Constructing Race and Architecture 1400–1800, Part 1

Editor's Introduction

For architectural historians, the 2020 publication of *Race and Modern Architecture*, edited by Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, brought the presence of anti-Black racism in our discipline home in an unforgettable way.[1] The book appeared as the Black Lives Matter movement captured global attention following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, and, as Maura Lucking observes in her review in this issue of *JSAH*, "it is difficult to recall an academic anthology so appropriately timed and so desperately needed as this volume." *Race and Modern Architecture* offers a critical impetus for self-reflection among scholars in the field: as Cheng, Davis, and Wilson note on the first page of their book, even as "architectural historians have traditionally avoided the topic of race," racial thought has profoundly shaped not only architecture but also the discipline of architectural history.[2]

Following the invitation that *Race and Modern Architecture* has extended to scholars to open up an urgent and much-needed conversation about race and architectural history, the *JSAH* roundtable "Constructing Race and Architecture 1400–1800" represents a collective effort to engage in dialogue and stimulate new kinds of thinking around these issues. This is the first of two planned sets of brief essays devoted to this topic, with the second expected to appear in the December 2021 issue of *JSAH*. Although the journal's traditional mainstay is the extended scholarly article, the roundtable format represents a valuable addition that opens conversations to a broad range of scholars working on many strands of a given topic—in this case, the intersection of race and architecture in the early modern period. The inclusion of diverse voices and viewpoints is critical to this project, making a stronger and more powerful statement than could be made by a single individual. Such a project can hardly claim to be comprehensive,

but in aiming for greater diversity and complexity, we seek to better represent both the membership of SAH and the field at large. It is only a first step, but one of many to come in our ongoing effort to promote and ensure inclusion at *JSAH*.[3]

While the issues raised in *Race and Modern Architecture* provoke questions about all aspects of the study of architectural history, this roundtable focuses on the early modern period. Why should we begin with this particular chronological cross section? Not only did the contours of the study of architectural history as we know it today first take shape in the early modern world, but the fundamental tools and principles that guide the study of architectural historians also trace their origins to this time, including the architectural treatise, the notion of the architect as an intellectual, the codification of standard building typology, and the systematic use of standard architectural drawing conventions. To understand the role of race in architecture, we need to examine how race intersected with these elemental materials, practices, and systems of belief that have governed our study of the field itself. At the same time, despite ongoing efforts to write a more global architectural history, the early modern architectural canon, firmly grounded in European theory and practice, still retains a privileged position in the study of architectural history. How do the narratives that we attach to these buildings change when we acknowledge that race lies at the core of the discipline? Here we must consider the sustained interest of early modern architects and theorists in the forms and ideology of classicism, given that the history of classicism itself, predicated upon the erection of clear distinctions between specific groups, ranks, and categories, must also be understood as a history of race. Viewed through this lens, the concerted efforts of early modern architects to revive classical models suggest profound if largely still unrecognized connections between the history of early modern architecture and racial thinking. Finally, critical race studies scholars locate the origins of our contemporary race-consciousness in the early modern period, when expanding global horizons led to new forms of contact, conflict, and exchange, and the redistribution of ethnic populations around the world.[4] What impact did this race-consciousness have on early modern thinking about the built environment? And, conversely, how did the development of the early modern built

environment inform, support, or subvert these emerging notions of race?

If at this point we have far more questions than answers, the contributions collected here will prompt us to consider many promising avenues for investigation and discussion. By introducing us to new sources and exploring new ways of thinking, these contributions register the tectonic shift currently transforming our understanding of the history of early modern architecture and, more generally, the study of architectural history itself. I would like to thank all of these scholars for their contributions, as well as all of those who have stimulated, encouraged, and supported this project from its inception.

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Notes

1. Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, eds., *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020). The essays in the volume address the intersection of architecture and architectural history with not only anti-Black racism but also anti-Asian, anti-Mexican, and other forms of racism.
2. Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, "Introduction," in Cheng et al., *Race and Modern Architecture*, 1.
3. Fernando Lara has generously offered to coordinate a roundtable to continue this discussion in a forthcoming issue of *JSAH*.
4. On the critical role of early modern natural philosophy in shaping notions of race difference, see Justin Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015). My thanks to Senam Okudzeto for this reference.

Indigenous Language and Ritual as Starting Points for Building Concepts

In this short essay I will explore the productive and theoretical approach to the conceptualization and use of space found in Dënesųłiné traditions and methods.[1] Among indigenous peoples, space and place contain cultural, spiritual, and historical connections to the land. The Dene peoples of Northern Canada, for example, believe in the continuing, essential truth of their land stories; these then reflect and animate the metaphysical aspects of nature embodied in the land. Building on the land first requires that the architect establish a relationship with that land. Consequently, choosing the site of construction is not the first step: building a relationship with the land on which the structure is to sit comes first. The Dene people retain a collective knowledge that celebrates their intrinsic relationship with the land, the Earth, and their understanding of the Earth as earth science.[2]

The world-renowned Indigenous Canadian architect Douglas Cardinal uses an indigenous methodology whenever he begins a project. He first establishes a relationship with the site, the land on which he intends to build.[3] For First Nations peoples, the land is more than a metaphor, more than a building site: it represents a complex, living partner that actively participates in a relationship with the architect and the ensuing built structure. Because all land has its own unique spirit, developing this metaphysical relationship constitutes part of the inspiration of the emerging design.

Land and Ceremony

The land acts as a mediator of space between the various worlds or perceptions of reality. The place of spirit, for example, is the unspoken place (*dene dayine taha'a*) where the spirit of the land resides.[4] It is crucial to recognize that this sacred place informs the spirit of the land. The initial approach to the spirit of the land is through ceremony that builds a dialogue between the spirit and those who wish to build on the land. For Cardinal, it is within this ontological understanding of place and sacred space that his initial design concepts emerge. It is in these first meetings with the land that he begins an early dialogue with the spirit of his site; this might be described as not unlike meeting the client for the first time. Cardinal prepares for this meeting by creating a ceremony, such as smudging, that involves sitting on and praying with the spirit of the land.[5] He asks for guidance and inspiration, according to his own Blackfoot and Cree traditions.

Language

Indigenous languages also play their part, as language defines experience, knowledge, and shared traditions. It is the vibrant vocabulary of First Nations peoples that creates cultural lexicons describing how land is perceived, cared for, and responded to. The Dënesųłiné language has within it certain syntactical structures that link the unseen worlds where "actants" are created with the reality we currently inhabit.[6] Hidden within the Dene language are morphemes, or small nuances and sounds.[7] These morphemes hold in part the sacred entry points into the spiritual world that coexists with our own perceived reality. These simple sounds are the instruments that create the portals to the spirit of the land, and so must be used if a respectful partnership with the land is to be established. These morphemes are often impossible to translate, however, which explains why speaking to the land in the language of the indigenous community is so important. Language creates the dialogue with the land; it elucidates the stories that show respect for the land, reminding us to tread lightly on our mother the Earth (*Ni'*), our Home (*Kue'*).

In the Dënesųłiné concept of built form, the process of design begins in the spiritual realm before plans and drawings

are ever begun. All lands are places inhabited by ancient ones (*tha'ydene'*), those peoples and land spirits whose spirits still animate the land on which they once lived; it is with these spirits that consultation on the use of their land first begins. This process can be initiated through ideas inspired by ceremonies that evoke land spirits. As Cree researcher and author Shawn Wilson states in his book *Research Is Ceremony*: "The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them."[8] Ceremony on the land creates a spiritual dialogue that offers agency to the land. Sitting on the land, drumming a song, or practicing a traditional pipe ceremony allows the portals within the land to open, permitting conversations with the spirits that continue to animate that land.

Such rituals, ceremonies, and practices reveal the indigenous notion of the actant: an agent that is neither human nor altogether imaginary, an actor that can bridge the worlds of seen and unseen reality and mediate the relationship between the inanimate and the animate. Jane Bennett defines the actant as "vibrant matter."[9] The concept that all matter is infused with vitality reflects what indigenous peoples have believed for millennia: all matter has agency and is a living, vital thing. Matter, then, must be accepted as having its own proprietary qualities and enjoying its own relationships with other elements of nature: in this case, the land.

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Notes

1. The Dënesųłiné peoples are a subset of the Dene Nation. They are the traditional peoples of northern Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the southern part of the Northwest Territories in Canada.

2. Amos Key Jr., Haudenosaunee faith keeper from Six Nations of the Grand River, southern Ontario, conversation with author, Feb. 2021. Key sources on indigenous architecture and research methods include Rebecca Kiddle, luugigyoo patrick stewart, and Kevin O'Brian, eds., *Our Voices: Indigeneity and Architecture* (San Francisco: ORO Editions, 2018); Margaret Kovack, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2008).

3. Douglas Cardinal, conversation with author, Jan. 2021. See also Douglas Cardinal, *Design Principles* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of History, 2016).

4. In the Dënesųłiné language *dene dayine taha'a* means "spirit plane."

5. Smudging is a ritual in which different land-based medicines (plants) are burned, and the smoke is used to clear spaces of negative energies.

6. In narrative theory, *actant* is a term from the actantial model of semiotic analysis of narratives. The term is also used in linguistics, sociology, computer programming theory, and astrology.

7. A morpheme is a morphological element considered with respect to its functional relations in a linguistic system.

8. Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 74.

9. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

Britain and the British World Context: Slavery, Race, and Empire

In recent years some progress has been made in the study of the relationship between early modern architecture and race in the United Kingdom, given that virtually no such research existed previously. Although the current Black Lives Matter movement has brought issues of racial discrimination and injustice to worldwide public attention, the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain in 2007 kick-started something of a sea change in scholarly circles, as well as in government institutions and conservation charities such as English Heritage and the National Trust. At the time this represented a significant development, for English Heritage alone manages around four hundred of England's most notable historic properties, including many eminent country houses, several with connections to the transatlantic slave trade.[1] Not so long ago such organizations seemed impervious to commemorative moments or to socially and politically motivated groundswell movements, but times have clearly changed. The sense of historic injustice is now palpable.[2]

These events have led scholars to rethink the history, meaning, and legacy of architecture in the British context vis-à-vis race. To be sure, architectural historians working on the British imperial and colonial world (beyond Britain) have studied intersections between race and the built environment for quite some time, especially following the advent of postcolonial theory in the 1970s, but with comparatively little attention paid to the metropolis (i.e., Britain).[3] Some of this work has addressed the period prior to 1800, most of it focusing on the architecture and urbanism of the Americas, especially the southern plantation colonies of British North America and the Caribbean.[4] By comparison, the Asian context during this same period has remained significantly underresearched.[5]

Perhaps counterintuitively, the one area that has generated most work on the intersections between race and architecture in the British Isles is on Ireland—an indication that perceptions of otherness did not always overlap with color.[6] Bearing in mind that race has been understood differently at different times, researchers have noted that in the early modern period the English, and later the Scots, viewed the indigenous inhabitants of Ireland as "wild and salvaige persones."[7] From the sixteenth century, this of course also reflected the difference and prejudice of Protestants versus Catholics. Such views justified the seizure of territory in Ireland and the (re)structuring of the broader Irish cultural landscape, including the built environment, the legacies of which we live with to this day. This is important, for, as scholars of Irish history have argued, the plantation of Ireland by England and Scotland represented something of a test bed for the subsequent colonization of the so-called New World, with its further

honing of the techniques of conquest, control, and discrimination against indigenous peoples.[8]

If it now seems clear that we have hardly done enough as scholars concerning the relationship between race and architecture in the early modern period, then what directions might future research take? We must consider the wider British context here because Britain dominated the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, as well as the industries that made use of chattel slave labor (such as tobacco and sugar), for more than 200 years. As the center of a global empire, Britain wielded power that extended across many parts of the non-European world for 350 years. Both of these phenomena, obviously interconnected, inevitably opened up deep and long-lasting physical and psychological fissures relating to architecture and racial-cultural difference of particular relevance for scholarship dealing with the historic built environment prior to 1800. While the majority of scholarship dealing with race and architecture addresses the period 1850–1950, the early modern period also presents a rich area for investigation.

