

# Historical Archaeology

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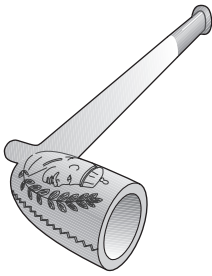
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## Chapter 8

# Struggling with Labor, Working with Identities

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Stephen W. Silliman

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### Introduction

Labor occupies a central place in historical archaeology. The significance of labor in archaeology stretches beyond a notion of labor as work or energy expenditure, beyond the kind of social labor acknowledged as the basis of human relations, and beyond the recognition that people labor at anything and everything that they do. The labor that occupies the attention of historical archaeologists is the labor that is colonized, enforced, controlled, exploited, indebted, hierarchical, unequally distributed, often rigidly structured, and simultaneously global and local. Such labor forms the crux of colonialism, mercantilism, capitalism, and class. This type of labor stands as a hallmark of the expansion of the European world economy from the 15th through the 21st century. It bound together, while simultaneously dividing, local communities, bodily and mechanized producers, regional markets, and worldwide consumers. These relationships cannot be captured solely in globalized or macroscale terms, but they must be recognized for their prevalence in past lived experiences and their power in contemporary politics. Whether indigenous Americans or Australians in European colonial settlements, artisans employed in far-flung European colonies and towns, enslaved Africans and African Americans on New World plantations, colonized African workers in Dutch and British South Africa, convict laborers in Australia, indentured servants in North America, industrial workers in Europe and the United States, or immigrant miners in the United States, these individuals and their experiences form the crux of many historical archaeological research projects.

The explicit goal of this chapter is to summarize the state of labor studies in historical archaeology through both case studies and theory. Shackel (2004) has recently undertaken a similar task, but only for industrial settings. Since labor serves

as a guiding theme, the cases draw upon a number of geographic and time periods but with a noticeable focus on the United States as a matter of convenience. The hope is to convey the rich possibilities of studying labor through historical archaeology with the otherwise relatively infrequent attempts to do so, compared to other topics covered in this volume. This larger goal necessitates that I accomplish a less obvious objective in the presentation of this chapter: dismantling the artificial divide between the archaeology of “culture contact” (traditionally focused on Native Americans and other indigenous people confronted with European settlement) and the historical archaeologies of colonial towns, African and Chinese diasporas, industrialization, and urban city landscapes. Referring to indigenous-European interactions as “contact” has tended to distance that genre of historical archaeology from other studies that focus on colonialism and post-colonialism (Silliman 2005). In North America, this has unfortunately resulted in little scholarly exchange about more overarching topics such as labor between historical archaeologists who work on Native American, African, Chinese, and European populations. For example, most historical scholarship on labor has focused on industrial contexts, work camps, and plantation slavery, but other researchers have identified a growing need to incorporate into this the study of indigenous people involved in colonial and post-colonial labor relations (Albers 1995; Bassett 1994; Cassell 2003; Littlefield and Knack 1995; Silliman 2001, 2004a). This chapter takes additional steps toward mending that disjuncture.

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### **Labor as Concept, Labor as Process**

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Attempts to study labor must articulate with the theoretical legacies of Karl Marx, some of which emphasize the economic and structural aspects of labor, while others emphasize the social relations and alienation of labor and its products (see Giddens 1971 for summary). However, due to space constraints, this chapter has to forego a detailed consideration of Marx’s work on labor, capital, and alienation, and instead focus on those who have used it (or not) in the practice of historical archaeology. Traditionally, anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and others have considered labor as primarily an economic phenomenon. Many adherents of the World Systems perspective of Wallerstein (1974, 1980) conceive of labor as a commodity on the periphery, or colonized areas, to be controlled and exploited by the core, or colonizing, nation. Yet, this type of approach downplays the social relations that comprise a labor system, reduces elements of labor (such as discipline and colonization) to only economic terms, and dehumanizes and denies agency for those who perform such labor. In particular, the framework and its relatives do not deal well with the fact that labor is a site of social struggle (McGuire and Reckner 2002; Saitta 2004; Shackel 2004). Labor also must be considered as a component of more than just obvious “working” environments (e.g., factories, mills, mines); it also held great significance in colonial institutions with other stated or assumed purposes. For example, Spanish missionary efforts in the American Southeast, Southwest, and West Coast expounded more than religious doctrine

and sought more than Catholic converts; they actively recruited laborers from the Native American populations among whom they settled (Lightfoot 2004; Milanich 1999; Silliman 2001). Missionary padres upheld work and discipline as mechanisms of religious conversion since, according to them, idle minds and hands awaited temptation by the Devil, an ideology that conveniently supplied a labor force for colonial operations.

