Stories in Stone
Memorialization, the Creation of History and the Role of Preservation

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Acknowledgments

This project grew out of the delivery of two tombstones to the lab where I was serving as the archaeological conservator and the need to understand their context and story in order to design an effective and ethical treatment. It evolved into a dissertation and has subsequently morphed again into this book. The opportunity to work with both Lucy Ann Dunlop's and Robert Hill's tombstones and to help to tell some of their stories has been an extraordinary one. It has connected me to new communities and has expanded my views of the two fields, archaeology and conservation, within which I work. I owe a debt of thanks to many people for their generous insights and for their encouragement along the way. First and foremost, I am indebted to the members of the First Baptist Church's History Committee, Opelene Davis, Liz Coleman and Ethel Hill, for partnering with me, and to the descendants of Alexander Dunlop for allowing me to temporarily share their wonderful ancestor.

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Foreword

‘To accept one’s past—one’s history—is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought.’

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

In July of 2019, I was privileged to be given a tour of the displays in the First Baptist Church, Williamsburg, Virginia, including the tombstones of Robert F. Hill and Lucy Ann Dunlop, whose biographies are traced and analyzed in this volume. It was a fitting time to appreciate the stories of the markers and their honored position - they are mounted facing a display of photographs commemorating the 1962 visit of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., - since I was at First Baptist as part of a community conversation about the legacies of the 1619 arrival of the first documented captive Africans to arrive in what is now Virginia (Thornton 1998; Horn 2019; McCartney 2019). In recognition of this anniversary, and the manner in which the four centuries of African and African American contributions to building American society have been intentionally diminished in public memory by a dominant white society, the National Park Service sponsored archaeological and historical research into the Jamestown space where one of those first African arrivals, Angela, lived (Reid 2019).

This focus on Angela provided an opportunity to address other hidden African American stories from the site of England’s first permanent new world colony, notably five burials of people of African descent that had been excavated by archaeologists in the early and mid-20th century. I first encountered the scant and sobering evidence of these five individuals while serving as the Project Archaeologist for the Jamestown Archaeological Assessment in the 1990s, a National Park Service sponsored project conducted by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (Horning 2006; Brown and Horning 2004). Marks of violence on the disarticulated remains and evidence that the individuals had been interred in boundary ditches so readily indexed the inhumanity of the early colony that, in the run-up to the 2007 commemoration of Jamestown’s 1607 founding, it was deemed inappropriate to publicly discuss their stories. The 1619 anniversary thus provided space to begin to rectify that literal whitewashing of the history of early Jamestown, and of its ongoing memorialization (Reid 2019). Part of our mission that July evening at First Baptist Church, then, was to ask a broadly defined descendant
community what they would like to see happen to both the human remains and the stories of the lives and deaths of those individuals whose names and lives were never formally acknowledged.

The book that follows starts with the unexpected discovery of two broken, buried, and disrespected gravestones of two seemingly forgotten African American residents of Williamsburg, and traces their story both back in time and to the present. It is, at times, a hard read, not because of its prose, which is clear and compelling, but because of the as-yet unresolved legacies it tackles. It sheds light in particular on the disenfranchisement and dismissal of the lives of past African Americans, particularly those who endured the horrors of enslavement, and the further desecration of their bodies in death through the willful destruction of African American burial places and places of commemoration. But the ugliness and inequality of life in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Virginia is only part of the story relayed in this volume. Dr. Williams consistently and effectively reminds her readers of the self-aware, strategic, and effective actions of African American individuals like Alexander Dunlop, who commissioned the gravestones, in seeking justice and equality. Archaeology emerges here as an effective vehicle for highlighting stories of persistence and resistance, and reimagines their importance in the present and for the future.

