

# The “Color” of Heritage: Decolonizing Collaborative Archaeology in the Caribbean

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This article explores the intersection of postcolonial theory and archaeology as it relates to the process of collaboratively investigating Afro-Caribbean heritage. Decolonizing archaeology involves asking uncomfortable questions regarding fundamental aspects of archaeological practice. The author examines the possibility that historical archaeologists sometimes miss collaborative projects due to a site’s assumed racial classification. The grouping of sites around the perceived ancestry of its inhabitants may restrict the ability of archaeologists to craft collaborative projects with various publics in postcolonial locations like the Caribbean. Recent research on Nevis provides a case study demonstrating how groups develop deep affinities for locations and how these affinities may cut across lines of color. The author’s goal is not to critique other approaches, but to challenge his own practice of archaeology by reflexively constructing a cosmopolitan past, one which reflects increased agency for groups feeling connected to a site regardless of any externally-defined racial affiliation.

KEYWORDS Afro-Caribbean heritage, Nevis, collaboration, site selection

## Introduction

Do researchers define heritage sites in ways which parallel the racialization of historical communities? Do such representations restrict our ability to learn about the past, and the importance of specific sites to living communities? How do the answers to such questions change when scholars look to forge collaborative projects? A situational approach is required to address these questions. For instance, researching the lives of enslaved Africans necessitates, to varying degrees, the investigation of plantation contexts while the exploration of resistance to social elites requires work within the centers of colonial power (e.g., capital cities, plantation contexts). The following pages discuss a different type of project related to the African diaspora, drawing from the author’s recent work on Nevis to

examine the "color" which scholars and the public assign to various heritage sites, or more precisely, the "coloring" of sites by archaeologists. This refers to the supposed ethnic or racial status of a site based on its occupants, designers, or builders. This status is often implicitly interpreted by archaeologists as indicative of which groups will feel an affinity towards specific sites. This assumed affinity motivates us to seek out particular sites when forming collaborative archaeology projects. Assumptions about the ethnic value of a site can be misleading, and the potential for collaborative archaeology which addresses the interests of modern African diaspora communities is discussed in detail.

Archaeologists have been "coloring" archaeological sites based upon their supposed racial and ethnic histories for more than a century. The most sinister forms of this practice centered on the denial of agency for non-European groups. Such practices have a deep history in archaeology, including early interpretations of Great Zimbabwe and various earthen mounds in North America. What has become known as the Zimbabwe controversy involved competing interpretations of the origins of the site's builders. Echoing the Mound Builder controversy of North America (Trigger 1980), archaeologists initially argued for a non-African origin of the group responsible for Great Zimbabwe's impressive stone architecture. Racist perspectives were foregrounded in such debates. Although the Mound Builder debate was laid to rest by the early twentieth century, the controversy surrounding Great Zimbabwe continued until the mid-twentieth century. Notable anthropologists such as Raymond Dart continued to argue for a non-local origin of the site's architects until the gradual acceptance of the site's indigenous origins by the 1950s. While the origin of Great Zimbabwe's builders has been largely resolved, the modern meanings of the site are in constant flux as international heritage discourse continues to marginalize local communities from the site (Fontein 2006). Modern researchers motivated by the postcolonial critique and subaltern studies understand the polysemous nature of heritage, particularly as an expression of a multivocal past. This is part of a larger movement within heritage studies generally which understands the role and importance of the past as being both shaped by and informing present concerns (Lowenthal 1985). Great Zimbabwean and North American earthen mounds represent crucial and severe examples of the process of coloring heritage. The case study informing this article is not so extreme, yet some of the same struggles are present. Nevisians endeavor to secure local and international recognition that a wide variety of sites are fundamentally representative of Nevisian heritage and identity. Their views represent a cosmopolitan perspective drawing on the creolized experience of Caribbean nations, what Ortiz (1995) refers to as "transculturation." In this respect, "cosmopolitan" refers to both the complex identities present in postcolonial nations as well as the ethical commitment facing archaeologists to accurately render these lived perspectives as part of their interpretations (Meskell 2009).

In recent years, the collaborative turn in African-American archaeology has been producing important, if sometimes unexpected, projects in the Caribbean (Agbe-Davies 2010). The cosmopolitan nature of many Caribbean societies means that members of the African diaspora in the Caribbean region may have a broader understanding of their heritage than those of us trained in archaeology are able to appreciate. Are potential locations of fruitful collaboration between scholars and

communities ignored because the act of coloring heritage based on assumed ethnic or racial history undermines the formation of partnerships around specific sites? I believe they are, but it is difficult to satisfactorily answer this question since it is difficult to document specific examples. Instead, it may be more fruitful to remember that archaeological questions and interpretations are guided by the positionality of archaeologists in the modern world (Trigger 1980: 662). If we are missing potential collaborations due to coloring heritage, it is only through transforming ourselves that we can hope to remedy the situation.