Of the many directions that one might follow in pursuing this agenda, it seems to me that two offer particular promise. These are infrastructure and the impact of the colonial remittance economy, both topics that point to what might be called systemic or structural forms of imperialism in the British economy. For instance, when we refer to the slave trade, or exploitative colonial economies in general, we are really talking about a system of infrastructure supporting a multifaceted array of connected buildings and spaces that established, facilitated, and entrenched power relationships across vast distances and over an extended period of time. Without this infrastructure, empire and the slave trade could not have existed. Docks, warehouses, factories, forts, dungeons, barracoons, and even ships may not be the examples that come to mind when we think of "Architecture," yet these all played a critical role as conduits for the flow of people, goods, and ideas, and they organized the world around them in significant ways. Considering such spaces as part of a wider networked extension of architecture helps us better understand how, for instance, the eighteenth-century English country house is connected to the West African slave barracoon.[9] This broader perspective in turn inflects the study of architecture to advantage within larger historiographic agendas such as world, global, and oceanic history, revealing webs of participation and complicity that expose the truly systemic nature of prejudice, oppression, and conquest perpetuated by the built environment.[10]

Likewise, an understanding of how remitted wealth from colonial enterprises funded and thereby shaped both urban and rural environments can shed light on the not-so-visible links between architecture and racial discrimination and exploitation in the wider British world. Reports by English Heritage and the National Trust as well as a small number of scholarly interventions have made preliminary inroads.[11] However, such work needs to go much further before it becomes part of mainstream inquiry and pedagogy.[12] In other words, when we research and teach on "British" architecture, we need to consider not only the wider British world but also the impact of that world (and the experience thereof) on Britain itself. The interlocking nature of these phenomena can no longer be downplayed or ignored. It does not take a great deal of historical imagination to appreciate that the disparate effects of wealth generated from both visible and "invisible" sources of income played a critical role in driving Britain's rise to world power as well as in defining the British landscape in the early modern period. Yet progress in this direction remains slow: only through a proper reckoning with this history, warts and all, can we hope to reconcile the past with the present, and race with architecture.

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1. The 2007 English Heritage report dealt specifically with properties from the period 1600–1830. For this and other reports, see "The Slave Trade and Abolition," Historic England, https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/the-slave-trade-and-abolition (accessed 20 Oct. 2020). The National Trust generated a report on properties connected to slavery in 2020: Sally-Anne Huxtable, Corinne Fowler, Christo Kefalas, and Emma Slocombe, eds., *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties Now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery* (Swindon: National Trust, 2020), https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colionialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf (accessed 20 Oct. 2020). For discussion related to the English Heritage initiative, see Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann, eds., *Slavery and the British Country House* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013). See also Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann, eds., *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (Swindon: Historic England, 2016); Stephanie Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014). On Scotland, see "Slavery and the Scottish Country House," University of Edinburgh, 14 July 2017, https://www.ed.ac.uk/history-classics-archaeology/history/news-events/news-and-events-archive/news-and-events-2017/workshop-slavery-and-the-scottish-country-house (accessed 20 Oct. 2020). See also "It Wisnae Us: The Truth about Glasgow and Slavery," https://it.wisnae.us (accessed 20 Oct. 2020); and "Discussing the Role and Legacy of the British Empire in Scotland's Built Environment," Managing Imperial Legacies, https://www.managingimperiallegacies.com (accessed 28 Apr. 2021). The latter documents a research project headed by Kirsten Carter McKee, who received a grant from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (2019) to investigate hidden narratives of empire and slavery in the eighteenth-century Scottish built environment. The National Trust for Scotland has developed the "Facing Our Past" project; see Jennifer Melville, "Throwing New Light on Difficult Histories," National Trust for Scotland, 1 Sept. 2020, https://www.nts.org.uk/stories/throwing-new-light-on-difficult-histories (accessed 20 Oct. 2020). See also, on Lisa Williams's blog for Historic Environment Scotland, "Edinburgh's Part in the Slave Trade," Historic Environment Scotland, 15 Nov. 2018 https://blog.historicenvironment.scot/2018/11/edinburghs-part-slave-trade (accessed 20 Oct. 2020).

2. It is worth recalling that prior to the emergence of BLM in Britain, the smaller but no less prominent (and controversial) "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign, focusing on the divisive legacy of the South African imperialist Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902), was mounted at Oxford University. The struggle to remove a statue of Rhodes from a prominent collegiate building inspired other similar campaigns to remove statues linked to the slave trade, including statues of Edward Colston in Bristol, Robert Milligan in London, and Viscount Melville (Henry Dundas) in Edinburgh. On the controversial decision to remove David Hume's name from a prominent building at the University of Edinburgh, see Kenan Malik, "David Hume Was a Complex Man. Erasing His Name Is Too Simplistic a Gesture," *Guardian*, 20 Sept. 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/20/david-hume-was-a-complex-man-erasing-his-name-is-too-simplistic-a-gesture (accessed 20 Oct. 2020).

3. See G. A. Bremner, "The Metropolis: Imperial Buildings and Landscapes in Britain," in *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire*, ed. G. A. Bremner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 125–58. On statuary in the urban environment, see Madge Dresser, "Set in Stone? Statues and Slavery in London," *History Workshop Journal* 64, no. 1 (2007), 133–67; Christine Stevenson, "Making Empire Visible at the Second Royal Exchange, London," in *Court, Country, City: British Art and Architecture, 1660–1735*, ed. Mark Hallett, Nigel Llewellyn, and Martin Myrone (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016), 51–72.

4. See in particular Louis P. Nelson, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016); as well as Daniel Maudlin and Bernard L. Herman, eds., *Building the British Atlantic World: Spaces, Places, and Material Culture, 1600–1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), in particular the section titled "Commerce, Traffic, and Trade," 165–228. See also Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg, eds., *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscape of North American Slavery* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010). See the classic study by Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Places* 2, no. 2 (1984), 59–72. See also Edward A. Chappell, "Housing Slavery," in *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, ed. Cary Carson and Carl R. Lounsbury (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2013), 156–78; Harold Kalman and Louis P. Nelson, "British North America and the West Indies," in Bremner, *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire*, esp. 247–58.

5. Some progress was made recently by the Leverhulme Trust–funded project The East India Company at Home, 1757–1857 (2011–14), hosted by the Department of History at the University of Warwick and University College London. See "East India Company at Home, 1757–1857," https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/home (accessed 20 Oct. 2020); G. A. Bremner and Daniel Maudlin, *Inner Empire: Architecture and Imperialism in the British Isles, 1560–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming). For the broader urban perspective in India, see Partha Mitter, "The Early British Port Cities of India: Their Planning and Architecture Circa 1640–1757," *JSAH* 45, no. 2 (June 1986), 95–114. See also Philip Davies, *Splendours of the Raj* (London: Penguin, 1987), 17–31; Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 8–23.

6. For instance, see Steve Garner, "Ireland: From Racism without 'Race' to Racism without Racists," *Radical History Review* 104 (2009), 41–56; Colin Kidd, "Race, Empire and the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Nationhood," *Historical Journal* 46, no. 4 (2003), 873–92.

7. Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); John Patrick Montaño, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. chap. 5. On the architectural implications of this phenomenon, and for further references, see G. A. Bremner, "Stones of Empire: Monuments, Memorials, and Manifest Authority," in Bremner, *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire*, esp. 89–93.

8. Jane H. Ohlmeyer, "A Laboratory for Empire? Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26–60.

9. On barracoons, see Louis P. Nelson, "Architectures of West African Enslavement," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 21, no. 1 (2014), 88–125. On West African slave forts, see Emily Mann, "Viewed from a Distance: Eighteenth-Century Images of Fortifications on the Coast of West Africa," in *Shadows of Empire in West Africa: New Perspectives on European Fortifications*, ed. John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu and Victoria Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 107–36. For further discussion of this infrastructural perspective in a slightly later period (1820s–70s), see G. A. Bremner, "Tides That Bind: Waterborne Trade and the Infrastructure Networks of Jardine, Matheson & Co.," *Perspecta* 52 (2019), 31–47.

10. Apart from Louis Nelson's scholarship, see also Emily Mann, "To Build and Fortify: Defensive Architecture in the Early Atlantic Colonies," in Maudlin and Herman, *Building the British Atlantic World*, 31–52; Emily Mann, "Building," in *The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History, c. 1550–1750*, ed. William A. Pettigrew and David Veevers (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 210–31.

11. For a classic study, see James Walvin, "The Colonial Origins of English Wealth: The Harewoods of Yorkshire," *Journal of Caribbean History* 39, no. 1 (2005), 38–53.

12. For instance, consider the controversy generated by the National Trust of England's project Colonial Countryside: National Trust Houses Reinterpreted. See Jamie Doward, "I've Been Unfairly Targeted, Says Academic at Heart of National Trust 'Woke' Row," *Guardian*, 20 Dec. 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/dec/20/ive-been-unfairly-targeted-says-academic-at-heart-of-national-trust-woke-row (accessed 21 Dec. 2020).

The Pain of Assimilation and the Punishment of the Urban Griot

The colonial archive has a way of showcasing ordeals of racial repression for a brief moment and then leaving us with little information on how these startling episodes concluded. Instances of racial violence and policing often surface in colonial ledgers, but as a result of poor record keeping the evidence often disappears even as we yearn to know more. One example of this tendency lies in the law issued against griots, or African oral chroniclers, in the early nineteenth-century in Saint-Louis, Senegal (Figure 1).[1] Like many archival fragments detailing racialized punishment, this mandate provokes far more questions than it answers.

In 1803, the French colonial government ratified a new law in an attempt to purge African griots from the streets of Saint-Louis. Dated 8 Fructidor, 11th Year of the Republic, the new law began by lodging a complaint: "The large number of griots from the Grand Terre gathered at the moment in Saint-Louis will only disturb the public tranquility."[2] Referring to griots as if they were pests, it continued: "Their arrival frequently during the night" is signaled "by the noise of their drums and their singing."[3] The law sought to bring an end to this disturbance by evicting from Saint-Louis all of the griots from the Grand Terre, or the African mainland. Any griots who refused to depart faced immediate reprisal; according to the decree, state officials would arrest them, have them caned, and expel them from the city for their
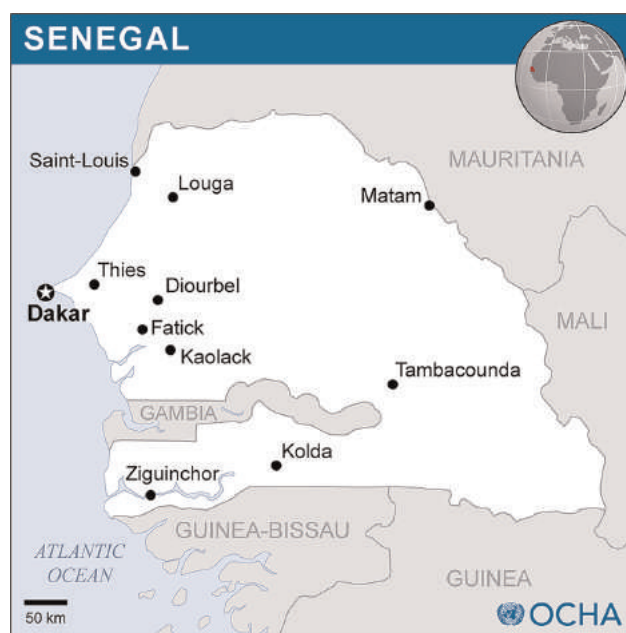
SENEGAL

Figure 1 Map of modern Senegal showing Saint-Louis on the northern coast ("Senegal: Location Map," ReliefWeb, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 12 Aug. 2011 https://reliefweb.int/map/senegal/senegal-location-map-2011).

infractions. Also, if any griots managed to enter Saint-Louis without explicit permission from the mayor, they would be put into prison and "immediately sold [into slavery] at the profit of the republic."[4] With these words, the colonial government declared that in this urban setting, where the republic met the Grand Terre, those griots who objected to French rules could expect not only the blow of the baton and the sting of public humiliation but also imprisonment and sale into slavery.[5] A nineteenth-century plan of Saint-Louis depicts the city as the Europeanized enclave that the French wished to create, with rectangular blocks, gardens, and an orderly fort distinguishing the island from the wooded mainland and the African Village de Guett-ndar (Figure 2).

