The Human Experience of Constructing Bodies and Persons: A Discussion

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Introduction

This thematic collection is coming together as our world grapples with many things. There is a striving toward herd immunity to slow the spread of various strains of COVID-19—a virus originally attributed to Asians and Asian Americans in a profound, yet typical, demonstration of how bodies are marked racially along lines of health and disease. There is a growing awareness of racism as a public-health crisis as the one-year mark of a collective, worldwide acknowledgement of and fight against anti-Black violence and settler colonialism in multiple contexts is reached. The world is moving toward—yet has far to go in—affirming sexuality and gender expression outside of normative confines. Known and unknown murders of people who are part of LGBTQ communities across the world—especially Black trans women and trans women of color—provide clear evidence of that. All these issues are touched upon in some way in this important thematic collection that demonstrates the urgency for anthropological research that speaks to the present. Contributors impress upon readers that critical and intersectional analyses of how inequalities are historically rooted are an important part of this project.

Amid anthropology’s continued four-field struggle with understanding social relevance as part of intellectual rigor, some question whether anthropology should be allowed “burn” in the interest of decolonization (Jobson 2020). Many are attuned to the ways that anthropological study contributes to the denial of the intellect and humanity of those whose social locations fall outside normative whiteness. The growing attention to decolonization is creating space for heretofore un(der)recognized bodies of scholarship to be integrated into archaeological research. This includes queer theory and scholarship produced by those among the global majority. Much of this scholarship is characterized as “interdisciplinary,” although in a normative sense this scholarship does not fit the bill. Rather, this work stands in direct opposition to forms of interdisciplinarity that maintain artificial boundaries preventing the holistic study of human beings and their interactions. I specify artificial boundaries because they do indeed exist that distinguish specializations and foci within and between fields. However, boundaries that can be viewed as being productive and liberatory are not resistant to considering how different subfields address the same research questions and how those approaches complement one another. Furthermore, these boundaries do not prevent the necessity of drawing upon approaches “out of bounds” as part of robustly addressing a question within one’s discipline.

The contributors to this thematic collection reflect this productive, liberatory, interdisciplinary approach in their archaeological investigations of how bodies and persons are constructed in the context of health and medicine. In many ways, these articles speak profoundly and accessibly for themselves. Therefore, what
I will do here is highlight some of the continuities and threads running through most or all the articles that best demonstrate what anthropology can and should be methodologically, theoretically, temporally, and politically. It is significant that all but one of the contributors has yet to complete doctoral studies. This cohort within all subdisciplines of anthropology is setting the tone for the future of interdisciplinary anthropological scholarship. This is an important part of decolonization that involves moving away from the “graduation and tenure first, transformation later” model that definitely needs to burn.

I am writing as a Black, feminist, Gen-X, cisgendered woman, who had the good fortune to begin my college education in an environment where my presence, intellect, and place within anthropology were visible and not called into question. In classes, I learned about how Black political, intellectual, and cultural production are intertwined with one another and American history, despite the 28 days set aside for national recognition. I also learned that the goal of said holiday was to “extend and deepen the study of scholarship on African-American history” in acknowledgement of this interconnection (Woodson 1990; Scott 2010). The diasporic emphasis on this history meant that enslavement was not centered as a starting point in its interpretation. This in turn shaped my introduction to the field of anthropology—its four fields and ties to traditions of African-descendant scholar activism. The biocultural orientation, interdisciplinarity, and social engagement of this work was presented as rigorous, rather than a basis for questioning expertise and focus. I learned about and met living people doing this work alongside forebears. As a result, I came to understand this as a tradition rooted in certain ideas and practices, but also convergences and divergences based on the realities of difference within and across Black communities. This includes considerations of class, gender, and sexuality. At the time, matters of normative physicality and neurodiversity were not considered. Ultimately, I came to understand this tradition as part of the past and present, with a space for me to build on it moving forward.

Intersectional race/racism operates such that some will read my statements and feel moved to question their “accuracy.” Some are likely to frame my experience as “unique” so as not to disrupt majority narratives about one’s venture into anthropology. I understand that my positionality means that my comments are subject to scrutiny that only legitimates my experience if I demonstrate my awareness of experiences and contexts beyond or outside of my own. Not accounting for that in my comments (which I did not) are possibly grounds for dismissal. The scholar-activist traditions that shape my work lead me to question these forms of editing and placement as legitimate intellectual engagement. The work I draw upon ties these practices to assertions of racialized power rooted in the epistemological denial of Black intellect and humanity.