## **Participatory or collaborative? International public archaeology in the twenty-first century**

The field of public archaeology has changed considerably in recent decades. Early work focused on the production of materials to educate the general public (McGimsey 1972). Today, a plethora of named approaches and associated methodologies exist, each seeking specific forms of engagement and being increasingly focused on particular constituencies. The literature of public archaeology has grown rapidly and a cogent review is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, this section briefly reflects upon specific approaches within the growing rubric of public archaeology (Skeates *et al.* 2012). I am particularly interested in teasing out the relationship between researcher and community through a discussion of participatory and collaborative approaches to public engagement in archaeology.

Education remains a fundamental aspect of public archaeology (McGimsey 1972; Merriman 2004). Public archaeology as McGimsey envisions it recognizes heritage as an exhaustible resource and understands that archaeologists have an ethical obligation to help preserve and interpret these resources for the general public. The ethical responsibility of archaeologists to the public trust is now a common theme in public archaeology (Ascherson 2000). Public archaeology continues to grow and increasingly focuses upon engagement throughout the archaeological process (Jameson 2004), an engagement increasingly concerned with empowering subordinated groups (McDavid 2002; Shackel 2011; Shackel and Chambers 2004). This trend calls upon archaeologists to consult with interested parties during planning stages so that archaeology can better answer questions posed by members of various groups. While archaeologists seeking to create inclusive interpretations maintain that archaeology has strong arguments to make about the past (Schadla-Hall 2004), a growing consensus agrees that archaeologists “no longer have the license to ‘tell’ people their pasts or adjudicate upon the ‘correct’ ways of protecting or using heritage” (Meskell 2009: 3).

My own engagement with public archaeology tends to focus on social justice (González-Tennant 2013), on the creation of a society “based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being” (Zajda *et al.* 2006: 1). Early attempts at utilizing archaeological research for this type of activism centered on providing interpretive tools to the public in order to encourage critical reflection on the ideological nature of US society (Leone *et al.* 1987). This work demonstrated the role of ideology in cementing social inequality within American society and how

such developments were naturalized or perceived as inevitable. A logical extension of Trigger's (1980: 1) aforementioned comments forces recognition of the fact that the majority of archaeologists seeking to transform the practice of archaeology are rarely exploited themselves, and are predominantly from privileged backgrounds and positions in society. This realization is at the core of recent scholarship confronting the colonial and class-based legacies within archaeology as a principal methodology for politicizing our disciplinary craft in socially relevant and transformative ways (McGuire 2008; McGuire and Walker 1999). Social justice thus intersects a growing concern for many archaeologists as we avoid the production of "heritage victims" (González-Ruibal 2009) who are silenced when first-world definitions determine the value and meaning of local places.

Collaborative archaeology represents a deeply ethical position advocating specific methodologies regarding archaeological practice (Atalay 2012; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Silliman 2008). According to Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008), collaborative archaeology seeks to establish a group of co-researchers (professionals and public stakeholders) and a nurturing environment conducive to group learning. This in turn supports the collaborative, simultaneous formulation of research questions alongside appropriate methods for answering such questions. Archaeological expertise remains central to these engagements and plays a role in recommending appropriate techniques and interpretations which can be defended with recovered evidence. This approach closely mirrors community-based participatory research (Atalay 2012; Whyte 1991) and as such is concerned with real-world problems. This approach is advocated as an alternative to traditional academic practices which reduce the public's role to that of passive consumer.

A number of other approaches are closely related to collaborative archaeology, although they draw their inspiration from different sources. Civically engaged archaeology has grown out of the civic renewal movement. This form of archaeology is "committed to a long-term sustained relationship with communities" (Little 2007: 5), particularly minority communities which continue to experience the inequality of American society. Engaged archaeology fosters transparency and accountability regarding archaeological research (Agbe-Davies 2010: 2). This goal is motivating a new generation of archaeologists to include community service learning projects as part of their academic and professional research (Agbe-Davies 2010; Nassaney and Levine 2009). These trends highlight a growing interest among archaeologists to include the public in all stages of archaeological practice. This emerging practice allows scholars to sensitively craft their interpretations of places in ways that speak to local and global publics.

The collaborative turn currently taking place in public archaeology represents a form of archaeological practice above that of simple technique (e.g., excavation, site mapping). Embracing a collaborative approach is a methodological choice which can transform archaeological practice in subtle yet powerful ways. Such choices require us to engage in self-reflection regarding the archaeological mindset as it relates to engaging with stakeholders and choosing sites. This echoes recent developments in ethnographic archaeology and the questioning of hierarchical relationships between experts and the public (Castañeda and Matthews 2008;

Meskel 2005; Mortensen and Hollowell 2009). The decolonization of archaeological thought and practice requires a readjustment in order to integrate all participants into each step of the archaeological process (Silliman 2008).