Griots are storytellers.[6] The ancestors of today's griots contributed to the oral transmission of cultural knowledge across West Africa. Throughout the region, griots continue to convey the histories of diverse peoples and sometimes council leaders using song, dance, poetry, and other forms of performance. Prior to the colonization of Senegambia, the Wolof nobility acted as patrons for griots, and their audiences included both the elite and the public at large. Griots serve a critical function as repositories of cultural knowledge. Without them, a people might forget their past, their triumphs, their origins, and their historical struggles.[7] In the absence of griots, a people might fall victim to assimilation into another cultural world entirely.[8]

That is exactly why the French sought to drive griots out of Saint-Louis. French authorities registered the griot law according to the new republican calendar, devised in 1793 to render the eleventh day of each month (in this case, Fructidor) the first day of a ten-day cycle, replacing the weeks of the Gregorian calendar.[9] In France, the republican calendar symbolized a break from the past and the beginning of a new era.[10] But if the republican calendar also symbolized something similar in Senegal, it assumed a different meaning in a place where the French saw themselves not as aggrieved citizens but as white colonizers controlling Black natives. The policing of griots coincided with the introduction of new legal restrictions in Saint-Louis following the reinstatement of French rule after a period of British control (1758–79).[11] These colonial laws required the inhabitants of Saint-Louis to adapt to French civic ideals, which specifically excluded the oral and lyrical transmission of African knowledge in public. Compliance was expected—or else.[12]

Historians of colonial Senegal have argued that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries signaled a time of fluidity and creolization in Saint-Louis, when French colonizers had no choice but to forge close relationships with African peoples. Contacts with the local populace assisted the French in their trading efforts while helping them survive in an unfamiliar place and simultaneously generating an Afro-European culture of mixture and exchange. In the late eighteenth century, shared cultural affinities enabled some elite Senegalese to obtain limited rights, and French citizenship thereafter. But what if another kind of culture took hold at the same time? What if the same society that incubated Afro-European exchange also enforced a highly restrictive approach to Blackness?[13]

The law against griots proved that a Europeanized space where racial fluidity reigned could still restrict those individuals who failed to obey European rules. The selective embrace of some Black peoples by the French did not prevent the active disciplining of others. French officials who at least superficially supported the idea of a representative republic that included some African peoples still insisted that Blackness had to be policed if an African polity were to become a part of the French nation. In a colony belonging to a country that had long viewed itself as race-blind, the very moment when some Black inhabitants of Saint-Louis gained greater rights was a time when the colonial state moved to punish persons who did not conform.[14] Meanwhile, as the French nation went to great lengths to assimilate some Africans, it also cast others out in the most identitarian of terms. Griots always appeared in official records as unnamed figures, identified only as African, *noir*, or even "négre."[15]

Such racial politics prefigured the social dynamics of the next century.[16] Today, we do not know how many griots suffered because of the 1803 law. What we do know is that for

Figure 2 Jean Baptiste Poirson, *Plan particulier de l'île St. Louis de ses environs*, 36 × 24 centimeters, nineteenth century (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris).
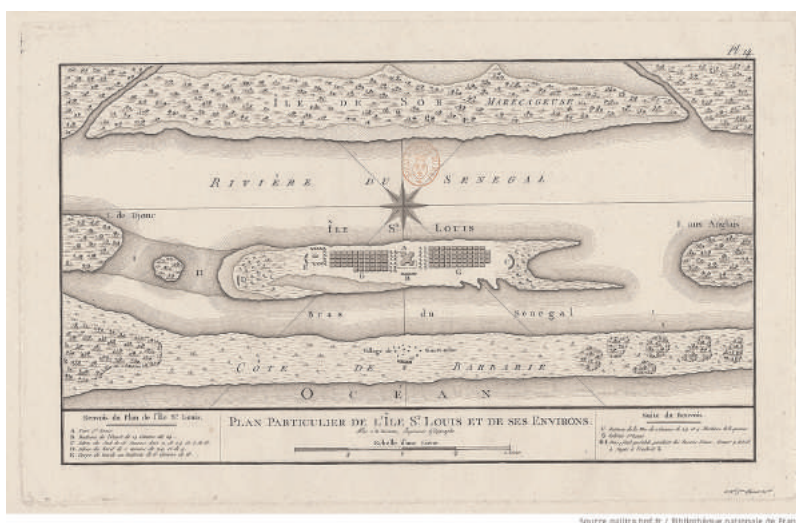
the griots who were suddenly forbidden from holding legal residence in Saint-Louis, the decree ushered in yet another era of cultural loss. If we are truly committed to engaging the diverse ways that colonialism hurt Black individuals in Africa and around the world, then we need to consider the restrictions imposed on the griots of Saint-Louis. In the process, we can begin to better understand the racially inflected gaps and questions that the colonial archive has left behind.

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Notes

1. Governor François Blanchot de Verly et al., Law Concerning Griots, 1803, Laws and Decrees, Collection on the History of Senegal, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar.

2. "Le grand nombre de griots de la grande terre dans ce moment à l'Île St. Louis ne pouverant que troubler la tranquillité publique." Blanchot et al.

3. "Cet arrive fréquent pendant la nuit par le bruit de leur tambours et les chants." Blanchot et al.

4. "Vendu de suite au profit de la république." Blanchot et al.

5. Blanchot et al. For more information on the slave trade in Senegambia, see Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

6. Cornelia Panzacchi, "The Livelihoods of Traditional Griots in Modern Senegal," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 64, no. 2 (1994), 190–91.

7. Panzacchi, 190–91.

8. Panzacchi, 192.

9. Eviatar Zerubavel, "The French Republican Calendar: A Case Study in the Sociology of Time," *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 6 (Dec. 1977), 870.

10. Zerubavel, 871–72.

11. Mark Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island: The Architecture and Material Culture of Gorée, Sénégal, 1758–1837* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 42.

12. Blanchot et al., Law Concerning Griots, 1803; Lorelle Semley, *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 90–91.

13. See Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); John D. Hargreaves, "Assimilation in Eighteenth-Century Senegal," *Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (1965), 177–84; Mark Hinchman, "House and Household on Gorée, Senegal, 1758–1837," *JSAH* 65, no. 2 (June 2006), 166–87; Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*; Peter Mark, *"Portuguese" Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Semley, *To Be Free and French*.

14. Semley, 91–92.

15. Blanchot et al., Law Concerning Griots, 1803; Governor François Blanchot de Verly et al., Law Concerning Griots, 1793, Laws and Decrees, Collection on the History of Senegal, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar; Governor François Blanchot de Verly et al., Law Concerning Griots, 1795, Laws and Decrees, Collection on the History of Senegal, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar.

16. Ambe J. Njoh, *Planning Power: Town Planning and Social Control in Colonial Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Free Women of Color and Architecture in Antebellum New Orleans

In her 1837 book *Society in America*, the British social theorist Harriet Martineau reflected on New Orleans and remarked in particular on the housing and social practices of free women of color in that city. Martineau censured the perceived licentiousness of these women, noting their willingness to be kept "in one of those pretty and peculiar houses, whole rows of which may be seen in the Ramparts."[1] Recent scholarship exposes the notion of *plaçage*—interracial relationships under formal, contractual arrangements—as an ahistorical myth that radically simplifies relationships across the color line in antebellum New Orleans.[2] These so-called relationships also ignore the agency of free women of color to acquire property in antebellum New Orleans. In this brief essay I will explore how these women used their rights as property holders to achieve economic enfranchisement, secure their status as family matriarchs, and shape the urban built environment. Through independent real estate ownership and development, free women of color established key economic foundations in New Orleans, achieving both a

Figure 3 Locations of the properties in the French Quarter, New Orleans, acquired by Louison Cheval from 1781 through 1802 (stars); location of the property in the midst of Cheval's Bourbon Street holdings owned by her daughter Eulalie Mazange (dot) (Google My Maps, map data © 2021 Google).

Figure 4 Creole cottage with Greek revival details, built by Norbert Soulié, 509–511 Burgundy Street, New Orleans, 1831 (photo by Tara A. Dudley).

means of self-sufficiency and a source of intergenerational wealth.

During the Spanish colonial period (1762–1802), free women of color led mixed-race families in the city. One of these matriarchs was Louison Cheval, born around 1754 to an enslaved woman, Javotte, and a French father, François Cheval.[3] François Cheval purchased his daughter in 1774 and emancipated her around 1777.[4] Shortly after, Louison, who already had two children, Henriette and Eulalie, began a twenty-five-year relationship with Frenchman Jean Charles Vivant.[5] As a free woman, Louison was able to enjoy the rights and privileges of property ownership. She acquired lots on Bienville Street and Dumaine Street in the French Quarter in 1781. Over the next two decades, Louison purchased several additional properties. In 1802, she inherited property
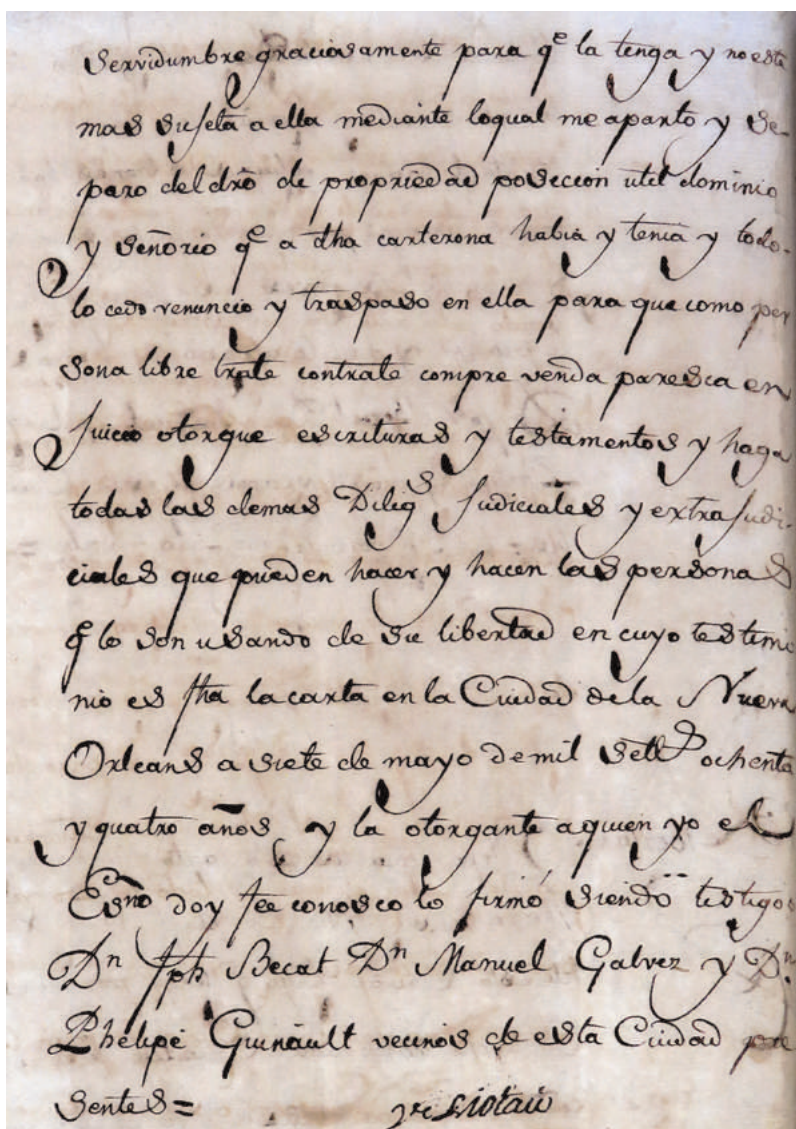
on Burgundy Street from Marie Catherine Theodore Triére (Figure 3).[6]

Louison's children and their offspring benefited from her real estate ventures. In 1818, Louison sold the Burgundy Street property to another daughter, Constance.[7] Since Constance had previously acquired an adjacent lot from a free woman of color, Marie Louise Triére, she was able to increase the size of her holdings by 30 percent with her mother's contribution.[8] Constance then added to her property's value with the construction of a Creole cottage built by her nephew Norbert Soulié, her sister Eulalie's son, in 1830 (Figure 4).