As a bioculturalist, I draw upon sources within and outside of anthropology to construct data sets—and frameworks for analyzing those data sets—that present lived experiences outside of limited contexts. Presenting lived experiences as simultaneously biological and cultural is part of my project (Watkins 2021). Similarly, the studies in this thematic collection make the point that nontraditional assemblages of data and analytical frameworks are required to operate outside of epistemological spheres that limit understandings of Black and other marginalized people’s lived experiences. Furthermore, the authors illustrate these approaches are necessary components of a rigorous, humanistic archaeology.

**Engaging Archaeologically Relevant Materials and the Relevance of Archaeology**

Contributors to this thematic collection demonstrate the necessity of engaging archaeologically relevant materials to reframe the way that material culture is interpreted regarding use, lived experience, and social relations. Their engagement involves various forms of departure from traditional archival sources and analyses, allowing them to identify nuances of visible and invisible distributions of power. These articles form parts of a whole illustration that Progressive Era–related shifts were hardly so for people on racial, class, ethnic, and gendered margins. Authors illustrate an array of impacts on the mental and physical health of Blacks and lower-status European immigrants. Papers also speak in concert to the patterned ways that people’s bodies were physically and ideologically manipulated to establish baselines for normal and abnormal health. Furthermore, authors illustrate how patterns were tied to a larger suite of structural inequalities impacting social health in specific ways. Discussions are instructive in highlighting how these inequalities manifest in the present without over-associating with contemporary concepts of...
“blackness” and “whiteness” that were not in effect during the time periods authors cover.

**Testing the Limits of Immateriality/Materiality**

The connections between artifacts, skeletal remains, documents, advertisements, bodies, and social relations the authors present emphasize the need to identify the material effects of the immaterial and vice versa. They offer compelling approaches that test the limits of empirical study, what constitutes data, and acceptable frameworks for analysis. Ideas specified in two articles are echoed throughout the thematic collection. Jennifer Lupu, in her article “‘Cases after Doctors Fail’: Marketing Pain Relief in Pre-Prohibition Washington, D.C.,” examines social relations as the materialization of language informed by images and text in advertisements. In “Tonics, Whiskey Bottles, and Syringes: Clues to Care in a Midwife’s Washington, D.C., Household,” Jennifer Saunders brings together archival documents and objects to identify effects that artifacts hold, pointing to experiences that are not visible by way of traditional archaeological analyses. Combinations of traditional and nontraditional data sets are treated as assemblages to emphasize that they are not fixed. Therefore, the goal of analyses is not to identify definite origins or the specific use of objects. This departure from “regimes of certainty” creates space for considering a range of uses, relationships, and experiences tied to objects. Aja Lans’s article highlights the importance of this approach for addressing the invisibility of the raced and gendered experiences of Black women. In “Investigating Black Women’s Mental Health in Progressive Era New York City: A Bioarchaeological Study of Slow Violence and Landscapes of Impunity,” Lans uses nontraditional archival resources to develop profiles of Black women whose skeletal remains are in the Huntington Skeletal Collection. Therefore, the assemblage she constructs for this purpose is not centered on the limited empirical certainty their partial skeletons offer. Intersectonal facets of lived experience are also examined in Kyla Cools’s article, “Material Culture and Structural Violence: Reframing Evidence of the Social Gradient in Industrial Contexts.” Specifically, Cools looks at how access to health care in a mining town in Pennsylvania exists at the nexus of ethnicity, class, and labor status. Meredith Linn’s article, “Neither Snake Oils nor Miracle Cures: Interpreting Nineteenth-Century Patent Medicines,” also examines health care among lower-status European immigrants. Both studies illustrate that traditional mergers of archival documents and artifacts yield limited and essentialized interpretations of how people utilized medicines. This includes patterns of alcohol consumption among the Irish. Space and place also factor into assemblages at multiple levels. This includes neighborhoods in 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century New York (Lans, this issue; Linn, this issue), Washington, D.C. (Lupu, this issue; Saunders, this issue), coal-mining towns (Cools, this issue), and the 19th- and 20th-century asylum (Ryan, this issue).