These developments aim to create transparency regarding archaeological practice and methodology. This transparency is seen as a crucial step in fostering collaboration as well as transforming the practice of archaeology. It is also important to recognize the significant difference which exists between participation and collaboration (Shackel 2004). A project is participatory when it produces information for non-specialists. Participatory projects are created for the public by archaeologists, and our expertise drives such relationships. This is public archaeology in the traditional sense. Collaborative projects differ in that they are actively created through conversations between researchers and other parties in a dialectical and reciprocal fashion throughout the course of a research project. The complicated nature of public archaeology motivates us to understand that different projects require different approaches and participatory or collaborative models are appropriate for different situations, effectively expanding archaeological practice and resulting in multiple public *archaeologies* (Mortensen and Hollowell 2009).

Participatory and collaborative approaches represent separate methodologies with associated techniques for public engagement. Recognizing the differences between these approaches is important for properly framing our research in accordance with local community concerns. In their recent discussion of archaeological work at the site of Timbuctoo, New Jersey, Barton and Markert (2012) discuss the difficulty of reconciling their practice of archaeology with local community concerns. Their work is largely participatory, supported by quarterly meetings with stakeholders, recognizable forms of outreach such as public presentations, and the production of scholarly publications (Barton and Markert 2012: 83). While the authors accurately recognize the increasing importance of personal testimony to historical archaeology (Purser 1992; Schmidt 2006), they also acknowledge their own struggle to connect their informants' narratives to the archaeological evidence (Barton and Markert 2012: 87). This includes the mistaken view that oral histories cannot transmit useful historical data beyond the confines of individual lives, neglecting the possibility that many oral histories are in the process of becoming oral tradition. Barton and Markert (2012: 89–90) are particularly troubled by the absence of racial violence in their collected oral histories, something specifically sought by the researchers as a way to contextualize the recovered artifacts which primarily date to the early twentieth century. One explanation for the inability of their oral histories to illuminate the artifactual evidence may be the participatory nature of the project. This rests on the scholarly investigation of racial intolerance which is not supported by a corresponding community interest. In contrast to participatory models, collaborative projects often push researchers to explore new foci and methodologies (Atalay 2012; Davidson and González-Tennant 2008; Silliman 2008).

The collaborative turn in archaeology is not a panacea. Some question if collaborative archaeology has produced a radically new form of archaeological practice or if it is little more than a “pretty face” masking a pre-existing, corporatized, and hierarchical research practice (La Salle 2010). Part of the

difficulty in realizing the goal of a collaborative archaeology lies in the challenges of openly discussing the collaborative process. This results in a glossing over of collaboration in our publications. Shackel's (2010) honest depiction of the difficulties experienced while crafting a collaborative project between archaeologists and the descendant community of New Philadelphia, Illinois, represents an important exception to the general pattern of glossing these difficulties. La Salle's (2010) discussion of collaborative archaeology provides a trenchant critique which firmly identifies the corporatized academy as a primary reason why true collaboration is difficult to achieve by archaeologists. This does not require us to abandon ethical positions or create unreasonably relativistic interpretations of the past. The collaborative turn demonstrates a profound interest in transforming the methodology of archaeology by involving other groups at each stage of the archaeological process. What is less clear is how this encourages archaeologists to transform their individual perspectives and practices. This self-transformative aspect represents a process of disciplinary decolonization (of the mind).

I will now turn to the case study informing this article. My engagement with Nevisian heritage began in 2007. I have since returned half a dozen times and now direct an annual field school and archaeological project there. This project's first year of fieldwork provides an example which illuminates the process of decolonizing my archaeological practice. The following section introduces this project while describing our first season of work and the powerful connection between Nevisians and a previously undocumented archaeological site on the island. I then return to a discussion of issues regarding the process of coloring heritage and draw upon postcolonial archaeology to comment on future possibilities for decolonizing Caribbean heritage.

### **Collaborative explorations of Nevisian heritage**

Nevis is located towards the northern end of the arc of islands commonly referred to as the Lesser Antilles (Figure 1). It is a relatively small island measuring thirty-six square miles with a population of approximately 11,000. Nevis was initially settled by aceramic peoples migrating from South America more than 2,000 years ago, with the greatest Pre-Columbian settlements occurring on the island between AD 600 and 1500 (Wilson 1989; 2007). While the island was seen by Christopher Columbus during his second voyage in 1493, European colonists did not establish a permanent settlement on Nevis until the 1620s (Dyde 2005: 32; Hubbard 1996: 23). The young colony quickly grew and became a primary port for English vessels and ships doing business with England throughout the New World. Various conflicts with other colonial nations compelled the inhabitants to build 13 forts and 20 gun placements around the small island (Machling *et al.* 2005: 8–9). While Nevis was once home to a thriving sugar industry, that commodity production came to an end in the mid-twentieth century. Nevis' centrality to British Caribbean interests meant that planters often experimented with new industrial technologies. The island offers a unique case study combining industrial, domestic, and transportation facilities in one location at a time when the sugar industry and plantation system were rapidly expanding across the Caribbean (Meniketti 2006).

