

REVIEW

***The Archaeology of Race and Class at Timbuctoo: A Black Community in New Jersey.* Christopher P. Barton. 2022. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. xvi + 134 pp. \$80.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-8130-6927-2.**

Tara Skipton

Department of Anthropology, University of Texas, Austin, TX, USA

Christopher P. Barton's *The Archaeology of Race and Class at Timbuctoo* effectively illustrates the myriad considerations that archaeologists ought to make in collaborative and activist archaeological projects by transparently showing the decision-making processes underlying project design, community outreach, methodology, and interpretation. By focusing on Timbuctoo, a free Black town in New Jersey founded in 1826, Barton and the Timbuctoo Advisory Committee are working to complicate existing understandings of nineteenth-century Black life in the region, both before and after Emancipation in the early 1860s. This book foregrounds the racial and economic structures that pervaded the everyday lives of Timbuctoo's residents while highlighting the community's persistence and engagement with these realities.

Barton notes that this book is not a guide to an archaeology of social activism, but as a graduate student in historic archaeology seeking to produce tangible change in the world, I found ample (albeit indirect) advice for developing my own praxis within community-engaged and community-based work in archaeology. From considering the practical intricacies of community collaborations to understanding the rationale for using experimental methods to test brick artifacts, my experience of reading this book filled me with creative inspiration, rather than the placid contentment or even critical skepticism that is common when reading more matter-of-fact publications. From the beginning, Barton is candid about his role and his positionality in relation to the project and any "ownership" of heritage and knowledge. This book makes it clear that these interpretations are not the *only* ones that could exist, nor are they complete and final. Two of this book's greatest strengths are its conciseness and accessibility, which are important aspects of the praxis of an archaeology for social justice. Although written for an academic publisher, this book does not require much archaeological background to understand its overarching themes, logic, and interpretations. Meanwhile, for readers like me, this book serves as a practical lesson that can help reimagine what archaeology can look like and can achieve.

The first two chapters set the tone for why this project and its questions are significant within the discipline of archaeology, for local awareness of public history, and in relation to structural inequities in the contemporary United States. Via a brief synthesis of similar projects that characterize collaborative archaeology, Chapter 1 situates the project at Timbuctoo along this collaborative spectrum and clearly shows the Timbuctoo Advisory Committee's considerations of the research's benefits and ethical concerns. Bridging project design with the contemporary context, this chapter then lays out the ways in which the project emphasizes a more realistic lived experience within the public understanding of Timbuctoo and its role in the Underground Railroad. Chapter 2 explores the intersections of race and class via the perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Sherry Ortner, identifying patterns of marginalization in nineteenth-century New Jersey that persist today.

Chapter 3 describes the occupational and archaeological history of Timbuctoo, the community's relationship to the broader landscape and nearby environmental features, and historical accounts of resistance and community protection. This chapter supports the idea of a strong collective identity

at Timbuctoo, a theme also directly evident through oral histories. The project focused archaeologically on the Davis site, a house built in the late nineteenth century. This chapter provides an overview of the site's history and what archaeological investigations have found thus far.

The remaining chapters use archaeological data to make interpretations about landscape use and activities (Chapter 4), economic processes of home construction (Chapter 5), food acquisition and storage practices (Chapter 6), and the role of display items and bric-a-brac in this relatively impoverished community (Chapter 7). These chapters very clearly and logically bridge empirical archaeological data, the broader historical and systemic context, and methods of interpretation to generate understandings of everyday life for those who resided at the Davis site. Not only do these chapters present significant information about Timbuctoo residents but they also provide clear examples of how archaeologists can interrogate documentary and material evidence to study race and class in the historic and recent past.

This book develops interesting arguments about race and class in nineteenth-century New Jersey, but it develops only *some* of the interpretive potential of the archaeology of Timbuctoo. There is room for a more concerted focus on gender, including interpretive approaches grounded in Black feminist methodologies that emphasize structural connections among race, class, gender, and sexuality. Even within the scope of the data presented in the book and its exploration of the relationship between women and the contemporary market at large, the discussion about the role of Black women in consumer culture could have been more robust.

Overall, the book presents intriguing discussions via collaborative archaeology at Timbuctoo, and I look forward to the diversity of future interpretations and insights in this area.