**Assemblages in Action: Expanding Archaeological Analyses**

Jennifer Lupu uses linguistic analysis to understand how patent-medicine advertising and branding during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were tied to larger social processes in her article, “‘Cases after Doctors Fail’: Marketing Pain Relief in Pre-Prohibition Washington, D.C.” McElree’s Wine of Cardui and Mexican Mustang Liniment are used as case studies that illustrate the general characteristics of patent medicines and how they were situated at the nexus of emerging mass production, brand marketing, and shifting the locus of medical authority outside the home. This includes targeted marketing that reinforced existing social norms along lines of race and gender. For instance, the use of culturally specific images and wording in gender-specific “voices” served two critical functions: (1) reinforcing standardized articulations of pain and healing and (2) undermining the credibility of professionalized medicine by comparing the efficacy to pharmaceutical and patent medicines. McElree’s Wine of Cardui was marketed as a woman’s tonic that offered pain relief related to all manner of “female troubles.” Lupu found images and texts in DC newspaper ads depicting the ideal consumer as a genteel white woman. Testimonials in men’s and women’s voices reinforced an ideal femininity tied to the “Cult of Womanhood” in terms of looks and behavior. In addition to describing the effects of Wine of Cardui in terms of aesthetic changes, testimonials described healing in the form of wives being able to return to properly caring for their homes. Mexican Mustang Liniment was one of the first products advertised with text and images targeting Black
consumers. Lupu notes that testimonials utilized Black church vernacular in describing the liniment’s “miraculous” healing properties in the voices of pastors and congregants. This targeting complements the agency mass-produced patent medicines offered Blacks in pain management. Locally produced medicines were often diluted by druggists based on prevailing, racialized beliefs about Blacks having higher pain thresholds (Hoffman et al. 2016). Marketing text also indicated that liniment was useful in relieving pain in people and their domesticated animals. Given the association of Black people with animals (Nott and Gliddon 1854; Gould 1996), the significance of the slogan “For Man and Beast” should not be overlooked. This is why Lupu argues for treating social dynamics implied in ads as materialized language. These interactions are part of a vernacular that functions to promote common language and understandings of pain and healing. This includes normalizing essentialized notions of race, gender, and health. This vernacular also valorized health care independent of medical doctors. Lupu argues that the ideological power of advertising elicited visceral responses based on consumers’ investment in product branding.

The valorization of patent medicine and home-based health care in Lupu’s article contrasts with the discourses around patent medicine Meredith Linn presents in her article, “Neither Snake Oils nor Miracle Cures: Interpreting Nineteenth-Century Patent Medicines.” Focusing on the Five Points area of New York City, Linn’s analysis of an assemblage of advertisements, archival documents, and artifacts demonstrates how home-based health care was pathologized. Images and text show that advertisements were used to construct binaries between pharmaceuticals and patent medicines, emphasizing the dangers of using the latter. Her analysis also illustrates how they were used to construct Irish mental and physical health as inherently abnormal, thus making them “unfit” for citizenship. These forms of materialized language emphasize ties between health and other discourses that reinforced normative social order through ethnic, racial, and gender norms. For example, interpretations of liquor bottles at the site were based on stereotypical behaviors attributed to Irish people, such as excessive alcohol consumption. However, Linn’s analysis indicates that bottles were reused when containers for medicines were in short supply. Ultimately, Linn uses the assemblage she constructed to reposition patent and pharmaceutical medicines in relation to one another. This includes attending to language used to pathologize patent medicine and the agency associated with it. Linn proposes to situate patent medicines and pharmaceuticals along a spectrum versus a binary, allowing both to be subjected to the same scrutiny. As a result, some important context comes to light. Based on prevailing ideas about bodily functioning at the time, subjecting a body to professionalized medical authority involved a treatment pattern of purging followed by “restoration.” Echoing Lupu’s points about false associations between professional medical authority and improving health care, these so-called pharmaceutical medicines were used across the board as treatments for various illnesses. Professional medical treatment did not differ substantially from the malignated patent medicines and home-based remedies. Ingredients and the relative toxicity of both medicines were also similar. Linn’s conclusions reinforce points made throughout the thematic collection about shifting medical authority outside the household, prioritizing social control rather than improving healthcare.

Cools also addresses how essentialized notions of alcohol consumption among lower-status European immigrants bear on archaeological interpretation in her article “Material Culture and Structural Violence: Reframing Evidence of the Social Gradient in Industrial Contexts.” Cools’s article uses the intersectional facets of class, labor, and ethnicity to examine comparative records of serious illness, debilitating injury, and access to health care in a Northeastern mining town. Cools terms the cultural and context-specific ways that people experience patterns of structural violence “structural vulnerability” (Quesada et al. 2011). Historical records provide guidance for how to position the suite of artifacts, archival documents, and household sites as an assemblage, presenting structural vulnerability as a positionality and as forms of social interaction based on that positionality. As with other cultural shifts associated with progress, social location determined the extent to which people experienced benefits of the Industrial Revolution. Eastern Europeans (and Blacks) were exploited as new arrivals to the labor force who could be paid less than their English, German, Welsh, and “native-born” counterparts. This is because nationalized hierarchies in place prior to their U.S. arrival guided distributions of power.

