**ANTH 110 Archaeology: Lessons from the Past**

**Interpreting histories of enslaved peoples**

*The enslaved community occupied a bounded and culturally significant space that was not just the background but the epicenter of black cultural production.*

-Whitney Battle-Baptiste[[1]](#footnote-1)

The problem: Missing histories of enslaved communities

1. What can be learned from Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage through archaeology, according to Whitney Battle-Baptiste (i.e., how do artifacts illustrate the “transformation of space in culturally significant ways for captive Africans living at the site from 1804 to 1850”?)?
2. How is the representation of the past (specifically regarding enslaved peoples) at the Hermitage reflected (or not) in its [website](https://thehermitage.com/) and public engagement today?
3. Compare the representation of the past at Gorée Island (Thiaw 2011)[[2]](#footnote-2) with the representation of the Hermitage plantation’s past.
4. What, if any, problems do you see with how the Hermitage is represented? Choose a section of the website that you would want to improve and indicate it here.

A small step toward a solution: Hermitage artifacts and representing histories of power and inequality

1. Visit the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery at [**daacs.org**](http://www.daacs.org). Click **Research – Galleries –** [**The Triplex**](https://www.daacs.org/galleries/triplex/) to view personal items from one of the captive quarters excavated at the Hermitage.
2. Choose an object from the gallery on which to focus. You are to use the object to give further insight into the lived experience of enslaved peoples at the Hermitage and, in the process, to improve representation of the Hermitage in some part of its website. Describe the object and the part of the website on which you’re working. Consider Battle-Baptiste’s ideas of *homespace, homeplace, and communitas* as you determine how to proceed. Take some notes here.
3. Do additional web-based research on the type of artifact you chose (consider, for example: who is it made for? How is it used? Where else is it found archaeologically). Write a short (1-2 paragraphs) essay on the object for a specific part of the Hermitage website.

Major takeaways:

1. What is the difference between lived and imagined pasts at the Hermitage?
2. Should the Hermitage and other antebellum plantations serve as tourist destinations and/or special event venues? Explain.
3. How could you re-imagine use of the plantation to promote equity?

1. Battle-Baptiste, Whitney. 2011. ‘In This Here Place’: Interpreting Enslaved Homeplaces. In *Archaeology of*

   *Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Faiola, 233-248. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thiaw, Ibrahima. 2011. Digging on Contested Grounds: Archaeology and the Commemoration of Slavery on Gorée Island, Senegal. In *New Perspectives in Global Public Archaeology*, edited by Katsuyuki Okamura and Akira Matsuda, 127–38. New York: Springer. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)