

2 INTRODUCTION

“Narrative allows us to communicate the emotional content of our values. Narrative is not talking “about” values; rather, narrative embodies and communicates those values.” (Ganz 2011)

Current events this year, such as the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, have revealed unresolved racial and ethnic issues in America. Given landscape architecture’s vision to “[lead] the design and stewardship of land and communities,” as promoted by the ASLA, we need to ask ourselves what we are doing as a profession and discipline to acknowledge the role of race, class, and ethnicity in people’s relationship to their environments. As noted by Terry Clements, only a small fraction (less than 11%) of CELA pedagogy research concerns social/cultural issues (Clements 2010). Although many academics have written about community-based design studios working in complex cultural contexts, few write about student experience addressing cultural, race, and class difference (Forsyth, Lu, & McGirr, 1999) (Lawson, Spanierman, Poteat, & Beer, 2011). Jennifer Britten’s self-reflective practicum provides a starting point to enable students to evaluate their roles as “interpreters and synthesizers of place” through the cultural landscape (Britten 2014); we include overt studio attention to issues of ethnicity and identity in order for students to better interpret the cultural landscape and to tell public history through landscape design. Particularly in the context of a community-based studio, the opportunity to engage design education with cultural learning requires rethinking the prominence of the design product and engaging students with varied exercises that promote reflection and discussion, often outside the traditional bounds of what is design and planning discourse.

This paper presents a case study in which students in the St. Croix Praxis studio, in collaboration with the National Park Service (NPS), St. Croix, USVI, developed conceptual designs for the former slave market located at Christiansted National Historic Site. The studio, third in a string of collaborations with the NPS on the island, was intended to draw out new ways of thinking about historic interpretation in preparation for a competition to design the site. The 2015 studio was co-taught by Holly Nelson, practitioner, and Dr. Anita Bakshi, who studies urban memory. Juniors, seniors, and second-year graduate students opted to take this studio.

The remains of the slave market site sit currently under a central lawn and a main street through downtown. Much of this important history is invisible at the site, yet the overwhelming majority of the local population can trace their heritage through this exact location. The complex delimited by the Christiansted National Historic Site served as the single entry and transshipment point in the Americas for 200,000 Africans transported by merchants sailing under the Danish flag from 1733-1803. The majority of the people brought to St. Croix by the Danes left from a handful of slaving sites along the West African Coast, the largest being Christiansborg, in what is now Accra, Ghana. It remains one of a handful of intact slave trade sites in the Americas, and is the most complete slave-trading complex in the United States. Additionally, its archive and associated documentary evidence is likely the most complete available for documenting the horrors of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. These documents include shipping manifests, taxation records, and records of sale that are jointly held in the National Archives of Denmark and the United States as well as original and facsimile documents held in the United States Virgin Islands.

To more purposefully address issues of ethnicity and identity in design, the instructors led the class through a series of conceptual exercises intended to encourage self-reflection and shake students out of their social comfort zones in preparation for site design. Outfitted with a real site for a real client (NPS), slavery provided the studio with an overt focus on ethnicity and identity issues. In addition to researching slave trade influences on the Christiansted landscape, we believe this studio created the space for students to explore their own stories relative to culture, history and ethnicity and, as a result, they more flexibly interpreted a public history site. As Marshall Ganz, social science professor at Harvard, says: “In the end you will be asked to link your story of self, story of us, and story of now to a single public narrative” (Ganz 2013).

3 METHODS

3.1 Background

Prior to visiting the island and meeting the community, students read the book *August Freedom*, by Liz Carson Rosas, to learn about an important slave rebellion on St. Croix in 1848 through vivid 'characters' and important places in their lives. By introducing them to historical figures and locations through a compelling narrative before they set foot upon the island, students began to develop a personal connection to the island's history of the formerly enslaved.

Students then immersed themselves in St. Croix's past and present through a weeklong site visit to the island. During this visit, students sought to understand a broader history and context for the project; students spent little time at the actual site they were to work on and instead toured the island's two major cities, Christiansted and Frederiksted, as well as other historic sites. Their walking tours were led by local guides, often followed by lengthy discussions over meals. One such tour, conducted by local historian "Miss V", was of the Free Gut neighborhood where freed blacks lived during the 16th-19th centuries. The guides also encouraged students to talk with people, introducing them to local residents, schoolteachers, students from local schools, and college students from the St. Croix campus of the University of the Virgin Islands. As is typical for a studio, students mapped and sketched in their journals. Having absorbed quite a bit of information during their visit, the studio was asked to present what they learned to residents at a community meeting, thereby allowing students to get additional refined and nuanced feedback. Students conveyed what they heard through cited quotes from people they spoke with and through diagrams and drawings they developed during their tours. The community meeting also provided an opportunity to explain the project that the students would work on for the rest of the semester.

