems that slowly but surely there is growing diversity in the field

00:58:51 **Sarah Head**

There is and that's the thing. Like what I want people to focus on is not the fact that I said there were so many white archaeologists I want people to focus on the fact that I said there were people of color archaeologists because I think every time were like, oh, there's just not a lot of diversity. Yes. You're right. There's not a lot of diversity. But I feel when we say that we're absolutely dismissing everybody who isn't white who is working in archaeology and it's like it's just oh you poor

little poo poo I'm so sorry there's just not that much diversity. Instead of doing that we should be like look at all of these people who are not white who do archaeology. You know.

00:59:25 **Holly Norton**

and we should be seeking out those citations and those studies.

00:59:32 **Sarah Head**

Yes, yes,

00:59:33 **Holly Norton**

So, I don't know if you guys on Twitter follow there's a thing that happens on Sunday's Cite Black Women and it's a hashtag, but there is a Facebook group or something and it's mostly African American scholars who it appears to me participate in it. Like I said, I follow the hashtag and it's not just archaeology. In fact it's mostly like historians and

01:00:03 **Holly Norton**

sociologists

01:00:03 **Sarah Head**

Yeah but still, those are our people.

01:00:06 **Holly Norton**

Well, yeah, totally they're 100% our people, but you know, they're they're making the point that yes, there are Black women who are studying almost anything like, seek them out because I mean it's easy not to. Right even today the way that not just academic but even like more Regional Studies are done in the way like people talk about things, even the way I talked about things today, you know, I defaulted to a lot of of white men who studies were foremost in my mind because they're well done, you know they deserved as just the way we're structured that's that's what's come up and we have to actively work and be like, no, we need to recognize all of our colleagues.

01:00:59 **Emily Long**

That's an excellent, excellent point and something we should all work on and the last [laughter] seriously I agree. I know it's glib of me just like yeah, we all need to actively do that, but we do.

01:01:18 **Sarah Head**

It's the only way it's going to change if we're actively going, you know what, yes, I can cite this guy and yes, this person has written every book out there. But is there someone else I can also maybe cite? Is there someone I can cite first? Is there someone I can cite who did better, you know.

01:01:33 **Holly Norton**

Mmm, well and also and this is easy for me to say I know. This is again privilege of my position. I stopped citing people who I think are jerks.

01:01:44 **Kirsten Lopez**

I love it.

01:01:44 **Emily Long**

I think that is a good idea.

01:01:46 **Sarah Head**

I like that idea.

01:01:48 **Kirsten Lopez**

I begrudgingly, there's a particular character that most archeologists disdain that I have to cite in my region and I cringe every time I have to do that.

01:01:56 **Sarah Head**

Fuck that guy

01:01:56 **All**

[laughter]

01:02:04 **Holly Norton**

my God, there's so many guys you can just fuck.

01:02:06 **Emily Long**

Yeah, that is true. And honestly, that's a great way to end the show. We're taking it on this episode. But just so in the last couple minutes, I mean these could be our closing thoughts, you know, be proactive and you know supporting other researchers, you can tell certain researchers to just fuck off and umm yeah, okay.

01:02:48 **Sarah Head**

So yes, I did I saved the F-bomb for the last few minutes of the show. So yeah. [laughter] I know, I'm sorry.

01:03:01 **Emily Long**

Well, Holly, is there any resources they should start actively looking into to further explore this topic we covered today.

01:03:08 [Holly Norton](#)

Oh my gosh. Um, yeah, so there are so many good works out there by African-American authors and my brain just exploded just like yeah... So Theresa Singleton, Whitney Battle-Baptiste, you know, definitely start with them. There's a lot of other really good works out there and this topic is really varied. So it kind of depends on you know, what aspect you want to look at and a thing that we didn't even really get to talk about today that I'm starting to look at is the systems of enslavement in the West which were not only about Africans and African American slavery, but were tied up in that history. What is a really interesting book that came out just a couple of years ago by Andrés Reséndez called *The Other Slavery* and he's looking at the human trade in the West mostly with Indigenous and Native American peoples. But again, it's tied up in our other kind of westernized concepts of enslavement. Kathy Cameron is a researcher at CU-Boulder. She's an archaeologist and she talks quite a bit about confronting slavery even in prehistoric studies, even though we can't really see it. So her work is really interesting and she's got a really good edited volume. I think called *Indigenous Captives* [actually called *Captives: How Stolen People Changed the World*], but I lent it to a co-worker recently. So I don't have it on hand. All my good books I like lend out and I never get back. Um, that's a whole other podcast

01:04:50 [Emily Long](#)

Exactly. Give people their books back people

01:04:58 [Kirsten Lopez](#)

Just being like, excuse me. I would like to have this title returned. I don't know who has it.

01:05:05 [Sarah Head](#)

This is just people begging for their books back,

01:05:09 [Emily Long](#)

please? Please give us our books

01:05:10 [Holly Norton](#)

I would probably subscribe. That would be fun. But I think another really accessible thing, and this is not archaeology specific, the New York Times recently did the 1619 project and it's brilliant.

01:05:25 [Emily Long](#)

Yeah the podcast it is so good.

01:05:29 **Holly Norton**

Yes, so I recommend anybody starting there

01:05:34 **Emily Long**

Excellent. What a wonderful place to start out and especially for those interested in podcasts. I think the 1619 is a really good place to start as well. Well, Holly, thank you so much for joining us today. And this has been such a fascinating topic to discuss and seriously, it has been fascinating listening to you and Sarah discussing slavery and post-slavery issues in archaeology. I mean, it's fascinating so seriously,

01:06:06 **Holly Norton**

This it went too fast. I could talk to you guys all day

01:06:10 **Emily Long**

You'll have to come on again. We would absolutely love that.

01:06:13 **Holly Norton**

I would love that.

01:06:15 **Emily Long**

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