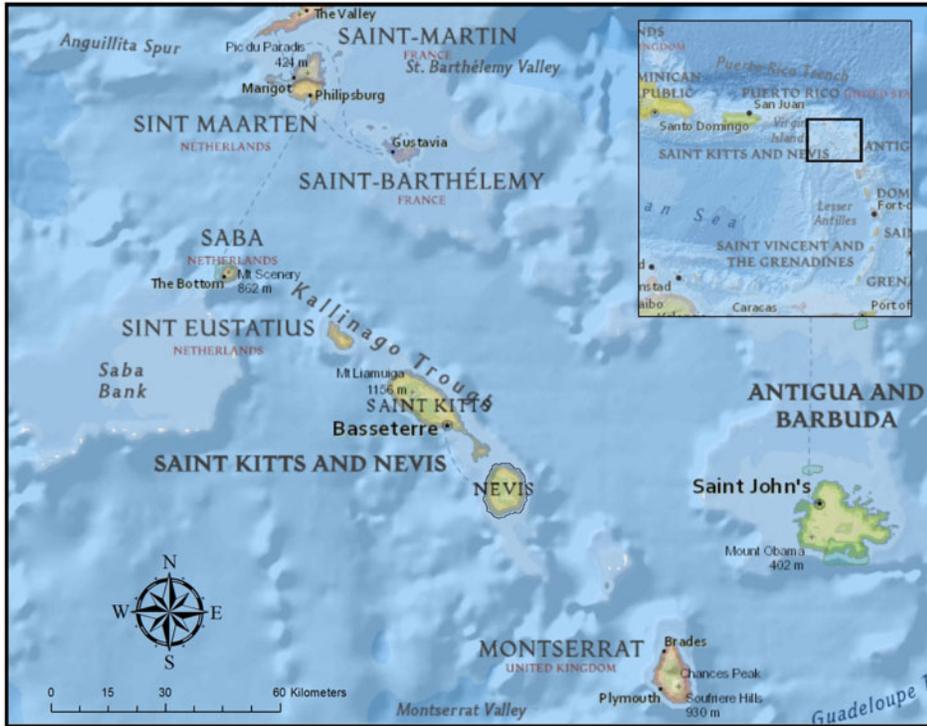


FIGURE 1 Location of Nevis.

*Illustration by author.*

A rich tradition of archaeology has taken shape on Nevis since the 1980s. This began with pioneering work regarding the prehistoric settlement and long-term Pre-Columbian occupation of the island (Wilson 1989; 2007). This research remains a model for similar projects in nearby locations. Other research into the island's prehistoric past has examined shifting patterns of marine exploitation (Wing and Wing 2001) as well as comparative analyses of marine subsistence strategies in the Caribbean (Keegan *et al.* 2008). The majority of recent archaeological work on Nevis focuses on the colonial period. The indigenous population of the island had mysteriously vanished by the time Europeans began settling there in the late 1620s. Two of the earliest historical archaeology projects on Nevis examined the island's sugar industry and military landscape. The early industrial archaeology of Nevis focused on the impressive preservation of the island's numerous industrial sites (Wright and Wright 1991). Military site archaeology began with investigations at a redoubt situated at the north end of the island, which was documented during a salvage project before the structure was demolished to expand the island's airport (Machling *et al.* 2005). Investigations of Nevis' industrial archaeology remains an active arena of research (Meniketti 2006; 2009), and research into the island's military history is benefitting from Machling's (2012) recent review of sites and documentary resources from Nevis and Britain. Recent research on neighboring St. Kitts probed the lives of Afro-Caribbean people at military sites (Ahlman *et al.* 2009; Schroedl

and Ahlman 2002). This work has contributed a unique understanding regarding a poorly understood aspect of Caribbean colonial life and suggests intriguing possibilities for examining non-plantation contexts of Afro-Caribbean peoples. Other projects have explored Nevis' plantation contexts. This includes handheld global positioning system (GPS) mapping of surface features (Reid 2008), experimental field techniques exploring the changing lives of enslaved Africans (Galle *et al.* 2009), and the living tradition of Afro-Caribbean pottery manufacture in the past and present on St. Kitts and Nevis (Ahlman and Schroedl 2008). The island also has been home to one of the first archaeological investigations of Jewish life in the New World (Terrell 2004).

I first visited Nevis as a crew chief for Dr. Marco Meniketti's San Jose State archaeological field school in 2007 and 2009. I returned again in 2011 to formalize my field projects and regularly travel between the USA and Nevis in support of an annual archaeological field school, now in its third year. In all, I have spent approximately six months exploring Nevis' rich heritage resources. In many ways, my approach to archaeology on Nevis is modeled on Meniketti's work. His approach to archaeology includes a sincere engagement with local communities, and he has formulated short-term projects in response to local requests. Although our scholarly interests focus on different aspects of Nevisian history, Meniketti's approach to a sincere and open engagement with local groups continues to inspire my work.