To study labor in historical archaeology does not require depicting or considering laborers of the past as simply victims of colonialism, capitalism, industrialization, and macroeconomic patterns. Instead, focusing on labor allows archaeologists to see the ways that administrators, overseers, capitalists, managers, and supervisors structured and often imposed labor *and* the ways that those laboring accommodated, resisted, made use of, and lived through labor situations. Labor marks a shared, yet multiply interpreted, experience which lends itself well to considerations of class, gender, agency, and identity. At the same time, labor fits well into a relational model (Wurst, this volume; Wurst and McGuire 1999). That is, one does not have a set of labor relations in the “modern world” without workers, overseers, and owners, all of whom are constituted in that relation. This view reveals the complexity of labor for those participating in it. Some chose it for social mobility and economic well-being, some endured it for survival, some could see few other choices in a rapidly changing world, and some sought to band together for improvement of working conditions; other individuals cultivated, imposed, employed, conscripted, legislated, or enslaved it.

Finally, labor must also be considered in its materiality and social context. At one level, this means that archaeologists must focus on social history and lived lives rather than, as Shackel (2004:46) recently agreed, disguise or lose them in specialized studies that focus only on the machines and products of industry. Considering only technology, production, waste products, and consumer goods in industrial historical archaeology avoids the larger social questions of labor and people that made these material aspects happen. Casella (2005:9–11) argues that this requires industrial archaeologists to turn their attention to “social workers” – that is, people who labored and lived on factory floors, in city streets, and in their homes. At another level, historical archaeologists have to ask what they might learn from material culture by utilizing a labor framework that they would not have considered otherwise. A recent study of Iñupiat workers in the whaling and fur industry of the Arctic in the late 19th century illustrates this nicely (Cassell 2003). Not approaching the lithic endscrapers recovered at the whaling station from a labor perspective would have missed the significance of how these stone tools related to industry and colonialism rather than simply to notions of Native cultural continuity or traditional practice. “The endscrapers were still endscrapers in and of themselves, but these particular chert endscrapers from Kelly’s station were new tools for new laborers engaged in new work in a new age” (Cassell 2003:163). Similar labor-oriented studies in California document how the items usually thought to indicate indigenous cultural patterns (e.g., metal tools versus stone tools) simultaneously frame out the materiality of labor relations (Silliman 2001, 2004a).

## Identity, Race, and Gender

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Many historical archaeological studies of disenfranchised, colonized, non-white people of the past 500 years center on individuals caught up in labor regimes and work requirements. Yet, historical archaeologists frequently end up focusing primarily on the laborers themselves rather than also on the processes and relations of labor that surrounded them. Archaeologists miss the social context in which individuals work and live if labor is not considered simultaneously with respect to identity, race, and gender.

Archaeologists who focus on labor regularly confront the question of what kind of identities might be expressed by workers. Will people use the common experience as a working class to forge an identity or a consciousness that manifests in their lived, material lives? Will this social identity focus on local communities, or will it unite laborers across geographical and perhaps temporal spaces? Will laborers rely on their ethnic or cultural heritage as personal and community anchors rather than absorb their lives of work into their expressions or struggles with identity? Do these perceptions of identity vary between men and women, workers and capitalists, indigenous people and colonial overseers? The answers to these are not a singular “yes” or “no.” In fact, the lack of concrete *global* answers bespeaks the complexities inherent in the different *local* times, places, contexts, and social agents that historical archaeologists study.

A few examples will illustrate. In the middle of the 20th century, the multiethnic, largely immigrant mining settlement of Reipetown, Nevada (see Figure 14.1), revealed a community structured not by ethnicity but by laborer resistance to the class structures of other, more “mature” mining towns (Hardesty 1998:92). The same hypothesized “class consciousness” informs the archaeological research at the Ludlow Tent Colony in Colorado (see Figure 14.1), the site of the 1913–14 Colorado Coal Field War which witnessed striking miners and their families pitted against managers, capitalists, armed detectives, and the national guard in the context of a tent colony (Figure 8.1). Here, researchers attempt to tease out whether class consciousness arose among the striking miners and families as a result of male working conditions that overshadowed the otherwise ethnic divisions in their home life, or whether this consciousness arose in men sharing experiences in mine work and women sharing home conditions, regardless of ethnicity (McGuire and Reckner 2002:51–52). In addition, the research at Lowell, Massachusetts (see Figure 13.1), on 19th-century industrial textile mills and their workers suggests also that people adhered to a kind of “working class culture” that did not dwell on ethnic distinctions (Mrozowski et al. 1996).