3.2 Conceptual Exercises Back in studio, students were assigned weekly conceptual exercises. Each assignment required a synthesis of readings, class discussion, and focused creative exploration. Approximately one third of the semester was spent on these four investigations so that students better understood the cultural history of the site. Hour-long discussions related to readings jumpstarted these creative responses. Each week ended with a pinup accompanied by rich discussion that grew more focused on the lives of the formerly enslaved.

We began with "Walking With The Past":

Exercise 1: Walking With The Past

Incorporate the following readings:

1: (fiction): *August Freedom*

2 (history): *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost its Archives and Found its History*

3:(drawing): "On and Off the Map", in *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*

During our time in St. Croix we visited some of the sites described in the fictional treatment of the island in *August Freedom*, including the fort at Christiansted and several other places. As you walk, sketch what you see, take photographs, and collect artifacts from the site. During the walk with Miss V, take photographs of the sites pointed out by the Storyteller, and take notes about the stories associated with the landscape.

Create a drawing/ map/ collage that incorporates text from written sources, photographs, archival photographs, maps, and oral history excerpts from the walk with a storyteller. The merging of the new and old imagery should convey the experience you had during the walk, and the manner in which your interpretation was affected / influenced by what you read. Think about documenting your journey in time, as well as in space. Think about drawing cinematographically, showing the progression of your movements. Think about how you can layer or weave together the past and the present. Recall the drawing "verbs" that Richard Serra spoke about: *to mix, to knot, to hook, of entropy, to bundle, of grouping, of layering, to join, to bond, to weave, to repair*. These drawings constitute a form of research and applied knowledge. They provide a means to enter into relationship with a place, and to get to know it better.

This exercise combined experiential site discovery with cultural and historical readings relative to change, sensory experiences and a journey through time, using concepts related to: mixing, weaving, repairing, joining and weaving. Projects included a textural collage created from a wall photographed in Christiansted with cutouts highlighting culture and celebrations, overlaid with collaged archival photographs, revealed to the viewer upon closer inspection. (Figure 1).



Figure 1a.-c.: Chelsea Beisswanger, The lasting imprint of African culture and slave history; Detail—Bottom; Detail—Top.

A second project, inspired by a tale in *August Freedom* about how a family wove its history into a basket design, depicts the weaving of stories about the history of slavery on St. Croix. Playing with weaving and the 640'x 640' plantation grid on St. Croix, the student made an interactive version of the 1767 gridded plantation map of the island. When you pull at its warp and weave, he cleverly reveals cultural and historical events and images. (Figure 2).

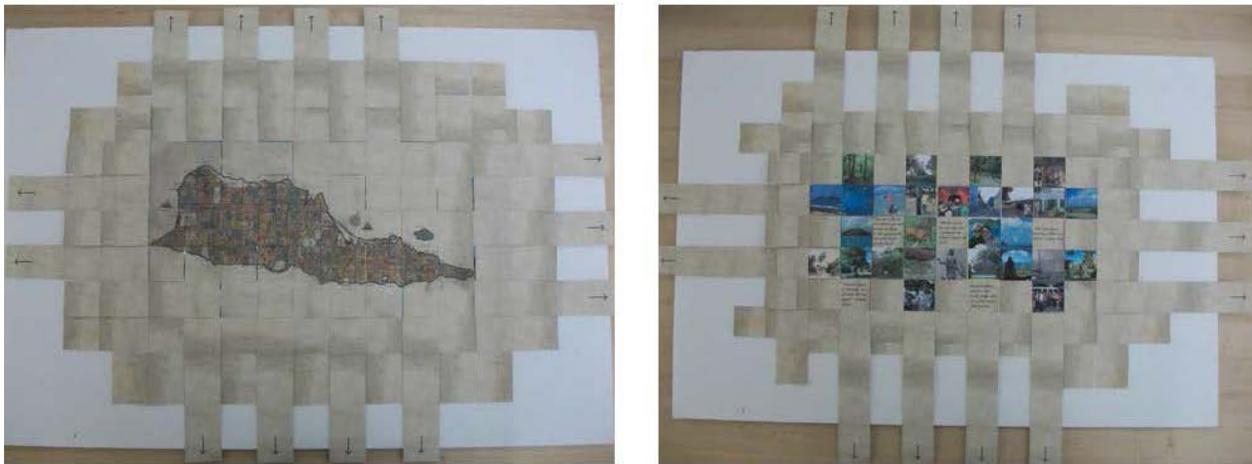


Figure 2: Mark Lacey, The weaving of stories into the life of St. Croix

Students revealed history and archeology with the sculpting exercise “Digging and Archeology” to depict the historical context of the site:

Exercise 2: Digging and Archeology

We will discuss the following readings:

- 1: **(history):** *The New Berlin – The Gestapo Terrain: Landscape, Digging, Open Wounds*
- 2: **(archeology):** *Resistance and Compliance: CRM and the Archaeology of the African Diaspora*

A mahogany tree stump on Hospital Street, adjacent to the Customs House, had to be removed, and since it was the boundary of the original Danish West India and Guinea Company yard that was central to the sale of enslaved Africans from 1749 to 1803 and the Danish sugar trade, NPS archaeologists performed controlled excavations.

Create a designed landscape through excavation and digging. For this exercise you will create a model by carving in a piece rigid model foam. Look closely at the photographs that you took during the dig, and think about the textures that you experienced on the island. How are / how can layers of history be revealed? Think about how to tie the readings (the importance of the act of digging at the Gestapo terrain site; the critiques of the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) approach to African-American archeology) to St. Croix’s slave market. Can you address any of these issues in your model? In addition to working with the foam, you can also incorporate rubbings, artifacts, or photos. Use them to texture to your model, or embed them in the foam and selectively hide and reveal them.

This modeling exercise required students to create through extraction and removal, paralleling the archeological dig at the site that occurred just prior to our visit. Results ranged from an abstraction of the coral reefs surrounding the island that represented the layering and building up of St. Croix’s history to a chipboard model of the Danish Fort upended and forced into the rigid foam that illustrates the impact of the Danish “footprint” on the island’s history to a model of the texture of sun/shade under the Tamarind tree where the formerly enslaved gathered to tell stories. (Figure 3 a, 3b & 3c).



Figure 3a: Chelsea Beisswanger, Layered Coral History; Figure 3b: Austin Scott, Ft. Christiansvaern’s Imprint; Figure 3c: Sarah Korapati, Telling History Under the Tamarind Tree

The next exercise, “Personal Remembrance”, was accompanied by very personal discussions about race and ancestries (Assyrian, Armenian, African American, Peruvian, Scottish, English, amongst others):

Exercise 3: Personal Remembrances

Discussion of the following readings:

- 1: **(memoire):** *False Papers: Essays on Exile and Memory*,
- 2: **(preservation & tourism):** *Facing the Slave Past: Historic Sites Grapple with America’s Greatest Shame*

Design a site for personal remembrances. Create a drawing and collage with personal photographs or images. This could be a space that acts as a memorial to someone important to you, or that commemorates an

important personal moment / achievement. Or this might be a space that honors your personal group of affiliation (this could be based on your community of interest, ethnicity, gender, political orientation, race, sexual orientation, etc.).

Has there been a time when someone else has told your story? This is your chance to now represent your story in your own words, as you would like to do. Imagine how you would want visitors and tourists to engage with this site. Create a drawing and collage using personal photographs and show quick perspective vignettes of people interacting with the site.

This exercise marked a turning point as discussion about ethnicity became overt. Sharing personal stories, students opened up to one another. Race was openly discussed relative to the readings and also in terms of current events and lived lives, but the sharing of personal history was deemed of highest importance since not every student was completely comfortable with an open discussion of ethnicity. In "The Personal Remembrance Body Image Book", you peer through a body cutout on the booklet cover to discover different aspects of wrangling with an eating disorder. As you turn the pages, the book portrays different exterior forces that gave shape to this empty body. Although this personal story was without overt relationship to ethnicity, the project shared a deeply personal story of one very quiet student's struggles.

The last exercise, a group project, "A Process of Transformation", asked students to dig into the hybrid history of the Caribbean, creating multiples pieces:

Exercise 4: **A Process of Transformation**

Discussions of the following readings:

- 1 **(history):** *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*
- 2 **(nature):** *Don't Judge Species on Their Origins*

Think about some of the issues presented in the readings, including: the importance of resistance and the creation of a Creole culture. 'Creolization' is the process through which contact between different peoples led to the development of new cultures. The social scientist Robin Cohen has referred to Creolization as the process through which "the formation of new identities and inherited culture evolve to become different from those they possessed in the original cultures..." In this exercise you will try to express the diversity of cultures of origin and the diversity of mixed communities in the New World (both of people and of plants). Think about the hybrid practices that led to these developments.