The Nevisian Heritage Survey Project (NHSP)<sup>1</sup> was created in close collaboration with the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society<sup>2</sup> and other interested groups, including families and individuals who have dedicated their personal time and resources to promoting the island's rich heritage. Our work actively combines research into both tangible and intangible aspects of Nevisian heritage. This reflects a growing consensus that tangible heritage (e.g., archaeological sites) is meaningful and recognizable only when properly contextualized alongside current cultural values and perspectives (Harvey 2001; Smith 2006; Smith and Akagawa 2009). This type of collaborative heritage project seeks to balance the interests of international scholarship alongside local community concerns. This mixed methods approach to studying the past is what first alerted me to the potential forms of coloring heritage.

The decision to investigate Saddle Hill on Nevis developed through conversations with local heritage workers, residents, and my scholarly interests in culture contact and interaction. During my conversations with various Nevisian groups it quickly became apparent that many feel residents of St. Kitts undervalue Nevis' heritage. They point to the site of Brimstone Hill Fort on St. Kitts—and its status as a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage site—as proof of this divided interest. Many Nevisians expressed a desire to see Saddle Hill receive similar international attention. Saddle Hill represents an impressive attempt at colonial-era defense architecture in the Caribbean and has received little attention from the international heritage community. The scant historical documentation regarding the site meant that historical archaeology represents a primary method for developing a deeper history of the site. In addition, the ability to document the everyday aspects of military life on Nevis would provide unique information regarding a poorly understood aspect of colonial history in the region.

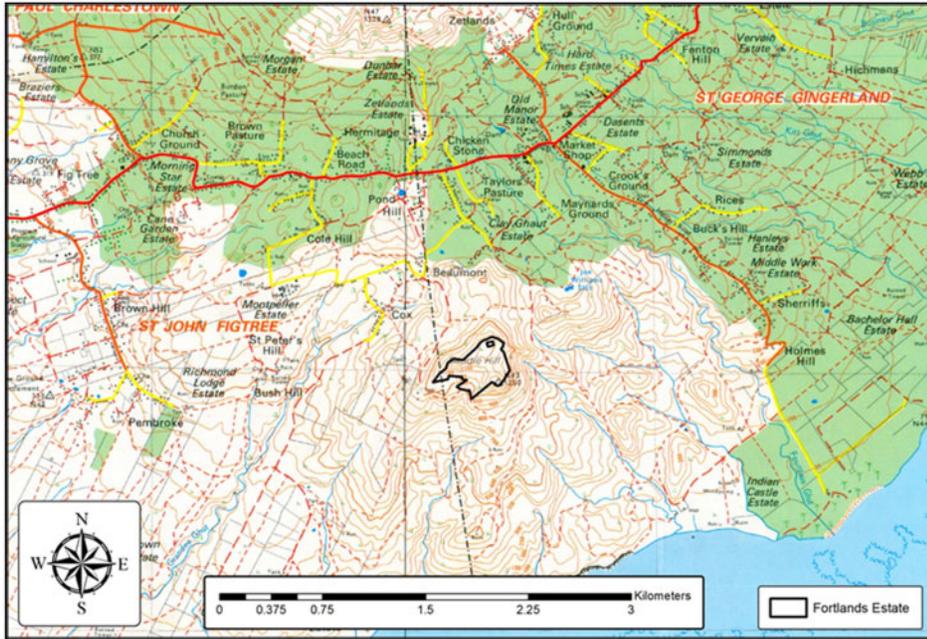


FIGURE 2 Location of Saddle Hill.

*Illustration by author.*

Our first four-week season took place between May and June 2012 and centered on the Saddle Hill fortifications, located on the southern side of Nevis (Figure 2). The fortress, as it is referred to by locals, was constructed between the 1710s and 1740s—most likely by enslaved laborers—after several decades of planning (Hubbard 1996: 98–99; Machling 2012: 281). The fortifications were manned sporadically by members of the local militia for the next several decades. The fort had its three signal cannons removed in 1782 when Basseterre on St. Kitts surrendered to French forces and a small French garrison was quartered for two years in Nevis’ capital Charlestown (Dyde 2005: 109–110).

The construction of Saddle Hill was due in large part to the ongoing hostilities between the British and French during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Dutch attack on Nevis in 1673 was successfully repelled by other ships and canon at Fort Charles (location of the 2013 and 2014 field seasons). As such, these earlier attacks do not seem to have had much effect on the citizens of Nevis, at least with regards to building additional fortifications on the island. However, the successful French attack and subsequent invasion of Nevis in 1706 left a lasting impression. This episode included the burning of a significant portion of Charlestown and within a decade the colonial inhabitants of Nevis committed themselves to constructing a fortification large enough to shelter many of the citizens during future attacks (Machling 2012: 281).