As demonstrated by the collaborative decision-making about the future of the tombstones of Lucy Ann Dunlop and Robert F. Hill described by Dr. Williams, archaeology has emerged in recent years as a conduit for honest and tough discussions about historical legacies, for uncovering hidden histories, and for taking responsibility for those histories. Central to this work is a recognition that descendant communities should not only be consulted, but that they should take the lead in designing and delivering research projects in a collaborative fashion. A founding principal for this engaged and proactive way of working is the notion of descendant communities as ‘ethical clients’ adopted as part of the New York African Burial Ground excavation and commemoration project (Blakey 2008). In the 1990s, what began as a compliance-based excavation of human remains from New York’s oldest and largest African burial ground to make way for a new Federal building exploded into controversy as the local African American community ‘seized intellectual power’ (LaRoche and Blakey 1997), protesting the treatment of the human remains and the lack of acknowledgment of community concerns. From this controversy arose a new decolonized way of working that has inspired archaeologists and communities not only elsewhere in the United States, but globally. Building on the last twenty years of such practice with regards to African American histories, a rubric for the ethical conduct of projects engaging with histories of slavery and the reality of ongoing racism
was produced for the National Trust by descendant community members and archaeologists based at James Madison's Montpelier in 2018. Our project recovering Jamestown's African and African-descended histories applies these principles by building trust through honest conversation. This is the principal foundation for conciliation archaeology and the underpinning for the community decision-making that informed the final disposition of the Hill and Dunlop grave markers described in this book.

Conciliation archaeology is founded on the recognition that the past matters, and that the past is selective. Or rather, what we do with the past is selective. Conciliation archaeology, and ‘archaeologies of listening’ (Kehoe and Schmidt 2019), seeks to engage the overlooked pasts in ways that serve the purposes of social justice in the present. Some may (and do) object to the overt mobilization of the past in the interests of the present. But that has always happened, not least of all at Colonial Williamsburg, with its motto ‘that the future may learn from the past.’ So, the issue is not to do with seeing the past as powerful in the present, it is the choice of which pasts to prioritize. As detailed in this volume, the very creation of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, designed to celebrate a particularly filiopietistic view of the origins of American democracy, further disenfranchised Williamsburg's African American community through the tried and true implementation of removal and displacement. African American homes were acquired and demolished to make way for the reconstruction (Edwards-Ingram 2011), while white families were permitted to remain within the bounds of the newly recreated colonial capital, itself cast as ‘white public space’ (Page and Thomas 1994). In the wider Williamsburg area, African American communities were frequently displaced: in 1918 to make way for the Yorktown Mine Depot (Mahoney 2013), in 1942 for the naval base at Camp Peary (McDonald, Stuck and Bragdon 1992), and as late as the 1970s when the National Park Service displaced the historic African American community of Slabtown/Uniontown at the Yorktown Revolutionary War battlefield site (Fitzsimons 2019). At the same time, of course, the very operation of the Foundation was (and remains) wholly reliant upon the contributions of its African American workforce.

Persistence, however, is as equally powerful a regional narrative as is racial discrimination. First Baptist Church itself is a potent symbol for persistence, perseverance, and community for Williamsburg's African American population, a reminder of the importance of place, and especially **homeplace** (after Battle-Baptiste 2011), as explored by Dr. Williams. And, as beautifully illustrated in this careful study of the tombstones and their wider significance, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation itself occupies a significant place in the development of the critical study of American race and racism, most notably in the establishment of the African American Interpretation Program.
1989), the re-orientation of archaeological research under Dr. Marley Brown in the 1980s towards examining the material traces of communities of free and enslaved African descended peoples in the colonial capital (Brown and Samford 1994; Edwards-Ingram 2014; Franklin 1997), and decolonizing practice through supporting and training archaeologists of color. While archaeology and its umbrella discipline anthropology are still marred by institutionalized white privilege (see Beliso-Jésus and Pierre 2020, also Harrison 1997 and 2008), the rich intellectual tradition of the African Diaspora, from W.E.B. DuBois (1906) to contemporary writers like Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) and Gary Younge (2006), is increasingly visible and influential. In *Stories in Stone*, Emily Williams brings another powerful Diasporic voice to the table: that of Alexander Dunlop, the man who commissioned the two tombstones at the heart of the ensuing narrative. His declaration to the Committee on Reconstruction that ‘I was born in Virginia, and I will die in Virginia’ serves as a powerful reminder of the significance of placemaking and rootedness, a value literally and figuratively inscribed on the gravestones that have finally been returned to a place of prominence in testimony to African American agency and persistence.

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