On the other hand, Native Alaskans and California Indians who lived and labored at the 19th-century Russian Colony of Ross in California left no material evidence suggesting that they bonded together as a class of workers (see Figure 14.1). Instead, Native Alaskans and Californians focused more on their own cultural practices, drawn from their disparate homelands, as they negotiated household and community spaces (Lightfoot et al. 1998). Apache workers on 20th-



**Figure 8.1** Cellar under tent burned by the Colorado National Guard, killing women and children, Ludlow Colony, 1914 (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, X-60482)

century construction crews in the American Southwest did not seem to forge a “class consciousness” with their fellow non-Indian workers. Rather, they articulated male wage labor with female household maintenance to retain a distinctly “Apache” identity (Bassett 1994). Although Australian Aborigines and white settler Australians co-participated in the pastoral industry of 19th- and 20th-century Australia, indigenous workers did not seem to form strong “class” bonds with their white co-workers. They retained distinctly Aboriginal practices and identities and were then ironically and systematically excluded from the history of pastoralism (Harrison 2004). Various Mi’kmaq indigenous communities in eastern Canada entered into the wage labor workforce in the 19th and 20th centuries as a means of survival, but instead of becoming fully proletarianized, as Prins (1995) describes it, the nature of reserve lands and migrant labor served to protect tribal communities and to help create a sense of Mi’kmaq nationhood. Finally, Native Americans in Michigan were sent to Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools between the 1890s and early 1930s to be socialized and trained as members of the capitalist U.S. workforce, but rather than forming a class consciousness alongside fellow non-Indian workers, these individuals retained a distinct sense of Indian identity (Littlefield 1995).

Discourse about race plays a critical role in the negotiations between ethnic/cultural identities and worker/class identities. That is, people sharing the same

working conditions seem less likely to share a class-based identity when people are simultaneously racialized into other social and (presumed) biological categories. Australian pastoralists cannot congeal into a unified laboring class when they are thought to be composed of “black” and “white” Australians (Harrison 2004). African Americans freed from enslavement in the 19th and 20th centuries and working the same jobs as Euro-Americans in the United States did not form class bonds with their white co-workers since racial discourse and violence intervened (Milne 2002; Mullins 1999; Shackel 2004), nor did industrial slaves in the 19th-century eastern U.S. (Shackel and Larsen 2000). Workers from many ethnic backgrounds such as Mexico, Ireland, Croatia, Finland, and China did not form class bonds (and therefore successful unions) in late 19th- and early 20th-century Arizona copper mines as a result of racial discourses and practices (Sheridan 1998). This racial discourse arose not only internally out of different ethnic groups competing for jobs, but also externally out of copper companies’ attempts to de-unify the workforce, depress wages, and avoid union strikes (Sheridan 1998:176–179).

As much as race infuses laborer experiences and organization, considerations of gendered labor are paramount to questions about identity (see Voss, this volume). Not only does gender impact and reformulate industrial and colonial work spaces, but the role of gendered agents in negotiating labor must be appreciated. Archaeologists have used the insight that work spaces, and some associated home spaces, weigh heavily toward particular genders as a result of labor relations *outside* the home. Studies of gendered “work camps” fall into this category (e.g., Paterson 2003; Veltre and McCartney 2002), but others have revealed that what many think to be single-gendered camps are not at all so. In the Australian colonial goldfields, archaeological and documentary evidence point to the presence of women and children in worker sites traditionally assumed to be all-male, indicating household struggles to balance the mobility required of miners with the individual desires to engage with notions of Victorian domesticity (Lawrence 1998:48–55).

The implications fan outward into other realms of gender. For one, prostitution, or sex work, deserves careful attention as a form of gendered labor, as demonstrated by the work of several historical archaeologists (Costello 2000; Hardesty 1994; Seifert 1991; Seifert et al. 2000; Simmons 1998). In quite another way, labor questions can reveal new perspectives on gender. For example, Yamin (2002) has argued that the recovery of many children’s toys in the Five Points neighborhood of 19th-century New York City (see Figure 13.1) indicates that parents were investing in their children *as children* and not simply as workers. In early 20th-century construction camps for the Roosevelt Dam in Arizona, Apache men who participated in wage labor for road construction, quarrying, masonry, and other tasks provided economic stability to families, while Apache women maintained households that adhered to more “traditional” notions of family and cultural space (Bassett 1994:64–74). This undermined the attempts by the U.S. government to break Native American cultural practices on reservations through work projects. Finally, attention to gendered labor among enslaved Africans on Jamaican coffee plantations has revealed the harsh realities of spatial and sexual control and the requirements not only to perform labor but to reproduce laborers (Delle 2000:178–187).