In all likelihood Saddle Hill’s fortifications were never completed. Various records from the Colonial Office Series at the National Archives in England support this possibility. One entry describes Saddle Hill: “within land is the ruins of an *intended*

fortification called Saddle Hill” (Machling 2012: 208 [emphasis added]). It seems the island’s colonial administration intended to man the fort full time. The Council and Assembly of Nevis Minutes from April 30, 1779 describe the following: “The Saddle Hill Gunner is to get a pay rise. A house is to be built for him in the fort and a flag staff and colours are to be bought to use for signals” (Machling 2012:155). However, archaeological investigations at the site revealed no evidence for habitation within the walls of Saddle Hill. The French invasion and control of Nevis between 1782 and 1784 appear to have had little impact on the site. There is sparse mention of a John R. Herbert rushing to Saddle Hill in 1782 to take up the post and stock the stores, suggesting that the construction of a gunner’s house, like so many colonial plans related to Saddle Hill, may never have come to fruition. Limited mentions of the fort occur in various archives from Nevis and England. It is apparent the fortifications received little attention in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, by the 1860s, correspondence describes a site covered in thick vegetation with no evidence of occupation in the intervening decades (Machling 2012: 283).

Today, Saddle Hill remains an attraction for tourists and many locals. Nevisians of both African and European descent who visited us during the 2012 field season expressed their belief that various individuals and communities occupied the site throughout the island’s history. It is clear that the site’s impressive stone walls, running along a natural ridge for approximately 2,000 feet, continue to elicit strong local interest (Figure 3).

As previously mentioned, our decision to work at Saddle Hill occurred after conversations with several local groups. These included Evelyn Henville, executive director of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society. This society has recently realized its long-term goal of becoming a Heritage Trust and one of the group’s initial responsibilities is management of key sites around Nevis such as Saddle Hill. After conversations with Henville, a series of goals for our project were agreed upon. This represents a key aspect of a collaborative archaeology: the participation of additional stakeholders in the planning stages of archaeological work. These goals were relatively broad:

- support the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society’s mission to inventory heritage properties
- utilize digital archaeology methods (e.g., geographic information system (GIS) and GPS) to locate and analyze archaeological resources
- work with various groups to document, preserve, and interpret Nevis’ intangible heritage (e.g., oral histories)
- promote undergraduate and graduate instruction
- develop a web-based data portal to disseminate research
- promote engaged scholarship through the creation of sustainable projects engaging local schools, and
- utilize new digital technologies to bring Nevisian heritage to life in new and engaging ways.

We successfully expanded our network of collaborators during 2012 to include local residents outside the capital city of Charlestown and the island’s government. Many of these residents eagerly shared their long-term and telling interest in Saddle Hill.

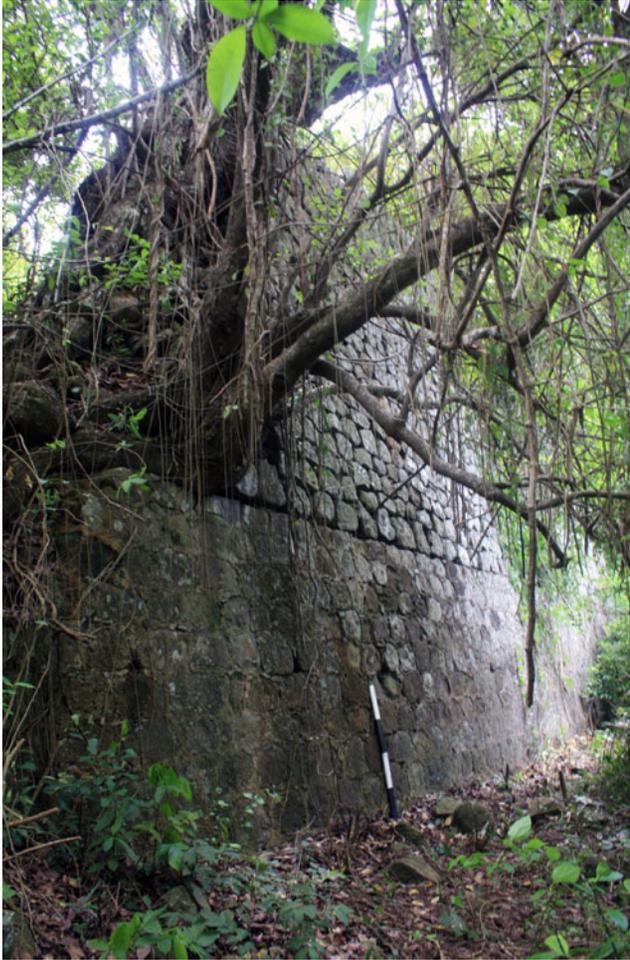


FIGURE 3 Section of Saddle Hill fortifications.