Create a collage that shows the importance of African resistance to change and that illustrates the processes of creolization that occurred in the New World. This drawing could focus on some of the following:

- illustrating diversity and hybridity
- showing the geographic spread of people and plants from Africa to the new world
- illustrating the transition of African objects, environments, and practices over time
- illustrating the hybrid communities that developed in the new world

This drawing should include several layers of information – use sheets of vellum, mylar, and acrylic - and can include drawings and photographs of people, plants, and maps.

The group project below depicts the interwoven history of the people who arrived to populate St. Croix after Columbus—sometimes a vortex; sometimes a tapestry (woven roof of the model); sometimes a web of intermingling. The graphic portrays the abrupt drop in the native Tai'no population through slavery and extermination in relationship to the African enslaved populations that followed. ((Figure 4a,b,c).



Figures 4a, b, c: Sarah Korapati, Michelle Lim. Nanxing Zheng: Creolization on St. Croix

A second project, the collaged Women of St. Croix, depicts the different power represented by race and gender on St. Croix. Whereas the Danish and African women are depicted quite clearly, Tai'no women in the collage are out of focus since they are so seldom depicted or recognized in island history due to the extermination of the Tai'no. This collage led directly to the student's final project, a museum dedicated to enslaved women. Located offsite at a slave village at Cane Garden, a former plantation on the south side of the island, the project makes a physical connection between the slave market and a plantation where the enslaved lived and worked. Shaped like a birth canal, the rammed earth museum is covered with medicinal plants, including those related to the abortion and infanticide common amongst the enslaved. Gashes in the building (symbolizing rape and abuse) become skylights to daylight the artwork. (Figure 5).

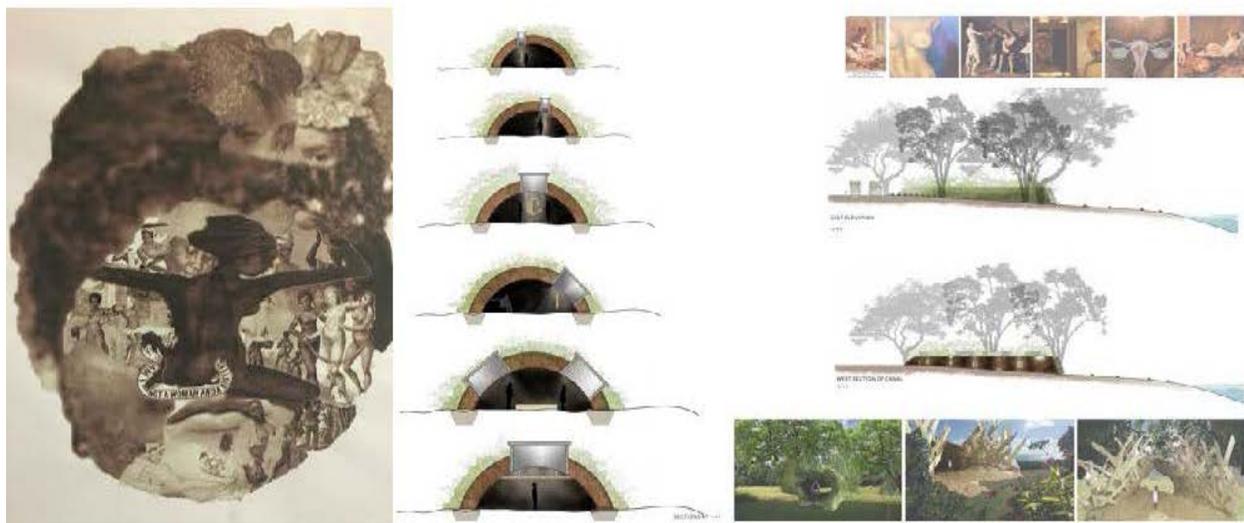


Figure 5: Stacy Martinez, Women of St. Croix; Museum Dedicated to Enslaved Women

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This studio created a unique opportunity to learn more about the slave trade-- to think about its implications and to apply these findings to a design problem. Discussion and critique of the conceptual exercises provided students with a space to talk about race and identity relative to their projects and also on a personal level. Student reflections upon the semester demonstrate the sometimes-intense discussions about class and ethnicity that surfaced through guided sharing of the stories behind the exercises. Although it is not unusual for studios to incorporate self-reflection exercises to encourage meaningful learning, this studio's focus on interpretation of a slave market demanded a different type of reflection due to the sensitive nature of the design:

"I took this studio with an open mind, understanding that I would learn something about a different culture. I never expected to learn so much about myself, my classmates, the Cruzan people and the lives of all those slaves who have been forgotten....it brought my attention to those who gave their lives to building and making America and other countries what they are today."