Eulalie, Louison's oldest daughter, also had a long-lasting legacy with the city's built environment, as did her children. Marie Liotau freed eleven-year-old Eulalie in 1784, ten years

Figure 5 Detail from the act of emancipation for Louison Cheval's eleven-year-old daughter Eulalie, 1784, noting the legal rights she would have as a free woman of color, including the right to own property and the ability to "treat, contract, buy a fair sale in court, grant deeds and wills" and otherwise engage in legal activities (F. Rodriguez, notary, May 7, 1784; courtesy of Hon. Chelsey Richard Napoleon, Clerk of Civil District Court, Parish of Orleans).

after she had manumitted her mother (Figure 5). In the late 1780s, Eulalie began a twenty-year relationship with Frenchman Jean Soulié.[9] Eulalie's progressive acquisition of property established a tradition that secured her family's future: the eight Soulié children who lived to adulthood continued to own and manage numerous properties in New Orleans until well after the Civil War.

Eulalie acquired her first recorded property, at present-day 819 Bourbon Street, in 1803 (see Figure 3). In 1815, she inherited four lots on Exchange Place and Chartres Street at the upriver boundary of the French Quarter from the daughter of her former enslavers (Figure 6).[10] At her death in 1825, the Soulié children inherited their mother's real estate holdings, but they decided to sell the properties in 1828.[11] The proceeds provided an income for the oldest daughter, also named Eulalie, as well as her sisters, Louise, Celeste, and Coralie.[12] The mademoiselles Soulié, who never married,

moved to France; by November 1832 they were living in Paris. By the 1840s, when the younger Soulié sisters had come of age, their names began to appear in New Orleans property transactions. Collectively, the Soulié sisters acquired and sold at least ten properties from 1840 to 1844 alone, renting out a number of them to generate income. This income stream enabled them not only to provide for themselves but also to contribute, through property ownership and architectural patronage, to the creation of New Orleans' built environment.

As this brief investigation suggests, free Black women were largely self-motivated to acquire property in eighteenth-century New Orleans, and they used this property to generate a primary means of revenue. Land and buildings owned by "single" Black or mixed-race mothers in turn provided a solid architectural legacy for free families of color. Despite insinuations of extramarital, interracial relationships did not enable
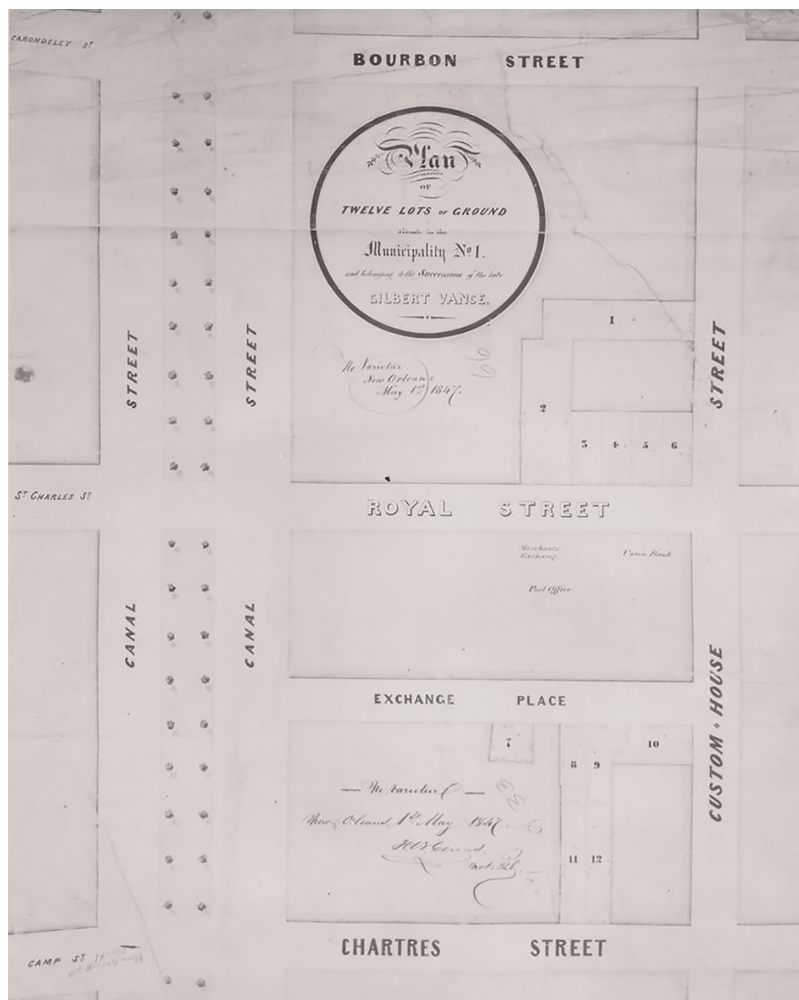
Figure 6 Properties on Exchange Place and Chartres Street, New Orleans, inherited by Eulalie Mazange in 1815; the locations (lot nos. 8–10) were illustrated when they were sold by the estate of the subsequent owner (H. B. Cenas, *Plan of Twelve Lots of Ground Situated in the Municipality No. 1, and Belonging to the Succession of the late Gilbert Vance*, 1847; courtesy of Hon. Chelsey Richard Napoleon, Clerk of Civil District Court, Parish of Orleans).

the Soulié matriarchs to embark upon real estate activities; on the contrary, both Louison Cheval and her daughter Eulalie made strategic, independent property acquisitions to create nest eggs for their children, and particularly for the female members of the family. Thanks to their ownership of more properties than their parents had owned, and the incomes these properties generated, the Soulié sisters achieved remarkable self-sufficiency despite the many limitations imposed on Black women at the time. Through their own agency, Louison Cheval and her female descendants—as well as countless other free women of color in antebellum New Orleans—endowed their families with property, making them stakeholders for future generations.

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Notes

1. Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, vol. 2 (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1842), 80.

2. See Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Jennifer Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

3. François Cheval was the descendant of French settlers who arrived in the German Coast (Côte des Allemands) in the late eighteenth century. Named after the German population that first settled there in 1721, the area included present-day St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, and St. James Parishes.

4. See notations in "Rillieux Ancestry–Soulié Family," Box 16, Judith Longest Bethea Papers, Manuscript Collection, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library.

5. Henriette and Eulalie were born in 1772 and 1773, respectively. Jean Charles Vivant was François Cheval's business partner. Together, Louison and Charles had nine children over the next twenty-five years.

6. Marie Catherine Theodore Triére, last will and testament, Narcisse Broutin, notary, 8 May 1802, vol. 4, folio 209-11, Office of the Clerk of Civil District Court, Parish of Orleans, Notarial Archives Research Center, New Orleans.

7. Constance, born in 1789, was the sixth child of Louison Cheval and Jean Charles Vivant.

8. Marie Louise Triére was formerly enslaved by Marie Catherine Triére, who bequeathed one-quarter of a block on Bourbon Street each to Marie Louise and Louison Cheval. Marie Louise later sold her portion to Louison's daughter Constance. Research regarding possible family connections between Louison Cheval and Marie Louise Triére is ongoing.

9. Soulié, a native of Roquecourbe, France, was a business associate of Eulalie's "stepfather," Jean Charles Vivant.

10. Marie Louise Liotau, will, 6 Sept. 1815, Michel deArmas notary, Wills and Probate Records, Louisiana, 1756–1984, online database, Ancestry.com Operations, 2015).

11. Process verbal of sale, 23 May 1828, Eulalie Mazange, Court of Probates (Orleans Parish), Louisiana, General Index of All Successions, 1805–1846, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; Chain of title, 819 Bourbon Street, Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey, Historic New Orleans Collection, https://www.hnoc.org/vcs/property_info.php?lot=18795 (accessed 4 Apr. 2021).

12. Process verbal of sale; Chain of title. Eulalie Mazange's estate sale also included the four properties that she had inherited from Marie Louise Liotau, the daughter of her and her mother's former enslavers. The May 1828 sale carried the stipulation that Eulalie Soulié and her sisters be permitted to live rent free in the Bourbon Street house, only paying property taxes, for one year following the transaction. The purchaser appears to have defaulted on his purchase, as the chain of title indicates that daughter Eulalie obtained the property from the estate in June 1828. Eulalie and Norbert later transferred the property between one another in April 1829 and April 1833, with Eulalie finally selling to Azelie Lombard in July 1833.

Architecture, Race, and Labor in the Early Modern Spanish World

During a 2019 visit to the Dominican Republic, I was eager to see firsthand the sixteenth-century Cathedral of Santo Domingo, a monument often characterized as a late Gothic building. I met with Esteban Prieto, director of the cathedral works and its museum, who shared with me his knowledge about the masons who migrated from the city of Burgos in northern Castile to work on the building, and who also showed me some of the identifying marks they left behind. The cathedral features elaborate stone carving of a very high quality. One could imagine that many parts were shipped from Spain, just as Erwin Walter Palm noted was the case for the cathedral's bricks and roof tiles in his classic 1955 study of architecture on the island of Hispaniola.[1] Yet, as Prieto assured me, the cathedral stone derived from a local quarry, north of Santo Domingo. Thinking about the extraction of this material turned my attention away from carving and toward quarrying, as work carried out primarily by native Caribbean people, but also by African slaves. Unlike the labor of European-born masons, the labor of these Black and indigenous workers is not a part of the surviving archival record.[2]

The application of the stylistic label "late Gothic" to the Cathedral of Santo Domingo can help a historian understand where the building fits in the chronology of European sixteenth-century architecture, but the use of this term is also reductive, for while it foregrounds certain design features, it also draws our attention away from the colonial context in which this building emerged, and thus elides the forces of power and domination that made its erection possible.[3] Begun in 1512, the Cathedral of Santo Domingo represented the expansion of early imperial ambitions in the Americas, accompanied by the foundation of nearly two hundred cities or towns by 1600. During this same time, across the Atlantic Ocean, the Spanish Habsburg king Philip II inaugurated the transformation of Madrid into a cosmopolitan capital while also sponsoring coastal fortifications and public buildings from Antwerp to Naples, and from Sicily to the Canary Islands. While scholars have investigated many of these monuments in detail, analysis of the ways in which race intersected with these construction projects has been almost nonexistent.