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## Agency and Resistance

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Complementing the value of gender, race, and identity for offering unique perspectives on labor are notions of social agency. A focus on agency insures that labor is not seen as only a “top-down” phenomenon where workers simply fall victim to institutional violence and social control or buy into capitalist ideologies about consumerism or lives of work. But notions of agency can be mis-applied if archaeologists do not keep the structural and systemic nature of labor in mind when interpreting the lives and experiences of agents. In other words, the alternative does not involve conceiving of workers as entirely “free” agents who have the autonomy, opportunity, or resources to fully resist or direct the labor relations in which they maneuver. Instead, agents can be studied in how they negotiate the rules, resources, constraints, and opportunities of labor relations that surround them.

A classic case of the interface between agency and labor is the Boott Cotton Mills complex in Lowell, Massachusetts (see Figure 13.1) (Beaudry et al. 1991; Mrozowski et al. 1996). In their study of a boardinghouse, tenement house, and agent’s house, the researchers made a number of insightful discoveries regarding workers and labor relations in this industrial complex. They found relatively few artifacts and minimal environmental data that suggested beautification projects or healthy hygiene among the workers, but they did find evidence of laborers trying to improve their lot and to assert their preferences amidst a general lack of “free time” (Mrozowski et al. 1996). Archaeologists found “costume” jewelry to adorn bodies, plastic combs for lice and women’s hair, and buttons of black glass and porcelain, all of which looked pricier than they actually were. They discovered local-brand alcohol bottles despite the company regulations and temperance movement that prohibited them, but these items were hidden or discarded in crawlspaces, sheds, and privies to escape detection. Not everyone agrees with these interpretations, arguing that the Lowell archaeologists have overplayed worker resistance and heroism (Orser 1996), but Beaudry and Mrozowski (2001) have recently defended their cogent position regarding the working class at Lowell as visible through backyard lots of worker housing and their struggles to maintain dignity and assert preferences and identities in the context of industrial capitalism.

Other studies have attempted to demonstrate the visibility of agency and struggles between workers and managers in a variety of U.S. industrial settings. Nassaney and Abel (1993) suggest that discarded artifacts from a New England cutlery along a riverbank may indicate worker dissatisfaction with an imposed factory system. Mrozowski et al. (1996) discovered archaeologically that workers at Lowell’s textile mills circumvented management’s prohibitions of alcohol. Shackel (1996, 2000) has argued that the shift from craft to wage labor for armory workers in mid-19th-century Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (see Figure 13.1), resulted in worker resistance. Some men and women, discontent with the imposition of wage labor and its associated disconnect between labor and capital, may have expressed their dissatisfaction in the ceramics that they bought and used (Shackel 2000:241–242). Whether or not women were protesting the wage labor situation imposed upon their

male family members, they may have avoided more fashionable and current ceramic wares to harken back to an earlier time – craft labor – when they could exert more control over their labor. Shackel (1993) also found that workers consumed some of the final product of a brewery – that is, beer – and then hid the evidence of their subversion.

In Australia, a growing literature considers the impacts of colonial ranching labor on Aboriginal people. This research demonstrates that the history of colonial labor and pastoralism is actually a “shared” history between Aboriginal people and European settlers (Harrison 2002, 2004). Harrison (2004:32–33) has documented how Aboriginal people worked in the 19th-century pastoral economy with some autonomy, freedom to conduct their indigenous cultural practices, and the opportunity to travel long distances to visit family. He also traces these labor trends well into the 20th century through oral histories, wages books, and archaeological landscapes and charts the ways that Aboriginal people negotiated an economic and social terrain that contained the harsh realities of racism, discrimination, and coercion (Harrison 2004:44–51, 88–111). In similar ways, Paterson (2003) has noted that a dual consideration of labor and agency reveals that “post-contact” pastoral work camps can be understood in terms of gender, age, and power differentials.

Although most recent archaeological studies of plantations of the American South have rightfully focused on Africans and African Americans as laborers in the plantation economy, Heath (1999) has expanded that vision to include free, white artisans on Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello in 19th-century Virginia (see Figure 13.1). Labor was a critical node of interaction and the negotiation of agency since these artisans had confrontations with Jefferson over alcohol, absenteeism, theft, and competition. In her analysis of material culture, space, and work, Heath (1999) found that these artisans had houses with raised floorboards for walk-in cellars and prominent stone construction that spoke to higher status on the plantation than their enslaved African counterparts, but these were juxtaposed with “unvaried and worn ceramics, limited faunal remains indicative of a relatively monotonous meat diet, and a quantity of salvaged industrial materials and tools” (Heath 1999:208). Even more revealing is that these artisans had work spaces outside of their home quarters, yet they introduced the material culture of their plantation labor tasks into the household. “The line between being at work and at home appears to have been blurred for men on the early 19th-century plantation. For the women, of course, the terms were often synonymous” (Heath 1999:210). This suggests that free artisans may have forged their identities *as artisans* in the household as on the broader plantation through the use of otherwise non-domestic tools.