*Photograph by author.*

### The “color” of Nevisian heritage

The colonial history of Saddle Hill makes it an unlikely candidate for a collaborative project engaging local African diaspora communities, at least from a traditional archaeological perspective. Although enslaved laborers were employed in the fort’s construction, long-term habitation does not appear to have occurred and insights into the lives of Nevisians (black or white) through material remains at the site seem unlikely. Archaeological work reveals little in the way of artifacts and further supports the assertion that full-scale habitation did not take place, most likely owing to the fort’s relatively remote location and daunting geography.

Such a stance is unfortunate as many citizens consider Saddle Hill to be an important site relating to Nevisian history. Prominent among them is Edward Herbert (Figure 4), a long-time resident of Nevis who also spent considerable time in England where significant Nevisian communities exist in Leeds, Bristol, and



FIGURE 4 Edward Herbert at Peak Heaven.  
*Photograph by author.*

elsewhere. These correspond to large Nevisian communities in the USA in the Bronx and New Haven, Connecticut. Herbert returned to Nevis fulltime in the 1990s and dedicated himself to protecting the island's heritage. His family currently manages Peak Heaven, a reconstructed heritage village representing Nevisian life as it existed in the early twentieth century. Herbert believes the early 1900s represents a pivotal time for Nevis. The majority of planters had left following the collapse of the sugar industry and the remaining Nevisians developed local traditions regarding everyday life.

Peak Heaven clearly reflects the Herbert family's historical interests. The site includes reconstructions of Nevisian houses from the early twentieth century and a small heritage museum. The site is also the location of a seventeenth-century sugar mill, one of the earliest on the island. Herbert and his family also run the Coal Pot Restaurant (named after a local ceramic cooking vessel commonly used on Nevis), which offers traditional Nevisian cuisine and a commanding view of Saddle Hill. This aspect of the location is telling, as Peak Heaven is not Herbert's first choice for the location of a site celebrating Nevisian heritage.

In the 1990s the Herbert family decided to develop Saddle Hill. They expended considerable personal capital into developing the public land into a heritage park. This included the construction of a restaurant celebrating Nevisian food. The family cleared walking paths through the thick brush that constantly threatens the site and installed historical markers at key locations. They also installed a high-powered telescope atop Nelson's Lookout, with support from Greenpeace, to view whales as they migrate through the Leeward Islands in spring and autumn. The family produced maps, shirts, and even postcards representing their interpretation of Saddle Hill (Figure 5). Edward Herbert worked briefly with international

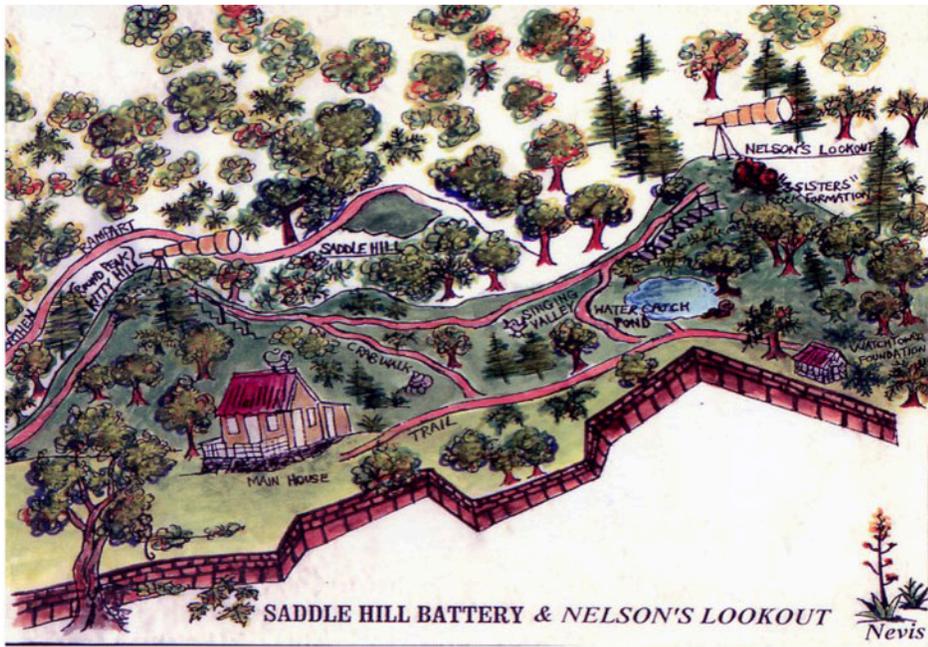


FIGURE 5 Postcard of Saddle Hill.

*By permission of Edward Herbert.*

archaeologists, but no long-term projects materialized during this time. While I cannot speculate on the intentions of others, it appears the site was understandably not a relevant location for others working on Nevis. In addition, the site's presumed British or “white” association makes it an unlikely candidate for a collaborative project exploring Afro-Caribbean heritage. My decision to investigate the site rested on three interrelated concerns. I wanted to support local heritage work, collaboratively engage with Afro-Caribbean communities in the investigation of their past, and provide my students with a valuable field experience exploring interaction and trade. Saddle Hill offered little in archaeological experience beyond the considerable amount of clearing and site mapping required to fully document the site's walls (Figure 6). Ultimately, the third goal was less successful than the first two goals of engaging local communities.