For historians exploring the matter of race in premodern architectural history, attention to labor offers a promising way forward. Recent innovative studies of Spanish colonial architecture highlight key indigenous contributions to the built environment. In one of the most significant of these interventions, Susan Webster challenges the notion of anonymous labor often proposed by twentieth-century scholars to explain the construction histories of buildings lacking documentary evidence.[4] For instance, in her work on seventeenth-century Quito, Webster conducted an archival investigation that revealed the names of skilled indigenous designers and builders involved in early modern construction projects, thus giving these previously obscure figures new agency. In Quito as in Santo Domingo, indigenous builders sometimes worked alongside African slaves. In colonial Mexico, day labor with or without wages was also carried out by slaves brought from across the Pacific Ocean on the Manila Galleon prior to the abolition of chattel slavery from Asia in 1672.[5] Manumission did not benefit enslaved Africans in Mexico in the 1670s, or African slaves in Spain. At the outset of the seventeenth century, Seville's population of Africans, enslaved and freed, stood among the largest of all Spanish cities, owing in large part to Seville's bustling port.[6]

Although less studied, a number of Africans also lived at the epicenter of Spanish imperial power, in the court city of Madrid. Not only are the biographies of key architects in Habsburg Madrid often sketchy, but we know even less about the men and women who actually toiled at construction sites. In my research on Madrid, I rely on building documents that often refer to unnamed workers. For instance, abundant documentation survives for the Cárcel de Corte, a monumental courthouse erected in the city center from 1629 to 1640. In premodern spreadsheets, accountants recorded building expenses for brick, stone, and slate, as well as expenditures for paper, artworks, and salaried staff. Supporting documents are sometimes extremely precise. For example, during the week of 16–21 January 1640, the paymaster Luis Pablo identified three individuals who partially paved a building courtyard: Sebastián de Yturbe, Juan de Ledesma, and "the peon," an unnamed man employed for four days at the rate of five reals per day.[7] This reference to "the peon" illustrates a silence that is familiar to architectural historians who work on premodern building sites and their archives. And yet, if we want to

acknowledge that race matters, we must pause to ask questions about this unnamed individual laboring in a multiracial city. The document informs us that on any given day "the peon" earned half, if not less than half, the wages earned by Yturbe and Ledesma, and less than twice the cost of a bucket recorded by the accountant. Might this so-called peon be an African slave, loaned out by his master? Or was he a destitute Castilian or perhaps a Morisco, which is to say one of the many converts from Islam and their descendants who worked on construction crews across Spain? We may not be able to answer these questions, but when we ask them, rather than making assumptions about race, we can begin to reimagine the contours of this early modern society, and of its building trade in particular.

Whether in a quarry north of Santo Domingo or on work crews in Cádiz or Palermo, race shaped the built environment of the Spanish Empire. As a scholar, one of my primary objectives has been to write stories about the early modern Spanish world that were absent in my own education, and that I hope will be especially relevant to other Latinos in the United States. Black Lives Matter has made me stop and think about those historical lives that I might have overlooked or otherwise failed to acknowledge in my own scholarly investigations. In our study of the built environment across the globe, the task ahead requires that we make a concerted and deliberate effort to write race back into architectural history.

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Notes

1. Erwin Walter Palm, *Los monumentos arquitectónicos de la Española* (Trujillo: Universidad de Santo Domingo, 1955), 90.

2. Virginia Flores Sasso, "La obra de fábrica," in *La Catedral de Santo Domingo*, ed. José Chez Checo (Santo Domingo: Arzobispado de Santo Domingo, 2011), 211–49. Flores Sasso notes that no record of indigenous labor appears in surviving documents for the cathedral, although such labor is documented for other building sites in Santo Domingo. She suggests nonetheless that indigenous people as well as African slaves carried out "las labores más duras de la construcción" at the cathedral (241).

3. On the violence associated with art making and building under colonialism, see Ananda Cohen-Aponte, "Decolonizing the Global Renaissance: A View from the Andes," in *The Globalization of Renaissance Art*, ed. Daniel Savoy (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 67–94.

4. Susan Verdi Webster, "Masters of the Trade: Native Artisans, Guilds, and the Construction of Colonial Quito," *JSAH* 68, no. 1 (Mar. 2009), 10–29; Susan V. Webster, *Quito, ciudad de maestros: Arquitectos, edificios, y urbanismo en el largo siglo XVII* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2012).

5. Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

6. Alfonso Franco Silva, *La esclavitud en Sevilla y su tierra a fines de la Edad Media* (Seville: Diputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1979).

7. Document dated 21 January 1640, file 3-163-4, Archivo de la Secretaría, Archivo de Villa de Madrid.

Race, Beauty, and Religious Architecture

The construction of race and architecture is a broad topic, but by narrowing it down to a single epoch we may draw tighter parameters around our discussion. Given current conditions in the United States, as we attempt to confront the uncomfortable questions surrounding the role of race in shaping our society, perhaps we can reflect upon a more distant history: What can the history of the world between 1400 and 1800 teach us about our contemporary notions of race and architecture, and the influence of both these categories at the crossroads where we find ourselves today? Does architecture, and especially religious architecture, reflect racial constructs of beauty? Who perpetuates and teaches what is valued in architecture?

As Duncan G. Stroik states in his book *The Church Building as a Sacred Place*: "The church is sacred—it is a holy place in which we come in contact with the divine."[1] Eighty years ago, African American author Richard Wright wrote the following in his effort to define the meaning and value that African American church buildings have for Black people: "For it is only when we are within the walls of our churches that we are wholly ourselves, that we keep alive a sense of our personalities in relation to the total world in which we live, that we maintain a quiet and constant communion with all that is deepest in us."[2] An essential building type that links the early modern world with the present is the church.

In general, the construction of a house of worship offers an opportunity to give ideals of religious beauty architectural form. The Catholic faith promoted such notions of architectural beauty with its emphasis on ritualistic order and the creation of built spaces to support and enhance the experience of the worshipper. Monumental religious buildings in Europe served to illustrate and embody the ideas and power of the church. A house of worship can provide a universal interpretation of basic human qualities that are common to all, regardless of culture. It is because of culture and its influence on religious aesthetics, however, that we must consider the question of religious beauty more carefully.

Who perpetuates, constructs, and controls architecture's value? We must inquire into what subjects are taught in architecture schools, and who is doing the teaching. The traditional Eurocentric emphasis of the survey of architectural history allows little room for the recognition of people of color across the world. Further, it is critical that we consider who is teaching the survey courses, because that person usually retells a narrative that begins in the early modern period—the conventional sequence of Renaissance, neoclassical, and Gothic Revival architectural traditions, and how much the profession owes to figures such as Vitruvius, Francesco Borromini, and Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand. Generally speaking, the teachers of architectural

history are white men who present a texture of historical knowledge that appears to suggest that architecture of any kind must be born in and judged from a Eurocentric position. This narrow approach to teaching architectural history has not changed radically since the origins of the professional architectural educational system. Houses of worship feature prominently in the narratives constructed by architectural historians: they use these buildings to highlight every ripple of time, discussing the development of styles, or the retreading of stylistic revivals, through the historical lens of whiteness. Such an approach is problematic for many reasons, including the fact that it leaves little room for broader discussion of the value of nonwhite church buildings for African Americans of the nineteenth century.

What does any of this have to do with the religious architecture of the early modern period and its racial influence today? I would argue that religious architecture is singularly the most powerful form of built human expression. European religious buildings constructed from 1400 to 1800 reflected the power of God on earth as upheld by powerful ecclesiastical institutions. The specific aesthetics of these monuments determined their architecture, as well as the forms of their statues, paintings, and stained glass windows exalting God, Christ, and the saints. These artistic expressions, applied to the walls, ceiling, and floors of buildings, displayed images of white people. Such imagery, as an unspoken and pervasive presence in early modern religious architecture, reinforced the belief that through truth, goodness, and beauty, the three transcendentals, we can create an architectural link with God. If God, or an almighty spirit or being, is culturally inclusive, students of architectural history have long connected the three transcendentals to Eurocentric ideals embedded in the built forms designed by white men of the past. We still face this problem today in architectural history, where the idea of culturally influenced architectural religious beauty is not taught inclusively. A typical architectural history survey course, at least as taught in most U.S. architecture schools, upholds such an approach to the study of religious buildings by emphasizing that religious buildings are sacred and connected to God, and that these designs represent transcendent embodiments of physical beauty. It is all too easy to lead students to the conclusion that the early modern European model is the universal ideal.

My research into early African American church buildings constructed from 1800 to around 1920 suggests that for these church congregations, no such architectural notion of beauty existed. These buildings were constructed by people newly freed from institutional slavery in the United States. The concept of "Black space" acquired special significance and relevance for African Americans because the space enclosed by the walls of these early churches was theirs: it was space

that they could own, control, and protect. The users of these buildings did not need a Eurocentric yardstick to define the value or quality of their churches' religious beauty, nor did the buildings need to refer to venerated architectural styles to achieve relevance and substance. Unfortunately, the architecture of such buildings is not taught or discussed in any architectural school's survey course.

It must be acknowledged that until the historical narrative taught in our schools of architecture becomes more inclusive of all cultures, the racial construct underscoring who and what is valued will continue to perpetuate the belief that truth, goodness, and beauty can be perceived only through the lens of whiteness.

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Notes

1. Duncan G. Stroik, *The Church Building as a Sacred Place: Beauty, Transcendence, and the Eternal* (Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 2012), 13.
2. Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Viking Press, 1941), 130–31.

Unlearning Palermo's Architectural History

In early modern Palermo, the construction of racial difference took the form of an urban performance. During the annual Feast of the Assumption, the final leg of a footrace of seminude Black slaves—described by one chronicler as a "run of demons"—tore through the city's streets.[1] Another public festival featured a frenzied dance of "slaves" set to so-called Moorish music, in which performers—their hands, arms, and faces coated with a paste of soot and oil—smeared onlookers with the taint of blackness, who then rushed to wash it from their skin.[2] The visibility of slaves in sixteenth-century Sicily fueled these anxieties about racial contamination. Enslaved Africans trafficked by Iberian traders on a trans-Saharan route to Tripoli were sold at auction in Palermo alongside Muslim captives, the currency of a corsair economy.[3] Global devotional cults of Afro-Sicilian Black saints grew out of the same networks: Antonio, a Muslim of sub-Saharan African heritage who was born in Libya, arrived in Sicily as a slave, while the better-known Benedict was born in Palermo to Christians from sub-Saharan Africa, his mother free and his father enslaved.[4]

If the ideologies of race shaped the cultural dynamics of early modern Sicily, in modernity the island itself was racialized. The figuration of the Italian South as barbaric, primitive, and criminally deviant legitimated the physical and epistemic violence of the Risorgimento, the unification of the Italian nation-state. In the nineteenth-century imaginary, the South not only lay beyond the reach of civilization—it *was*

Africa.[5] Sicily bore the brunt of this nationalist fever. Reviews of the Esposizione Nazionale in Palermo (1891–92) likened an ethnographic exhibition of objects from rural Sicily to an "Abyssinian Village" in a pavilion devoted to the Italian colony of Eritrea that featured Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Sudanese families living among thatched huts.[6] Scholarship on Italian paradigms of postcoloniality suggests that Italy's colonial ambitions in Africa developed simultaneously with the subalternity of the modern South, theorized as a case of "internal colonialism."[7] As Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo observe, both represented an "affirmation of hegemonic whiteness."[8]

Modern arguments for the South's "Africanness" scapegoat the region's colonization in the early modern period.[9] The positivist Alfredo Niceforo remarked in 1898 that "Sicily, above all in its cities, still appears to be an appendage of Spain," virtually unchanged from "the time of Philip II." Niceforo attributed the island's volatility to the Spanishness (*spagnolismo*) of the Sicilian character. During the revolts of the Risorgimento, he wrote, people in cities like Palermo "abandoned themselves to savage scenes . . . that an African tribe would hardly have committed."[10] He later argued that Southerners belonged to a "Mediterranean race" that traced its origins to Africa, and were therefore more closely related to Spaniards than to Northern Italians.[11] Grappling with this historiographical legacy is critical to unlearning the architectural history of Sicily during the Spanish period—one of the many casualties of the region's marginalization. In other words, we must acknowledge that the island's alterity is a racial alterity, in ways both explicit and implicit.