A similar study has been conducted on a 19th-century Mexican-California rancho in northern California, but with different results. In my excavations of Native American worker living areas on Rancho Petaluma, an enormous *hacienda*-style operation north of San Francisco Bay operating between 1834 and the early 1850s (Figure 8.2, see Figure 14.1), I found that indigenous men and women working on the rancho, for reasons ranging from outright capture to indebtedness to alliance building, had interfaced with labor in different manners (Silliman 2004b). Through the interplay of textual and artifactual information, I could discern that adult men, who spent quite a bit of time herding and butchering livestock and



**Figure 8.2** Petaluma Adobe quadrangle, Rancho Petaluma, northern California. Photograph by Stephen Silliman

plowing fields, introduced little of their work tools into household material culture. This was somewhat surprising given the prominence of Indian *vaqueros*, or cowboys, in all of Spanish and Mexican California. On the other hand, adult Native women brought needles, scissors, and other sewing items into the home, all of which would have stemmed directly from their tasks in and around the Petaluma Adobe residential and working area under the management of resident settlers (Silliman 2004a:188–197). Rather than a simplistic notion of “culture contact,” ideas about colonial labor better clarified the negotiation of gender and social identity in this 19th-century setting.

### Lived Experiences in the Home and Workplace

When archaeologists and historians peer into the shadows of near and distant pasts in the “modern world,” they immediately confront the problem of labor. The lives of people outside of the small circle of elite who supervised, delegated, and owned typically involved work. This was true whether one’s ancestry was Native American, African, Chinese, or immigrant European; whether one lived in the eastern United States, western North America, New World plantations, desert Australia, South Africa, or Latin America; and whether one toiled in mines, cotton fields, livestock

ranches, construction projects, or prostitution. Interpreting these lives requires not just a requisite focus on labor relations as a workplace issue, but also an emphasis on the ways that labor relations implicated residential spaces, people's home lives, and their off-work hours. A number of studies have considered these issues, and I sample a few here.

The American West has offered a rich area for considering labor in historical archaeology, ranging from the earliest Hispanic missions and ranchos of the late 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, to the gold mining camps of the mid-19th century, to the public works projects and industrial mines in the 20th century. Unquestionably, the archaeology of mining and work camps in the American West has tackled the labor issue thus far in the most thorough manner. A special issue of the journal, *Historical Archaeology* (2002), delved into this topic with the theme, "Communities Defined by Work: Life in Western Work Camps." In the various articles contained therein, archaeologists highlighted a number of key elements in an archaeology of labor. Van Bueren (2002b) noted that life in early 20th-century work camps revolved around labor, but found that off-work activities maintained a critical place in worker's lives. This took place despite the scientific management of work efficiency that established hierarchical labor tasks and pay as well as orderly rows of tents and houses (Van Bueren 2002a, 2002b). Outside of the strict management realm, Baxter (2002) found that California's oil fields during this same period witnessed an intentional segregation of laboring and living spaces by workers because they *could*. Other analyses have revealed how labor relations impacted the daily lives of coal miners in Colorado during the early decades of the 20th century, including managerial control of housing, medical facilities, food, entertainment, and actual entry into the residential community (McGuire and Reckner 2002:50).

An important feature used to distinguish laboring contexts in the American West hinges on industrial (particularly mining) technology and its associated labor. Archaeologists and other scholars have identified non-industrial and corporate industrial contexts and have outlined their impacts on gender, class, space, and human lives (Hardesty 1994). In particular, 20th-century "model" and "satellite" mining towns have been considered from the perspective of power (Hardesty 1998). The shift from local operations with often Native workers to "large-scale, heavily capitalized, corporate industrial ventures" resulted in a shift from more egalitarian to more paternalistic and class-based social settings (Van Bueren 2002a:2-3). The implications ramify to more than just broader household or community patterns; they also impact gender. For example, Hardesty (1994:133-134) found that non-industrial mining sites had women working as prostitutes who owned their own businesses, but that the influx of corporate ideology resulted in working class women occupying wage-labor position for pimps and not owning their own businesses.