Cools explains that the layout and different types of housing throughout Eckley Miners’ Village reflected the socioeconomic gradient of workers. Eastern and Southern Europeans were among the lowest-status
immigrants in the town and were assigned to lower-status jobs with the lowest pay grades. These pay grades impacted the quality of housing and the ability to access formalized health care provided by manufacturers. Cools’s analytical approach allowed for broader interpretations of patent medicine that shed light on how lowest-status laborers engaged in home-based health care. For instance, Listerine and Pond’s Cold Cream, typically associated with oral health care and cosmetic treatment, respectively, served an array of purposes. Lower-status miners relied upon the antimicrobial properties of Listerine to stave off infections in work-related wounds. Similarly, mentholated cold creams were useful palliatives for aches and pains. Advertisements for both products reflect these uses, which shed light on the social relations of patent and pharmaceutical medicines.

To the latter point, Jennifer Saunders frames the social embeddedness of artifacts as the effect they hold. In “Tonics, Whiskey Bottles, and Syringes: Clues to Care in a Midwife’s Washington, D.C., Household,” she investigates an assemblage connected to Olivia Taliaferro and her family in late 19th- and early 20th-century Washington, D.C. Taliaferro was a nurse and midwife who resided with her family in the Barry Farms neighborhood. Building on historical evidence of erasure in the archive, Saunders’s study seeks to redress the invisibility of the lived experiences of Black people and their families in the past. Drawing upon Black-feminist frameworks, her study attempts to reconcile aspects of Black women’s erasure through analyzing an assemblage of artifacts, archival material, and primary and secondary historical sources. Responding to the documented historical evidence of erasure in the archive, Saunders’s study aims to redress the invisibility of this family’s lived experience. Drawing upon Black-feminist frameworks, she identifies and circumvents ideological constraints through which Black people’s lives are usually interpreted. In keeping with a broader theme of this issue, the historical particularities of Olivia Taliaferro’s life as a Black woman are tied to the social norms of the Progressive Era. As part of the agenda to shift medical authority outside the home, dominant scientific discourses framed midwifery as unclean. Furthermore, Olivia Taliaferro was also subject to scrutiny according to the “Cult of (White) Womanhood” that deemed her femininity as abnormal (Spencer-Wood 1999:171–172; Franklin 2001; Battle-Baptiste 2011). This includes Taliaferro’s status as being unmarried and without children. While licensure provided Olivia with a measure of occupational protection, it was also part of the larger project to eradicate home-based birth by reinforcing hospital-based medical practice.

Saunders points out that a departure from archaeological regimes of certainty is not just a matter of arriving at different conclusions. Questioning fundamental components of archaeological analysis is involved, such as what constitutes data, units of analysis, and the bases for hypotheses. This is powerfully illustrated in Saunders’s discussion about interpreting the “preponderance” of liquor bottles and other bottles containing alcohol-based substances among artifacts found in the attic. Within existing archaeological regimes of certainty, a working hypothesis tying the Taliaferros to bootlegging seems reasonable. However, understanding the violence of the archive and its tie to erasing Black women’s labor, traditional sources cannot be expected to capture her experience fully. Saunders proposes imagining relationships of various sorts to make Olivia’s life and labor visible. This includes envisioning uses for objects and articulating her life with that of another midwife whose home was subject to archaeological investigation. Rather than viewing this as fictionalizing, Saunders illustrates how imagining creates space to draw upon historical and other sources that provide evidence and nuances of Black women’s lived experiences. As a result, links between medicines and certain members of Olivia’s household emerged. Furthermore, bottles containing substances not used in the practice of midwifery or to treat illnesses relatives had could be evidence of self-care tied to Olivia’s affective experience of navigating life as a Black woman midwife and nurse. The vast ideological distance between the initial working hypothesis and Saunders’s interpretation emphasizes the need to treat normative archaeological regimes of certainty as extensions of the archive. Non-traditional sources allow Saunders to present the affective experience of Olivia’s struggle along with evidence of her successful career as a nurse. Clothing and other goods found at the house reflect consumption practices associated with a comfortable lifestyle. In sum, a departure from certainty allows Saunders to identify how Taliaferro’s life reflects her specific lived experience outside racial and gendered norms.