For architectural historians studying early modern Palermo, race remains the elephant in the room. Reconstructing the activity of enslaved laborers in Palermo's building sites represents a productive first step toward recentering race in our narrative of the city's architecture.[12] In 1536, for example, Muslim slaves reopened failing drainage trenches, while a 1565 census of male slaves, categorized by skin color, identified laborers to reinforce city walls.[13] So too might we rethink the embeddedness of race in monuments that instrumentalized religious identity for political gain. As Daniel Nemser argues, early modern conceptions of race and religion were in fact "mutually constitutive."[14] For instance, we might consider representations of the turbaned "Turk" or "Moor" on the Porta Nuova (1570–1668) and the Porta dei Greci (begun 1555) against Iberian ideologies of *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity).[15] The memory of the Islamic past—a past that Sicily shared—fed the period preoccupation with Spain's own "blackness" and "Moorishness."[16] In Palermo, celebrations of Ottoman defeats in North Africa recalled the Norman conquest of the island, eulogized in local chronicles as the triumph of Christianity over the "infidels." In a poetic nod to these entanglements, in 1556 a converted "Moor"

carried two iron doors from a nearby bastion to be installed at the Porta dei Greci. The doors, since lost, were seized by Spanish troops from one of the gates of Mahdia, the Tunisian city known in early modernity as "Africa" (Figure 7).[17]

But recentering race in Palermo's history also demands that we attend to the less obvious ways in which racial thinking conditions us to see the city's built environment. At issue is Palermo's place in an early modern canon that has, from the very start, presupposed the devaluation of the extra-European and nonwhite subject. Deconstructing that canon requires us to interrogate interpretive models that we rarely describe in terms of race.[18] For example, a reevaluation of our ingrained expectations of early modern stylistic development yields valuable new insights. Scholarship on sixteenth-century Palermo is dogged by the traditional argument that the city's Renaissance-era taste for the Gothic reflects a damning delay (*ritardo*) in the reception of classical vocabularies.[19] This regressive style was transgressive—a threat to a hegemonic architectural culture of which classicism was the highest expression. We might chalk this up to the limitations of dominant models of periodization. As the art historical project to reimagine the boundaries of early modern Italy has shown, modes of making in places marked by transculturalism challenge the rigid classical/anticlassical binary.[20]

Could the familiar argument for the "delayed" assimilation of classicism in Palermo also be inflected by racial thinking? We should recall that the very schema of early modern style established by Heinrich Wölfflin in the nineteenth century rested on theories of race.[21] Foundational accounts of architectural classicism in the Italian South likewise betray racial prejudice. Extolling the antiquities of Naples in a letter of 1758, Johann Joachim Winckelmann lamented that he was, however, "infinitely displeased" to "see everywhere ugly African blood."[22] We cannot divest diagnoses of Sicily's stylistic ills from the transhistorical belief in the South's "backwardness"—its resistance to progress, and thereby the achievements of civilization. Renaissance Italians associated the "bestiality" of animals with sub-Saharan Africans and the indigenous peoples of the Americas, judging them ripe for Christianization. Contemporary descriptions of both groups drew on a classical tradition that claimed early humans lived in caves and forests like "wild animals."[23] The same was said of the Italian South: a letter of 1575 proposed the "mountains of Sicily" and Calabria ("our Indies") as a proving ground for the Jesuits' "civilizing mission" in the Americas, while a seventeenth-century missionary compared peasants in Basilicata to "herds of animals."[24] The very concept of "delay" would seem to be endemic to the region.

Much work remains to be done in our effort to better understand how the coloniality of the Italian South—extending from early modernity to modernity—engendered its historical and historiographical racialization. Yet the study of early

Figure 7 Porta dei Greci (formerly Porta Vega or Porta d'Africa), Palermo, Sicily, begun 1555 (photo by Elizabeth Kassler-Taub).

modern cities like Palermo, which were implicated in global economies of slavery, devotion, and conquest, can contribute meaningfully to the histories of other subaltern geographies where a critical theory of race and its relationship to architecture is better established.

<div align="right">ELIZABETH KASSLER-TAUB
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Notes

1. Fifteenth-century documents describe these slaves as "scavi nigri." See Francesco Paolo Tocco, "I festeggiamenti dell'Assunta nella Palermo quattrocentesca: La corsa di schiavi neri," in *Le usate leggiadrie: I cortei, le cerimonie, le feste e il costume nel Mediterraneo tra il XV e XVI*, ed. Gemma Teresa Colesanti (Montella: Centro Francescano di Studi sul Mediterraneo, 2010), 376–406.

2. F. M. Emanuele e Gaetani, marchese di Villabianca, "Dei giuochi popolareschi," in *Nuove effemeridi siciliani*, 3rd ser., vol. 1, ed. Vincenzo di Giovanni et al. (Palermo, 1875), 219–20.

3. See Lori de Lucia, "The Space between Borno and Palermo: Slavery and Its Boundaries in the Late Medieval Saharan-Mediterranean Region," in *Rethinking Medieval Margins and Marginality*, ed. Ann E. Zimo, Tiffany D. Vann Sprecher, Kathryn Reyerson, and Debra Blumenthal (New York: Routledge, 2020), 11–26.

4. Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 35–41.

5. See Nelson J. Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

6. See Vivien Greene, "The 'Other' Africa: Giuseppe Pitrè's Mostra Etnografica Siciliana (1891–2)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012), 288–309.

7. See Pasquale Verdicchio, "The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy," in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 191–212; Christina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).

8. Christina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, "The Italian Postcolonial: A Manifesto," *Italian Studies* 69, no. 3 (2014), 431.

9. On nationalist attitudes toward Spanish colonialism in the South, see Helen Hills, "Introduction: Directions to Baroque Naples," *Open Arts Journal* 6 (2017/18), 1–20.

10. Alfredo Niceforo, *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* (Milan, 1898), 208–10.

11. Alfredo Niceforo, *Italiani del Nord e Italiani del Sud* (Turin, 1901), 22.

12. Here I look to the model of Robin L. Thomas, "Slavery and Construction at the Royal Palace of Caserta," *JSAH* 78, no. 2 (June 2019), 167–86.

13. Salvatore Bono, *Schiavi: Una storia mediterranea (XVI–XIX secolo)* (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 2016), 169; Antonino Giuffrida, "Schiavitù e mercato del lavoro nella Sicilia rinascimentale," in "Schiavi, corsari, rinnegati," special issue, *Nuove effemeridi: Rassegna trimestrale di cultura* 14, no. 54 (2001), 37.

14. Daniel Nemser, "Race and Domination in Colonial American Studies," in *The Routledge Hispanic Studies Companion to Colonial Latin America and the Caribbean (1492–1898)*, ed. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Santa Arias (London: Routledge, 2020), 53.

15. On the Porta Nuova, see Cristelle Baskins, "The Play of Mistaken Identities at the Porta Nuova of Palermo," in *Jews and Muslims Made Visible in Christian Iberia and Beyond, 14th to 18th Centuries: Another Image*, ed. Borja Franco Llopis and Antonio Urquízar-Herrera (Boston: Brill, 2019), 331–54.

16. See Barbara Fuchs, "The Spanish Race," in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, ed. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 88–98.

17. Maurizio Vesco, "Un nuovo assetto per il quartiere della Kalsa nel Cinquecento: L'addizione urbana del piano di porta dei Greci," in *Il quartiere della Kalsa a Palermo: Dalle architetture civili e religiose delle origini alle attuali articolate realtà museali*, ed. Giovanna Cassata, Evelina De Castro, and Maria Maddalena De Luca (Palermo: Regione Siciliana–Assessorato Regionale dei Beni Culturali e dell'Identità Siciliana, 2013), 62n46.

18. See Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, "Introduction," in *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 3–20. See also María Fernández, *Cosmopolitanism in Mexican Visual Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 68–102.

19. Emanuela Garofalo, "Culture in dialogo attraverso e attorno la penisola italiana nei primi decenni del XVI secolo: Il tardogotico e le altre opzioni," in *1514: Arquitectos tardogóticos en la encrucijada*, ed. Begoña Alonso Ruiz and Juan Clemente Rodríguez Estévez (Seville: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, 2016), 357.

20. On classicism in Sicily, see Stephen J. Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 54–65.

21. See Eric Michaud, "Wölfflin in France: From Racialism to Structuralism," in *The Global Reception of Heinrich Wölfflin's "Principles of Art History,"* ed. Evonne Levy and Tristan Weddigen (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2020), 199–214.

22. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Lettere italiane* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1961), 91.

23. See Jill Burke, "Nakedness and Other Peoples: Rethinking the Italian Renaissance Nude," *Art History* 36, no. 4 (2013), 714–39.

24. Jennifer D. Selwyn, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuits' Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 96, 129.

Whitewashing Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village

The Academical Village of the University of Virginia numbers among the most familiar and most carefully studied examples of early American architecture (Figure 8).[1] Much of the attention given to this work stems from Thomas Jefferson's unusually articulate intentions for the project, including his stated desire "to improve the taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile them to the respect of the world and to procure them its praise!"[2] Taking his inspiration from the pages of an ancient classical tradition, Jefferson conceived of an "academical village" as the ideal environment for educating citizens and leaders of the new democracy. But this project, so closely entwined with the founding ideals of the new nation (and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site), was also a landscape of slavery. If we overlook that fact in our interpretation of this place, we perpetuate the harm—the assumptions of white supremacy—woven not only into the fabric of these buildings but also into the very foundation of the nation.

Jefferson and his hired contractors relied on the stolen labor of skilled and unskilled enslaved artisans. The building records for the university make clear that scores of unnamed laborers—called "hands" in the records—worked as carpenters, masons, painters, and more. Close analysis reveals individuals like Sam the carpenter, who oversaw teams of other enslaved carpenters building roofs, and the stonemason Thrimston Hern, who laid the steps of the famed Rotunda (Figure 9). These and many other people who participated in the construction of the Academical Village spent years under constant threat of harm, often separated from their loved ones. Newspaper advertisements of the period about runaway slaves remind us that while these workers also hoped for freedom and self-determination, those national promises were not intended for them.[3] Given the little evidence that survives—historical erasure perpetuates the legacy of the violence of slavery—scholars must work all the harder to recover and acknowledge the work of these artisans, excavating their humanity both from the archives and from their built work.

Jefferson's design for the University of Virginia built on his many decades of architectural experiments in a slave society. Fully aware of the moral crisis provoked by the slave system, Jefferson sought to mask the presence of slavery by creating separate public and private zones for enslaved persons in the buildings and landscapes he designed. As Mark Wenger demonstrates, Jefferson's unbuilt designs for a remodeling of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg included alternate access routes for enslaved domestics to distance them from the main entrance and public entertaining rooms.[4] Jefferson's redesign for Monticello after his return from France featured similar changes.[5] One visitor observed that Jefferson laid out the dining room "so as to make the attendance of servants entirely unnecessary, believing as he did, that much of the domestic and even public discord was [traceable to] . . . these mute but not inattentive listeners."[6] He reshaped the landscape of the mountaintop at Monticello to minimize the visibility of laboring Black bodies from "polite" spaces. Unwilling to relinquish his enslaved community, he crafted spatial designs that sought to veil his own hypocrisy. Spatial segregation also informed Jefferson's political imagination: his vision for a postemancipation United States did not include Black citizenship; rather, it involved Black deportation on a national scale.[7]

Jefferson's design for the Academical Village, his culminating work, paid scrupulous attention to the segregation of spaces and the masking of slavery. Built on a ridge, the project featured five pavilions on either side of a large green space

Figure 8 Thomas Jefferson, Academical Village, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1817–26, aerial view from the south, June 2019 (photo by Sanjay Suchak).