Aside from these later developments in capitalism and industrialism, an archaeology of labor finds its way into the early colonial periods of western North America. Russian settlements in California (Lightfoot 2004, this volume) and the Arctic (Crowell 1997; Veltre and McCartney 2002) have begun to be approached with an eye toward labor relations and their articulation with gender and agency. The labor

question takes on great salience given that Russians conscripted laborers from Native Alaskan populations to use them as seal and sea otter hunters from Alaska to California. While Veltre and McCartney (2002) pursued the labor issue only to the point of recognizing the archaeological sites under study as male-only, worker-separated housing in Alaska, Lightfoot (2004) has moved toward deeper considerations of labor policies and practices in colonial California.

The comparative study of Russian settlements and Spanish missions in colonial California (Lightfoot 2004) and archaeological studies of labor in California's missions (Silliman 2001) and ranchos (Silliman 2004a) have revealed what might be gained from a focus on colonial labor for cultural change and continuity in Native lives. For instance, Lightfoot (2004:186–188) has demonstrated the impacts that Russian and Spanish labor regimes had on California Indian people. The similarities, such as exploitation of inexpensive Native labor, and differences, such as more freedom to leave, less provisioning, and no training in skilled crafts by the Russians, provide important clues as to how Native social agents maneuvered this colonial terrain and to how historical archaeologists can track them in the material and documentary record. Studying California's ranchos with a similar perspective has demonstrated how labor impacted the ways that Native Americans participated in the colonial world, the nature of subsistence and social pursuits, and the organization of daily life and scheduling (Silliman 2004a).

As the above examples allude, relations and structures of labor impact the social space in which people lived and worked. Other examples from outside the American West help to round out the picture. In colonial New England in the northeastern U.S., house architecture speaks to the issue of labor, as the construction of "outhuts, lean-tos, ells, and wings commonly referred to as 'appendages' to house backsides" related directly to the service structure of the house (Larick 1999:76–77; see also Garman [1998:152] for negotiations over living and work spaces by enslaved Africans). In these changing forms, archaeologists can trace the ways that labor was conceptualized and implemented by those requiring it and those performing it. Nineteenth-century industrial sites in Massachusetts such as Boott Cotton Mills in Lowell (Mrozowski et al. 1996) and the Russell Cutlery Factory in Turner's Falls (Nassaney and Abel 2000) reveal the persistent efforts by managers and capitalist owners to structure not only their workers' employment spaces but also their domestic spaces. That is, social control and surveillance extended far beyond the walls of the official "work" space. However, archaeological research has shown the ways that workers often resisted or reinterpreted the "designed" space as their own "used" space. In a parallel fashion, 19th- and 20th-century haciendas in Latin America utilized space to manifest power, control, and social division along the lines of labor, as illustrated by archaeologists working at Hacienda Tabi in Yucatan, Mexico (see Figure 11.1), who found differences in housing structure, permanence, and placement based on labor roles (Meyers and Carlson 1999).

An important context for considering the implications of labor for lived experience is the plantation slavery system of the Americas. Although most plantation archaeologists focus primarily on questions of culture, race, gender, and power, others have begun to articulate these issues with the labor that permeated many

facets of life for enslaved Africans. Such a recognition is critical since labor provided the grounding feature of plantation slavery, its very *raison d'être*. "Archaeologists should remember that slaves were at plantations to work. . . . [T]he primary function of slaves was to perform labor" (Orser 1990:115). This does not have to be a call for an economic approach but rather a recognition of the importance of labor relations in social life and lived experience. Several scholars of the plantation have focused on the organization of labor, in particular the task- and gang-system of labor, the distinctions between house and field slaves, and both of their impacts on slave autonomy and social control.

The task system was common along the coastal rice and sea island cotton plantations of the American South (Reitz et al. 1985:165; Young 1997:42). In this system, enslaved people were given specific duties to complete on individual plots of land to tend, and upon completion of the assigned task, the slaves were allowed free time (Berlin and Morgan 1993:14–15; Reitz et al. 1985:166). Often, enslaved workers completed these tasks with minimal to no supervision (Young 1997:43). In the gang system that predominated in tobacco, sugar, coffee, and short-staple cotton plantations, enslaved Africans and African Americans worked in teams for a specific period of time, usually dawn to dusk, to complete any number of assigned tasks (Delle 2000:179; Reitz et al. 1985:166; Young 1997:42–43). Generally, supervision was close, group composition carefully designed, and labor often segregated by sex or age (Berlin and Morgan 1993:14; Delle 2000:180).