Aja Lans highlights the archival erasure of Black women’s lived experiences in the context of mental health in “Investigating Black Women’s Mental Health in Progressive Era New York City: A Bioarchaeological Study of Slow Violence and Landscapes of Impunity.” First, Lans ties this erasure to the inherent violence of the
archive, structured to enforce the dehumanization of marginalized groups (Fuentes 2018). The second element involves the gradual, largely invisible operation of slow violence (Nixon 2011; Ahmann 2018). Like Saunders, Lans emphasizes the necessity of drawing upon nontraditional archival sources to access Black women’s experiences. While eugenics provided a backdrop for framing Black mental health as abnormal, Lans illustrates how the material conditions of Black women’s mental-health experiences were obscured. Lans constructs profiles of two Black women whose remains are in the Huntington Skeletal Collection using an assemblage of their skeletal remains, death certificates, and other primary and secondary sources. Mabel, a 27-year-old woman, died in the Blackwell’s Island Workhouse Hospital in 1909. Her causes of death are listed as “chorea,” an involuntary-movement disorder and mania. Previously, she worked as a domestic and lived in the Tenderloin neighborhood. Although records indicate she was married, there is no evidence of cohabitation. The portions of her skeleton that remain show signs of osteoarthritis and habitual squatting or sitting. Carrie, a 35-year-old woman, died at home by suicide in 1898. She lived in the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood with her husband in a dwelling described as a stable. The abbreviation used to describe her occupation suggests that she was a housewife or domestic. Carrie’s partial skeletal remains show evidence of osteoarthritis and periostal inflammation.

Lans uses an assemblage of data to analyze the place and gender-specific aspects of slow violence these Black women experienced. Carrie and Mabel resided in areas of New York City that reflected their marginal positionalities. The environmental quality of Hell’s Kitchen was negatively impacted by the multiple industrial plants in the area. The stable where Carrie lived was particularly close to several establishments compromising air and water quality, along with high risk for fires. While Blacks of various professions and backgrounds lived in the Tenderloin neighborhood, it had the highest concentration of “red-light” establishments in the city. It was both “Negro Bohemia” and a place associated with sex work and other activities considered unlawful and immoral. Both areas marked Mabel and Carrie accordingly.

Therefore, Lans’s analysis illustrates how local and extralocal processes supporting racial segregation and the dehumanization of Black people impacted Carrie’s and Mabel’s lived experiences. Jim Crow determined the socially and environmentally precarious areas where Blacks could reside without a critical eye toward the systems creating patterns of violence. Furthermore, Black people and their lived experiences were viewed through archetypal lenses that assigned deviance to all aspects of their being. Black women were particularly constrained by categorization of their femininity that stressed promiscuity, a lack of gentility, and the normalization of subservience to whites (Hicks 2010). This means that the toxic neighborhood in which Carrie lived would have been considered a “natural” environment for her by way of physical abnormality. Lans also points out that the assumed hypersexuality of Black women made the Tenderloin a seemingly natural environment for Mabel. Furthermore, Black women’s sexuality put them at risk for suffering sexual assault that would go unpunished. Although Mabel’s and Carrie’s skeletal remains provide little evidence of impact to their physical health, the assemblage of data directs Lans, echoing Saunders, to the likelihood of debilitating affective experiences. Restating Lans’s poignant question: “How does one die of mania?” the pre- and postmortem circumstances of Carrie’s suicide suggest familial alienation, possibly tied to her husband’s affective experience. This work affirms the unique role that bioarchaeology can play in bringing together human skeletal remains and documents to address Black women’s erasure in the archive.

It is important to consider how Lans’s article responds to Cools’s statement about the majority of archaeological studies of health inequality. Lans’s study is grounded in skeletal biology without bifurcating the biological and cultural aspects of lived experience by foregrounding statistical analyses of skeletal evidence of stress. Cools’s article uses artifacts and documents as a lens through which to view embodied experiences of inequality with extensive health-based evidence. Therefore, both articles offer responses to the preponderance of bioarchaeological studies focused on health inequalities and are able to be articulated in ways that traditional studies in their subfields would not allow.