Figure 9 Proctor's daybook showing the names of some of the laborers who helped to build the University of Virginia, 16 September 1823 (photo by Worthy Martin; Special Collections Library, University of Virginia).
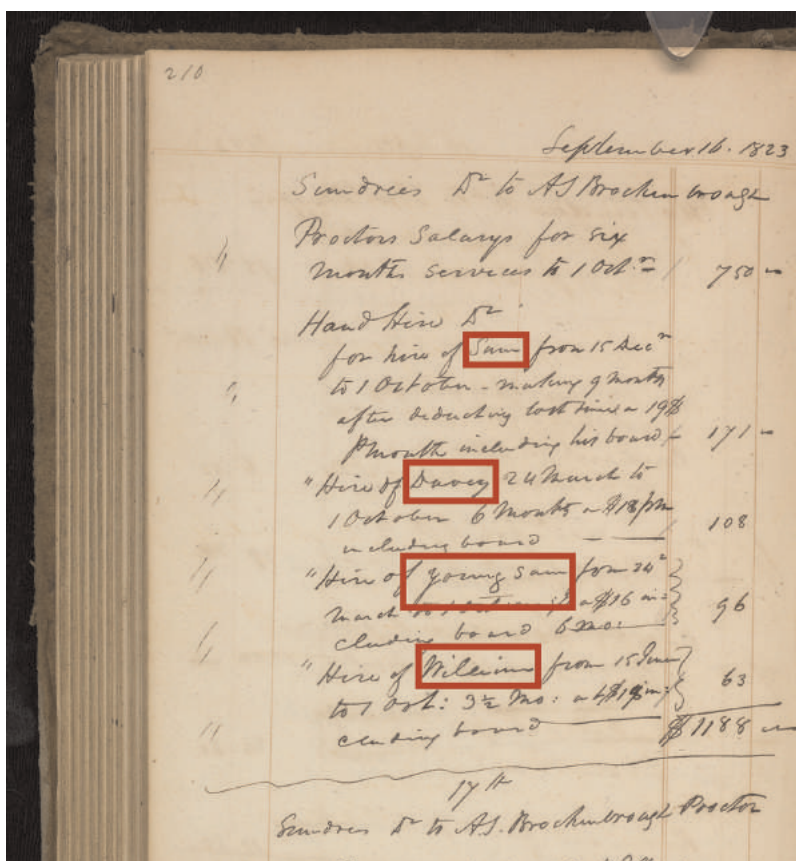
known as the Lawn; each was designed to appear as an elegant two-story building (Figure 10). But, in fact, this privileged axial view disguised a third, subterranean level that opened only toward the rear work yards. Now filled with dogwoods and azaleas and subdivided by low curvilinear walls, these yards were originally occupied by kitchens, laundries, dairies, and chicken coops, and were separated from white-dominated spaces by 8-foot walls. Period census records show that at any one time, approximately 150 enslaved people inhabited this subterranean level and the adjacent yards (Figure 11). Masking slavery was especially important at the Academical Village because Jefferson believed that slavery would corrupt the virtue of the university's young residents.[8]

As Mabel Wilson has demonstrated, the racism of the Academical Village extended even into its architectural details, given that Jefferson's selection of the classical architectural
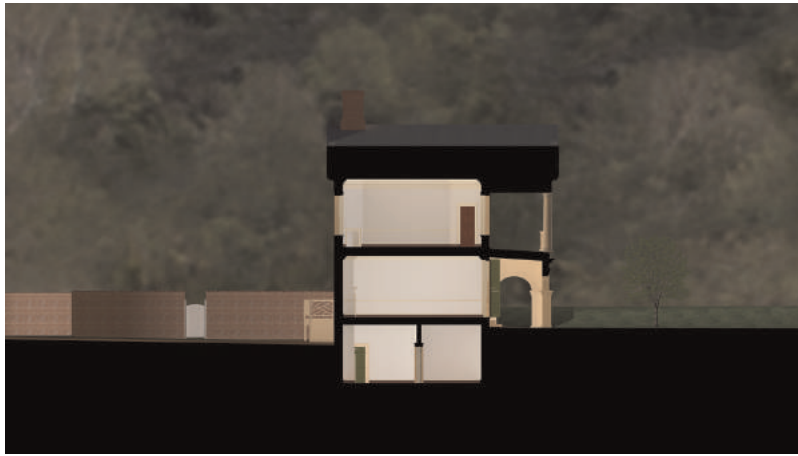
Figure 10 Thomas Jefferson, Pavilion VII, Academical Village, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1817–26, section looking north (rendering by Lauren Massari).
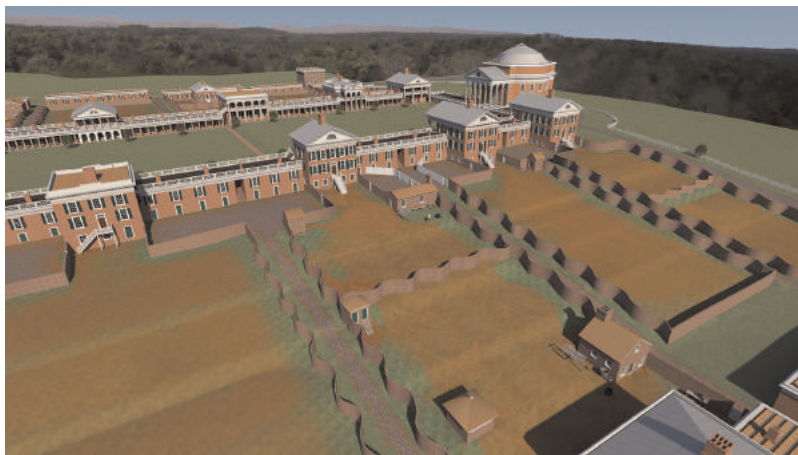
Figure 11 Thomas Jefferson, Academical Village, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1817–26, digital model, aerial view showing the university ca. 1850 (model and rendering by Lauren Massari).

style tied his architecture to an Enlightenment tradition that assumed—even justified—a hierarchy among the races.[9] Like so many, Jefferson believed that African Americans belonged to a lower class of humanity and that their enslavement was an unavoidable evil. These ideas laid the foundation for later (false) race science, the "discovery" of racial difference in Jefferson's Anatomical Theater (now lost), and the devastating legacy of eugenics that emanated from the segregated wards of the University of Virginia's hospital.[10] The Academical Village provides tangible evidence—and poignant reminders—of the institutional white supremacy that haunts our nation to the present.

The Academical Village offers an extraordinary lesson in histories untold. Seen through one lens as the architecture of democracy created by a revolutionary and courageous founding father, through another lens this complex of buildings attests to a remarkable history of Black resilience and continuous efforts toward self-realization by the Black community of the United States.

To conclude, I would argue that architectural historians must adopt one of at least three important antiracist frameworks. First, perhaps the easiest approach would be to analyze the architecture of white oppression, in this case institutional slavery. Second, at the same time, we must be aware that this architecture bears evidence of the persistent intellectual and (false) scientific constructions of white supremacy—both explicit and subtle—that still shape our polity. Third, and most important, given that narratives of white oppression and white supremacy still center whiteness, we must amplify the work of Black agency, resistance, and self-determination. Architectural historians cannot be antiracist until we center the histories of American minoritized communities, decentering whiteness and Europeanness from our curricula, our journals, and our other intellectual concerns. Let us remember that there is no such thing as an apolitical history.

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Notes

1. Richard Guy Wilson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village: The Creation of an Architectural Masterpiece* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Joseph Michael Lasalla, "Thomas Jefferson's Designs for the University of Virginia" (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1992); Susan C. Riddick, "The Influence of B. H. Latrobe on Jefferson's Design for the

University of Virginia" (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1988); Mary N. Woods, "Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia: Planning the Academic Village," *JSAH* 44, no. 3 (Oct. 1985), 266–83; Desmond Guinness and Julius Trousdale Sadler Jr., *Mr. Jefferson, Architect* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); William B. O'Neal, ed., *An Intelligent Interest in Architecture: A Bibliography of Publications about Thomas Jefferson as an Architect, Together with an Iconography of Nineteenth-Century Prints of the University of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969); Frederick Doveton Nichols, *Thomas Jefferson's Architectural Drawings* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society/Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation and the University Press of Virginia, 1961); Fiske Kimball, *Thomas Jefferson, Architect* (Boston: privately printed, 1916).

2. "To James Madison from Thomas Jefferson, 20 September 1785," Founders Online, National Archives, last modified 13 June 2018, http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0191 (accessed 27 Apr. 2021), original source, *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 8, *10 March 1784–28 March 1786*, ed. Robert A. Rutland and William M. E. Rachal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 366–69.

3. Louis P. Nelson and James Zehmer, "Slavery and Construction," in *Educated in Tyranny: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's University*, ed. Maurie D. McInnis and Louis P. Nelson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 27–41.

4. Mark Wenger, "Jefferson's Designs for Remodeling the Governor's Palace," *Winterthur Portfolio* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1997), 232–42.

5. Louis P. Nelson and Maurie D. McInnis, "Landscape of Slavery," in McInnis and Nelson, *Educated in Tyranny*, 42–74.

6. Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society: Portrayed by the Family Letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith (Margaret Bayard) from the Collection of Her Grandson, J. Henley Smith*, ed. Gaillard S. Hunt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 387–88.

7. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Bostin: Lilly and Wait, 1832), 144.

8. Jefferson, 170.

9. Mabel O. Wilson, "Race, Reason, and the Architecture of Jefferson's Virginia Statehouse," in *Thomas Jefferson, Architect: Palladian Models, Democratic Principles, and the Conflict of Ideals*, ed. Lloyd DeWitt and Corey Piper (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2019), 80–97.

10. Kirt von Daacke, "Anatomical Theater," in McInnis and Nelson, *Educated in Tyranny*, 171–98. On eugenics at the University of Virginia, see Gregory Dorr, *Segregation's Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

Orality and Permanence: Restoring a Gbongan Palace through Spoken Architectural History

Ever since the twelfth century, old men and women, skillful players of instruments known as "talking drums," and even dancers have randomly uttered lengthy accounts about builders of architecture in the region now known as Southwest Nigeria. Such encomiums featured as almost willfully tangential stanzas in otherwise poetic accounts of the histories of kingdoms, in a verbal art merging speech and song.[1] Articulated before audiences in a host of dialects now broadly called the Yorùbá language, these descriptions were sometimes presented only in oral form and at other times in tandem with music and dance.[2]

This conveying of architectural information existed within a tradition of Yorùbá poetry known as *oríkì orílè*, which also

included details about a kingdom's geographical features as well as the history of its monarchs.[3] Hence, each kingdom had not only a grand *oríkì orílè* but also myriad little ones, with each home having an *oríkì orílè* that chronicled the history of the individual family. Architectural references appear in some *oríkì orílè* almost without warning, with descriptions of architectural elements and their makers introduced unexpectedly into erstwhile accounts of personalities and historical events. Nonetheless, by the period 1400–1800, the *oríkì orílè* achieved a mature and elaborate oral form, to the point that one monarch even employed the *oríkì orílè* as a means to rebuild the structure described in a new location. In 1823, Fulani marauders from what we now know as Northern Nigeria attacked Gbongan, a kingdom in the south, forcing its citizens to migrate elsewhere. Two years after this desertion, the then king of Gbongan used the *oríkì orílè* of his kingdom—first composed in the early eighteenth century—to rebuild his palace.[4]

In this essay, I present an analysis of the *oríkì orílè* of the palace of the king of Gbongan to explore how notions of difference among people in disparate kingdoms across Southwest Nigeria transformed an oral architectural history into a tool for restoring and rebuilding both a palace and a kingdom that had suffered the ravages and displacement of war. As a result, the *oríkì orílè* of Gbongan came to be perceived as the preeminent if not only means of preserving a royal institution, as well as a kingdom, for future posterity. Modern notions of "race" may not be entirely pertinent to this discussion, since the loyalties of eighteenth-century Gbongan citizens to their kingdom and to their neighbors, as well as their antagonisms with other kingdoms, stemmed from a fundamental sense of Gbongan identity defined both by the *oríkì orílè* of the palace and by the *oríkì orílè* of individual houses throughout the kingdom.[5] Nevertheless, one of the essential substrates in the conception of racial theories in general is the idea of difference, which played an important role in the displacement of the Gbongan kingdom in the first place, as well as the subsequent need to preserve and restore its palace—at a new location, if need be. According to the *oríkì orílè* of Gbongan, the Fulani from the north sought to conquer Gbongan in an effort to expand the Fulani empire into the south.[6] Hence, the Fulani hoped to make the conquered Gbongan citizens subservient to them—proving that the Fulani did not consider the Gbongan to be their equal. In other words, for the Fulani, the Gbongan were both different and lower in status.