Some have suggested that task systems led to increased autonomy; to more free time to hunt, fish, cultivate, and raise poultry; and to increased incentive for enslaved people to sell handicrafts, hire out their own labor, or commit theft (Adams and Boling 1989:94; Moore 1985:154; Singleton 1985:292–293). These conclusions rely on the reduced schedules for time-intensive labor. Dissenters have argued that the task system did not promote more leisure as it required additional hours of food procurement (Reidy 1993:140), nor did it entail less labor (Berlin and Morgan 1993:15). The gang system has been viewed as a mechanism often employed by planters to exert more pressure and control over slaves (Miller 1993:165; Reidy 1993:149), while the task system has been viewed as a technique to promote certain levels of production and thus labor and social discipline without the need for strict domination (Tomich 1993:238).

Focusing on African-American labor in studies of post-emancipation contexts in the Americas offers additional insights. Several archaeological and historical projects have revealed that despite the demise of slavery and its associated required labor duties imposed upon people of African descent in the latter half of the 19th century, the social and political climate worked to insure the continuation of African-American labor for an ever-expanding capitalism. That is, legal equality did not translate directly to economic or political equality. Archaeologists have demonstrated this in the rural hamlet of Peterboro, New York (see Figure 13.1), where the African-American Russell family worked for the Euro-American couple of Gerrit and Ann Smith in the mid-1800s (Wurst 2002:166–167); at the famous Five Points neighborhood in New York City (see Figure 13.1) where the process of "gradual emancipation" insured that freed blacks would continue to labor until undergoing

notable racial violence as white immigrants vied for their jobs in the first half of the 19th century (Milne 2002:133–137); and at various industrial sites in the American South where white Southerners sought to disenfranchise African Americans from work opportunities (Shackel 2004:50–51). Research in Jamaica has shown how London-based missionary societies taught discipline to freed Africans to instill a desire to work diligently and how small lot sizes and proximity to plantations for ex-slaves served to confine them to the labor world they had legally “escaped” (Delle 2001:187–188).

To complement studies of material lives, archaeologists investigating the impacts of labor and the lived experiences of laborers have begun to trace the biological impacts of colonial and industrial labor. Industrial settings are known for their often dangerous working conditions, health risks, and environmental degradation, all of which have come under the purview of historical archaeologists in recent years. As Shackel (2004:52) notes: “It is important that these issues are made part of the story of industry and labor.” Mrozowski (this volume) similarly demonstrates that these biological features of historical archaeology deserve serious attention. Two projects that have highlighted these issues in detail are the Boott Mills excavation in Lowell, Massachusetts, and the Harpers Ferry sites in West Virginia, both located in the eastern United States (see Figure 13.1). For Lowell, historical archaeologists have been able to reveal the presence of parasites in privies associated with worker housing (Beaudry et al. 1991) and the proximity of privies to water sources prior to the company installation of water closets (Mrozowski et al. 1996). Both aspects reflect the difficult health conditions faced by industrial workers in the late 19th century. Similarly for Harpers Ferry, archaeologists have identified problems with parasites and sanitation (Ford 1994; Reinhard 1994).

In quite a different way, Larsen and his colleagues have investigated the impacts of colonial labor on Native American groups in Spanish-controlled La Florida of the American Southeast in the 16th and 17th centuries (Larsen et al. 1996, 2001). Using bioarchaeological studies of excavated human remains associated with mission and colonial sites, these scholars have identified the physical impacts of labor on the bodies of Native people incorporated into colonial work regimes. For example, they discovered an increase in skeletal robusticity and an earlier onset of osteoarthritis in mission populations when compared to pre-mission times, both of which seem to signal heightened physical pressure from required labor duties. Men showed more impacts from heavy, repetitive labor, but both men and women revealed heightened arthritic conditions (Larsen et al. 1996:115–117). As a rough complement, a recent study of four enslaved African Jamaican burials has also revealed some of the biological hazards of labor (Armstrong and Fleischman 2003).

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### **Labor Struggles, Class, and the Present**

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The notion of struggle, whether individual or collective, remains one of the defining elements of the historical archaeology of labor. The most common way for histori-

cal archaeologists to engage with the topic of labor is through the notion of class. Because class has undergone in-depth treatment elsewhere (see Wurst 1999, this volume) and would require extended discussions of Marx, I forego a detailed discussion here except to note its significance for an archaeology of labor. By focusing on labor as a critical nexus in social and material production, historical archaeologists can heed the warnings about our disciplinary tendency to overemphasize consumption, consumerism, and boundless choice (Wurst and McGuire 1999). Labor comprises aspects of both opportunity and constraint. Similarly, labor is the seat of production, and it involves social relations, individual agents, material culture, and corporeal bodies. By focusing on laboring experiences, particularly those in industrial contexts of the last century, archaeologists can develop new strains of critically engaged and political archaeology that resonate with concerns of the present (Saitta 2004).