In reflecting upon studio outcomes, there is no doubt that the optional nature of this studio was extremely important to its outcome. Students self-selected to study ethnicity issues, and presumably they were more open to cultural history, the cultural landscape, and to this type of discussion. Final reflections revealed that even quieter students who were less comfortable in joining the class discussions in the beginning had derived benefit from the open discussions related to the exercises. While the Personal Remembrance Body Image Book, described earlier, had skirted issues of ethnicity, the student's final reflection deals directly with the subject:

"I grew up in a very diverse part of New Jersey...I had friends of all races and treated them as equals. Although we were taught in school about how unequal certain races were treated in the past, it still came as a surprise to me when I started to realize that racial prejudice still existed. One day, simply taking a stranger's parking spot at the mall by accident meant being told to "go back to my own country" and that I "don't even belong here". And although America is my own country, being born and raised here, it solidified my view on just how hurtful racism could be....we still have much to do and understand about racial prejudice as a whole."

Over the course of the semester, several students learned from their families about African American relatives whom they had been unaware of before:

"This led to the discovery of my great grandmother being a person of color and my great grandfather being light skinned with blue eyes."

This student, who grew up in New Jersey, did not initially recognize his heritage as being other than Hispanic, despite having lived with extended family in Puerto Rico for a year as a teenager. Similarly, another student claimed her Dominican ancestry but not her African roots:

"I had always categorized myself as Latina, a Latin woman and a proud one...the very beginning of my junior year was when it finally hit me. That I... was a person of color, that I was a black Latin woman in America....St. Croix Praxis Studio started conversations, conversations about things that not many want to discuss, on color and race and discrimination and where we all come from."

Perhaps the experiences associated with this studio assisted these students in self-identifying as black. On the other hand, other students struggled with the innate, previously unconscious white privilege.

The focus of the class upon a specific site design problem helped to release intensely personal discussion, yet keep it within confines related to the project. Teaching this studio was invigorating and sometimes terrifying because we plunged into painful subjects. Sometimes we didn't know what to say. To the students' credit, they used their discoveries related to identity to empathize more fully, as is demonstrated by the site design (described earlier) focused on enslaved women:

"This studio not only taught me about the history of the island but of myself as well. I saw through my own personal remembrance the difficulty of expressing my past to individuals who know nothing of me. Revealing secrets that have been enclosed and put away for some time. Knowing my secrets in comparison to those of the island, I understood the delicacy of this project and the importance of history and space."

Students produced a lot of work for this studio, from the conceptual exercises to case studies of other memorials to an interpretive site design. A traditional design studio would assign more time to the site design, particularly because it had a real client. It is a valid criticism of this studio approach that it did not produce fully developed site design proposals. As a studio, we positioned ourselves to ask questions, learn as much as possible, and to test possibilities through design propositions to enable our community partners in their long-term work and ongoing conversations about a proposed slave market proposal. The NPS St. Croix received thirteen conceptual interpretive site design approaches that “started a conversation” about what to consider in an interpretation of not only the slave market site, but also the complicated history of slavery on the island and current economic and social considerations. As previously mentioned, some student designs are site-specific while others reach out into the town of Christiansted, and one extends even further by locating a commemoration site on a plantation to connect the memorial more closely with the slaves’ daily lives. In some cases, the conceptual exercises outlined in this paper contributed directly to the final projects; other students were captivated by the explorations but failed to directly apply these investigations to their site design. Because our clients and collaborators on St. Croix supported the students’ exploration of cultural meaning and memory, we could consider issues of identity in greater depth. Sonia Dow, Executive Director of the St. Croix Landmarks Society, best described this attitude when she stated:

“What I wish for the Rutgers students is the same as what I wish for everyone that we engage with-- that they leave with a better sense of who they are. Even if they don't have roots on St. Croix, the fact that we share who we are as a people hopefully will get them curious about who they are.”