The term *oríkì orílè* is a composite of three individual words: *oríkì*, *orí*, and *ílè*. *Oríkì* refers to a praise poem possessed by each individual; it stated the person's forebears, and it also purported to describe that person's future personality. Hence, the *oríkì*, composed at birth, would anchor and steer that person throughout life. *Orílè* is a conflation of two words,

orí and *ìllè*. The first refers to the head, which in Southwest Nigeria in the early part of the last millennium came to be associated with the soul or the essence of the individual (sculptors depicted virtuous people with big heads to show the nobility of their souls). *Illè*, meaning "ground," came to be synonymous with the specific ground of one's kingdom.[7] Thus the phrase *oríkì orílè* literally meant the poem of the soul of one's place or kingdom, and the *oríkì orílè* of a palace referred to the praise poem of the ruler's edifice, which in many ways served as the supreme symbol of the kingdom. Therefore, in such a verbal art, stanzas describing parts of the king's building, geographical details of the locale, the kingdom's origins, and biographical portraits of past kings merged to create an essential portrait of a place. Put differently, the *oríkì orílè* of the palace at Gbongan represented a kind of total history, with details of architectural elements such as those described below as its component parts:

> Ìdòwú agbégirebete fóba
> Bó tí ń gbé odó
> Ní ń gbé àpótí
> Ní ń gbé òpó
> Ní ń gbé ààsè fún Olúayé[8]

The translation of these verses is as follows:

> Ìdòwú, one who creates beautiful carvings for the king[9]
> He was not only an expert in carving mortars [wooden containers used to mix ingredients used in rituals]
> He also excelled in [carving decorative] containers
> In sculpting [monumental] veranda posts
> And in [creating bas-reliefs on] wooden doors for important persons in the community.

In their oral delivery these stanzas aimed to mimic the ornamental beauty that Idowu's carving endowed upon the king's palace as well as other buildings. This eighteenth-century oral architectural history provided the means for the ruler of Gbongan to restore a kingdom nearly destroyed by difference, a concept that in later generations contributed to the notion of "race."

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Notes

1. Solomon Adéboye Babalóla, *The Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala* (London: Clarendon Press, 1966), 12. *Ijala* in the title of this book refers to a type of Yorùbá poetry that differs from the type that is the subject of this essay.
2. The dialects were similar enough to suggest a common origin, yet different to the extent that they allowed individual citizens to recognize separate identities associated with mostly autonomous kingdoms. In the nineteenth century, African diasporic immigrants such as the Reverend Samuel Johnson, who published the first studies of the Yorùbá language, promoted the notion of a single "Yorùbá" language instead of myriad local dialects. Yet in the early modern period, the languages of citizens of Southwest Nigerian kingdoms were not called "Yorùbá"—a word derived from *Yarba*, an opprobrious term used by the Fulani of Northern Nigeria in reference to the peoples of Southwest Nigeria. Rather, the "Yorùbá" citizens saw themselves as belonging to their particular kingdoms within the region of Southwest Nigeria, including (among others) Oyo, Ijebu, and Abeokuta. See Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginnings of the British Protectorate*, 9th ed., ed. Obadiah Johnson (Lagos: CSS Bookshops, 2009). Currently the Fulani number among the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, residing in many nations of the region. Their origins are unclear: their ancestors may be Berbers or Egyptians as well as locals in West Africa. The Fulani influence with respect to the rise of Islam in West Africa is almost incalculable (among other aims, the Fulani wished to transform the Gbongan kingdom into an Islamic kingdom).
3. Since the twelfth century, many types of oral poetry have existed in the region; these include *ijala*, *rara*, *ege*, *olele*, and *adamo*, just to mention a few. See Olatunde Olatunji, "The Yoruba Poet and His Society," *Research in African Literatures* 10, no. 2 (1979), 180.
4. Solomon Babayemi, "The Role of Oriki Orile and Itan in the Reconstruction of the Architectural History of the Palace of Gbongan," in *The Yoruba Artist: New Theoretical Perspectives on African Arts*, ed. Rowland Abiodun, Henry J. Drewal, and John Pemberton III (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 144.
5. The hierarchy of kingdoms that emerged in Southwest Nigeria beginning in the twelfth century was firmly established by the early modern period in the West. According to most oral historians, Ilé-Ifè assumed preeminent status among these kingdoms, as the origin of all the peoples of Southwest Nigeria. Hence, the kings of Oyo and Ifè enjoyed a higher status than those of Abeokuta and Ijebu, for example. Debates about whether some of the other kingdoms functioned as tributaries of the kingdoms of Oyo and Ifè have been ongoing since the early modern period. See Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*. Wars between kingdoms in this region as well as with those from elsewhere, including the Dahomey in present-day Benin, exacerbated differences. Such wars made foreigners wholly "other"—meaning they were both different from citizens of one's kingdom and persons with whom no one in the kingdom should have any interaction. It is possible that some of the Fulani were lighter in complexion in the eighteenth century, due to their Berber ancestry. Hence, the Fulani may have loathed the Gbongan citizens' darker complexion.
6. Babayemi, "The Role of Oriki Orile," 144.
7. For definitions of *oríkì orílè*, *orí*, and *ílè*, see R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba* (London: University of London Press, 1958).
8. From Babayemi, "The Role of Oriki Orile," 146–47. An audio recording of this poem is available at the following URL: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZpsiqmuaWZiAXl3ZpNZNvpvzfX5vfxH6/view?usp=sharing.
9. Ìdòwú is the name of the artisan who "creates beautiful carvings for the king."

Race and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Italy

Walking through the vast gardens of the Royal Palace of Caserta near Naples, one might easily miss the small male heads wearing turbans that ornament one of the monumental cascades (Figure 12). If these grinning visages might seem merely whimsical examples of *turquerie*, they also speak indirectly to the presence of Turkish slaves who contributed to the construction of the massive palace and its waterworks. In fact, they offer the only visual clue to the intersection of race and racial hierarchies with the palace's early modern history. I first encountered these narratives while researching the

Figure 12 Detail of a cascade, Royal Palace of Caserta, 1780s (photo by Robin L. Thomas).

slave labor employed at the palace construction site. A slim number of excellent publications led me to documents in the palace archives, opening up new and unexpected vistas on slavery and race, and ultimately resulting in an article I wrote for this journal.[1]

In writing that article, I encountered two challenges. The first involved finding a way to address an audience in a field that traditionally privileges visual analysis. As suggested by our stroll through the gardens of Caserta, the ethnicities of slaves, some Turkish, others North African, left few visible traces, and the physical representations that I found had more to do with decoration than with the representation of racial categories. To borrow a term used by a historian of the White House, race was "invisible" within the predominant modes of architectural investigation.[2] Considering the story of race

required that I turn away from the architectural historian's traditional emphasis on the visual evidence of buildings and drawings to consider instead what Dell Upton has termed the "landscapes" of slavery, or the spaces where the enslaved laborers of Caserta worked and lived.[3] It also led me to foreground labor over design, reversing prevailing paradigms that valued the production of the draftsman's table above other concerns. Having established those parameters, I found that the histories of landscape and work-site labor offered fertile ground for incorporating stories of race into European architectural history. It became apparent that in our field we have many opportunities to investigate both questions of race and the history of labor.

The second challenge that I confronted had to do with the concept of race itself. The sources that I consulted rarely

identified a worker with the racial specificity that historians seek today. Our current parameters of racial distinction did not exist in a time and place when even the term *race* itself was not widely used. Scholars have shown that early modern Europeans employed such terms as *nations* or *varieties*, and in the Mediterranean basin, where North African and southern European populations intermingled, even those categories were not fixed.[4] In period documents, the denotation *Turk* could apply to any Muslim, but sometimes also served to indicate Christian converts who arrived in the kingdom originally as Muslims. Relatively few of these people could claim to be ethnic Turks, as most came from the North African cities of Tunis, Tripoli, and Algiers. Even less is known about skin color, given the absence of such descriptions. When Charles of Bourbon, the Neapolitan king who commissioned the palace, subsequently became Charles III of Spain, he established the Casa de los Negros in the royal household to administer the crown's slaves. Despite its official title, which denoted Blackness, the Casa de los Negros recorded mostly light-skinned North African slaves in its rosters.[5] In this context, I had to deduce race indirectly, often by referring to a natal city: royal agents recorded this particular detail along with an individual's name and age. At Caserta, most slaves came from Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, with smaller numbers from Crete, Constantinople, Zuwara, Jaffa, and other Mediterranean cities. Shared civic origins likely created distinct group identities among the broader population of slaves, but this is impossible to confirm.

The concept of intersectionality, drawn from critical race theory, provides a useful mechanism for investigating racial histories during this period. Not only did these individual slaves recognize overlapping notions of themselves, but also the royal government that owned them made strategic use of their multiple identities. Early modern documents variously distinguished individuals by "nation," religion, and city of origin, meaning that an individual could be, for example, a Turk, Muslim, and Tripolitan. Intersectional identity became even more complex for Christian converts, who often took the names of administrators, master masons, and architects that oversaw the work site. These individuals were Turks, Tripolitans, Christians, and converts, as well as the namesakes of their godparents for their baptisms. Rather than untangling the complexities of these intersectional identities, it seems that enlarging our understanding of them may enable us to construct more capacious and robust narratives about the role of race in early modern European architecture.

We may follow many avenues in seeking to write racial histories for early modern architecture: these may lead us through the landscape, through the work site, or through early modern notions about race and racial categories. Race may not be visible when we first encounter buildings from the period, but when we discover it in textual sources, we gain a completely new perspective on these sites and the fundamental role that race played in their creation.

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Notes

1. Robin L. Thomas, "Slavery and Construction at the Royal Palace of Caserta," *JSAH* 78, no. 2 (June 2019), 167–86.

2. Jesse J. Holland, *The Invisibles: The Untold Story of African American Slaves in the White House* (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2016).

3. Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Places* 2, no. 2 (1984), 59–72.

4. David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 11–17, 26, 64–65; Daniel Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 3–12.

5. José Miguel López García, "Los esclavos del Rey de España a finales del Antiguo Régimen: Un aspecto poco conocido de nuestro reformismo ilustrado," in *La corte de los Borbones: la crisis del modelo cortesano*, ed. José Martínez Millán, Concepción Camarero Bullón, and Marcelo Luzzi Traficante (Madrid: Polifemo, 2013), 201–35.