Kearin Ryan’s article, “The Smell of the Insane: Disciplining the Olfactory Domain in the Nineteenth-Century Asylum,” adds to the scope of environments discussed in the collection to which marginalized people are relegated. Ryan notes that, ironically, asylums were initially designed to provide people with “manias” a bucolic respite from overstimulating, crowded city environments. The theory that insanity could be cured through the environment was tied to ideas about bodily
function coming out of professionalized medicine. At the same time, asylums developed alongside Progressive Era discourses that essentialized racial and ethnic differences in mental health. Eugenics affirmed the inherent mental and physical inferiority of Blacks and lower-status European immigrants, suggesting that conditions were incurable. Biological evidence of ethnic and racial differences in odor were also being prioritized as part of constructing inherent racial differences reflected at visual, behavioral, and physiological levels. All of these factors influenced how the failure of the asylum project was interpreted.

As with other professionalized medical initiatives addressed in this thematic collection, promoting social order and civilization was prioritized over health care in asylums. Ryan details how the layout and ventilation for the asylum represented the latest technological advancements, but was not amenable to the growing number of people being sent to asylums. Institutions were not designed in anticipation of growing numbers to prevent congestion. Furthermore, the population increase in asylums reflected beliefs about connections among inherent medical, social, and physiological differences along racial lines. Spaces became catchalls for people embodying various forms of deviance. Echoing Lans, disregard for the systemic ways that asylums failed their patients without repercussion indicates that landscapes of impunity existed in various forms within the built environment.

Archaeology and Radical Humanism

In closing, the articles in this thematic collection make unique contributions to understanding how historically rooted patterns of health inequality are maintained over time. Authors identify nuances of these systemic operations that lead to understanding ideologies and practices that shape interactions and distributions of power. Ryan’s article offers important cautions for the reemergence of discussions about body odor today, thanks to products like Lume deodorant (bear witness to the extremely gendered and raced advertising at <https://lumedeodorant.com/>). Analyses of patent-medicine advertisements highlight how people are subject to multiple projects related to civilization, maintaining social order, and normalizing certain loci of authority in the context of health. As a result, directing consumers how to express their pain and what to buy for pain management becomes health care. Lupu powerfully ties this to “socially controlled” palliative experiences arising from investments in branded products (Thompson et al. 2009:112–152). Related to that, Linn provides a reminder that behavior out of step with the social order of health is diagnosed and thus pathologized.

Contributors also model using violence carefully in framing patterned inequalities that lead to health disparities. Bioarchaeological analyses focused on structural violence should continue to be reshaped accordingly to identify raced, classed, gendered, and ethnic distinctions. All of the authors point out that this is not just a matter of adding cultural context, but bringing veiled structures of inequality to light. This includes the ways that ethnic hierarchies traveled from Europe to impact access to labor and health care. The significance of pace in the enactment of structural violence is also examined carefully in the context of race and gender. Lans brings attention to Black women’s current status as a “protected” group in relation to suicide due to low rates. The invisibility of slow violence obscures affective experiences tied to anxiety and depression that Black women experience at high rates—as well as instances of suicide. This underscores the importance of the non-traditional sources and frameworks authors use to bring lived experiences into focus. The connections Lans makes among Carrie, Mabel, and Sandra Bland are not visible otherwise.

One of the most unique aspects of these articles is their clear demonstration of how the structural elements bearing on health inequities persist in scholarship. Authors expose how binaries and essentialized categorizations are embedded in the regimes of certainty shaping how artifacts are interpreted. Each article demonstrates the necessity for interdisciplinary, archaeological scholarship that involves using frameworks and data sets that support interpretation outside of traditional contexts. This includes departures from certainty that involve the intellectual process of imagining. The radical humanism of these studies resides in their ability to present how people simultaneously experience biological and social realities. Contributors also make it clear that radically humanistic archaeology involves internal critique of methods and analytical approaches, rather than leaving this to people in other disciplines carrying out critical studies of archaeology. The basis for contributors’ humanistic research extends into various realms of the academy and beyond it. Authors are engaged in collective knowledge production with
communities in which they study and reside. This work takes various forms: public education, participatory interpretation, and active commitments to antiracist teaching practices—sharing their knowledge with people from whom they are learning.

Rather than ending my comments with a call for decolonized archaeological study, I will state that the articles in this volume serve as proof that this project is already in progress.

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This discussion is dedicated to my cousin, Dara Northern, who lost her life as a result of domestic violence this summer. The abuse of Black women and girls must not go unnoticed.

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