5 CONCLUSION

Landscape architecture is not a diverse profession. We have been slow to respond to changing demographics in terms of issues of race, gender, and ethnicity, but we can begin to address this in school, an entry point into the profession, hoping that greater sensitivity to different identities and cultural roots will lead to more inclusive design solutions. As one student reflected on the St. Croix studio:

“It is important that architects, landscape architects, and planners have designs that are empowered by the history and of the livelihood of the people who live there. There is a lot of power in what a space can translate to, and the Saint Croix studio has taught our classmates how to walk across that bridge as designers. My wish for the future memorial in Christiansted is for it to be honest and transparent about the actions taken place on the soil in the past, no matter how dark, shameful, and damaged it is.”

Our studio focused equally upon understanding issues of ethnicity and identity as well as upon an actual interpretive site design. In so doing, less time was left for iterative design development; however, educating empathetic practitioners who consider issues of race/ethnicity in design will be increasingly important as the American population becomes increasingly diverse—practitioners who are conscious about ethnicity and whose designs are more inclusive of multiple viewpoints.

6 REFERENCES

- Britten, J. (2014). Intersecting Self-Reflection and Skill Development in Landscape Architecture Pedagogy, *CELA Landscape Research Record*, 1, 45-54.
- Clements, T. L. (2010). What are we doing today: a snapshot of scholarship in design education and pedagogy. Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture. Meeting (2010: ISOMUL, Wageningen University). Netherlands. CD-ROM.
- Forsyth, A., Lu, H. & McGirr, P. (1999). Inside the Service Learning Studio in Urban Design, *Landscape Journal*, 18(2), 166-178.
- Ganz, M. (2011). Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power. In S. Odugbemi, & T. Lee (Eds.), *Accountability Through Public Opinion: From Inertia Through Public Action* (pp. 273-290). Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank.

Ganz, M. (2013). Worksheet: Public Narrative: self & us & now. Retrieved August 30, 2016 from: <http://marshallganz.usmblogs.com/files/2012/08/Public-Narrative-Worksheet-Fall-2013-.pdf>

Lawson, L., Spanierman, L., Poteat, P.V. & Beer, A. (2011). Educating for Multicultural Learning: Revelations from the East St. Louis Design Studio. In T. Angotti, C. Doble, & P. Horrigan (Eds.), *Service Learning in Design and Planning: Educating at The Boundaries* (pp.70-79). Oakland, CA: New Village Press.

Lawson, L. (2007). Parks as Mirrors of Community, *Landscape Journal*, 26(1), 116-133.

7 ASSIGNED READINGS

Aciman, A. (2001). Shadow Cities. In A. Aciman, *False Papers: Essays on Exile and Memory* (pp. 37-48). New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux.

Bastian, Jeannette (2003). *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost its Archives and Found its History*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Cronon, W. (1995). The Trouble With Wilderness. In William Cronon (Ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (pp. 69-90). New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Davis, M.A. (2011). Don't Judge Species on Their Origins, *Nature*, 474 (7350), 153-4.

Espenshade, C., & Norton, H.K. (2007). The Challenge In Locating Maroon Refuge Sites At Maroon Ridge, St. Croix, *Journal of Caribbean Archaeology*, 7, 1-17.

Goodheart, A. (2001). Facing the Slave Past: Historic Sites Grapple with America's Greatest Shame, *Preservation*, 53 (September/October), 36-43.

Hood, W. J. & Erikson, M. (2001). Storing Memories in the Yard. In Craig Barton (Ed.), *Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race* (pp. 171-189). Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press.

Joseph, J. W. (2014). Resistance and Compliance: CRM and the Archeology of the Diaspora, *Historical Archeology*, 38 (1), 18-34.

LaRoche C.T. & Blakey M.L. (2014). Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground, *Historical Archaeology*, 31 (3), 84-106.

Lippard, L.R. (1997). *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York: The New Press.

Mack, M.E. & Blakey, M.L. (2014). The New York African Burial Ground Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities, *Historical Archaeology*, 38 (1), 10-17.

Mann, C.C. (2011). Crazy Soup, & Forest of Fugitives. In C.C. Mann, *1493: Uncovering the World Columbus Created*, New York: Vintage Books, 281-345.

Purnell, B., (2010). Exhibition Review: African Burial Ground National Monument, *The Journal of American History*, December, 735-740.

Rosas, L.C. (2009). *August Freedom*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Till, K.E. (2005). The Gestapo Terrain: Landscape, Digging, Open Wounds. In Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 63-106.