The explicit use of historical archaeology to politically engage the present draws largely on the rich literature in critical theory and its specific manifestation as critical archaeology (see Palus et al., this volume). A labor project with outspoken proponents of this vision is the Ludlow archaeological project, centered on the careful study – and boost to public memory – of the events and people involved in the Colorado Coal Field War in 1913–14 (Ludlow Collective 2001; McGuire and Reckner 2002; Saitta 2004). The Ludlow strike and ensuing massacre is often considered one of the most important strikes and cases of outright industrial violence in 1910s America. As a result, the project couples the rigors of an archaeological search for an accurate history with a stated desire to draw in the public, to resonate with working class interests, and to change the nature of heritage and remembrance regarding the early decades of the 20th century. “[W]e remind citizens that the workplace rights we enjoy and tend to take for granted today were won via struggle and paid for in blood” (Saitta 2004:380).

Using the Colorado Coal Field War, McGuire and Reckner (2002) point out that the idea of a free-agent cowboy “Old West” marked by socioeconomic status rather than class continues to haunt public history. They emphasize the requisite rethinking that comes with a shift from calling the West a frontier, an untamed space at the edge of an expanding settled area, to calling it an internal periphery, an intentionally underdeveloped arena that provides labor and goods for the “core” (McGuire and Recker 2002:47). Acknowledging the latter requires a focus on labor relations in a structured economy founded on wage labor. Like Wurst (1999, this volume), they argue for a view of class as a relational structure that binds together, while it simultaneously creates, workers, managers, and employers.

Redressing the paucity of studies that focus on working class people in various industrial settings across North America comprises only one necessary step. Additional attention to labor is required to understand past and present Native Americans as a particular group in that working class environment. The role of Native American wage labor in the United States economy, like that of union strikes and industrial companies, has been a relatively squelched topic in archaeology, history, and public memory (Albers 1995; Campbell 2002; Littlefield and Knack 1995). Just as significantly, attention to any form of Native labor, whether wage or not,

has not been a priority for archaeologists and their historically minded colleagues (for exceptions, see Cassell 2003; Lightfoot 2004; Silliman 2001, 2004a). Labor offers one way that many Native communities have forged their cultural continuity and identities, but this labor is widely misunderstood by scholars and public alike. The misunderstanding grows, in part, from the inability of many to “see” Native American labor because of the dual standard applied to it. As Albers notes, “when Native Americans manufacture dream-catchers, even on an assemblyline, their ethnic identity is validated. When they rebuild an engine block . . . as a wage laborer in a commercial garage, their ethnic identity is denied” (Albers 1995:248). Unlike many other people engaged in working class activities, Native Americans have had to, and still do, articulate their labor in a much broader nationwide discourse about their “authenticity.” Historical archaeologists are poised to play a key role in that discourse.

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## Conclusion

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By its very nature of engaging with questions of the “modern world,” historical archaeology has to come to grips with the realities of labor. If we want to understand the lived experiences, identities, agencies, and struggles of people in the past who were caught up in colonialism, capitalism, industrialism, and racism, then labor must be at the forefront of our studies. Labor does not trump the importance of studying gender, identity, race, sexuality, or class, but it adds a necessary element that intertwines with those topics in illuminating ways. Can we talk about gender in the homes of textile mill workers without considering their working lives? Can we discuss Native American cultural practices in colonial settlements without understanding the labor regime that engaged them regularly in their bodies, relationships, and material culture? Can we ask questions about racism and oppression on slave plantations without knowing the nature of labor that underwrote the enterprise and that occupied many of their waking hours? This chapter has attempted to answer these in the negative.

To focus on labor does not require that historical archaeologists adhere to a single theoretical perspective. Although the topic of labor typically falls under theories based on Marxist analyses of class and capitalism, it need not reside only in those arenas. Some of the studies summarized in this chapter do engage with Marxist-inspired perspectives on social and economic relations or on critical theory approaches to the present, but others focus on theories of practice, agency, and identity. Marxist perspectives on labor often resonate with strongly capitalist situations like industry and worker strikes, but they may not work as well when considering the cultural negotiations of Native Americans and other indigenous people who struggled with colonial labor regimes. We must keep in mind that labor is a multiply experienced relation and a multiply relational experience – it is not always about only class or capitalism; it can also be about bodies, gender, and identity. For this reason, historical archaeologists need to remain open to many theoretical possibilities, provided that these are well grounded in the realities of past lives, the

present conditions surrounding archaeological research, and the future possibilities of political impact.

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