Interestingly, Herbert's interpretation of the site included tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. His postcard locates both cultural and natural resources in its interpretations of the site. This juxtaposes areas of rare birdsong alongside the site's historical lookouts and stone walls. This is a fascinating way of thinking about Saddle Hill. The inclusion of birdsong and migrating whales again suggests a unique conceptualization of heritage landscapes. This moves beyond a site's experiential character. Instead of reproducing the split between culture and nature at the heart of Western thought, the Herbert family instead produced interpretive material which simultaneously celebrated the site's unique natural and cultural aspects.

The family's vision for Saddle Hill was never fully realized. They unsuccessfully battled to protect the site from developers while attempting to gain a legal foothold for

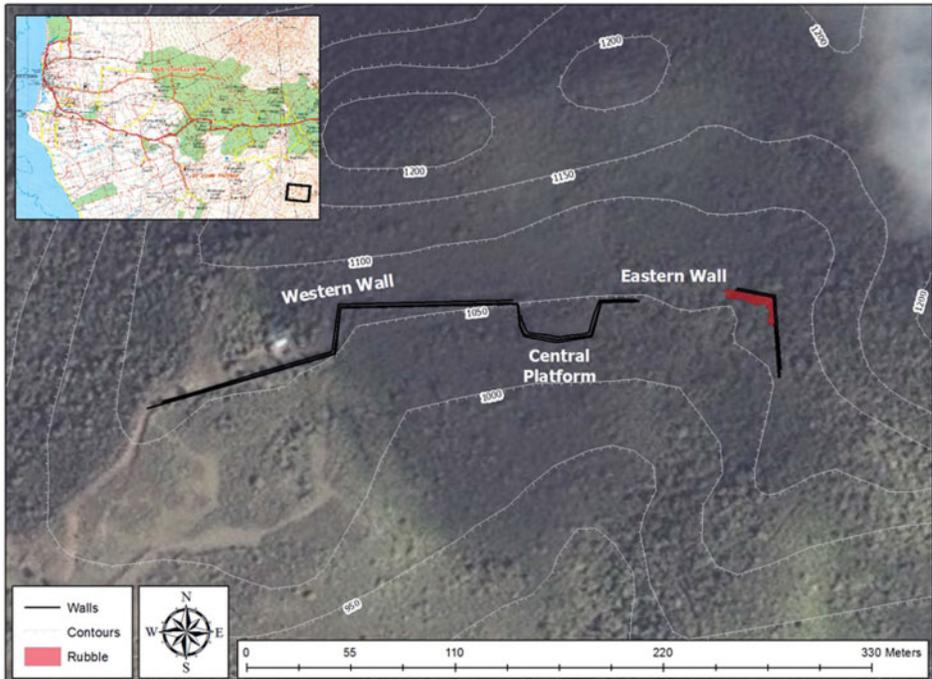


FIGURE 6 Areas of Saddle Hill.

*Illustration by author.*

their investment in the publically-owned property. I learned about their experience through visits with Herbert and his family at their home and Peak Heaven. Herbert was keen to discuss his earlier experiences at Saddle Hill. He spoke about the six years his family ran a restaurant at the site as well as the labor exerted to clear paths, erect historical markers, and produce souvenirs. Herbert also shared his concern that young Nevisians were losing touch with their history and this motivated him to document sites as an exercise connecting youth with their roots. He lamented the destruction of historic sites and discussed at length the looting of cut stone from ruins to build walking paths and courtyards, a practice exacerbated by a growing expatriate community. Herbert also commented how the use of archaeological sites for dog-fighting—a growing pastime among Nevisian youth—represented another example of how local residents poorly valued their heritage resources.

While the family maintained a presence for many years on Saddle Hill, the Nevisian government eventually forced them to leave. Herbert is quick to point out that it was “another government” and not the current set of democratically elected officials which forced his family to vacate the site. There is little doubt that economic interests motivated the government’s decision to halt the family’s plans. They cite the construction of a mobile phone and communications tower on the northern ridge of Saddle Hill and particularly the construction of a service road to the tower. The road winds around the southern portion of Saddle Hill and crosses the fort’s walls. To accomplish this it was necessary to destroy several feet of wall and build an earthen ramp obscuring approximately ten feet of the wall’s base to allow vehicles to drive



FIGURE 7 Field school students clear section of Saddle Hill fort damaged by road construction.

*Photograph by author.*

past (Figure 7). The family mounted a short-lived, brave, and ultimately futile effort to protect the Saddle Hill fortifications during the road's construction following the government's ultimatum to leave. During one of our conversations, Herbert described how his wife, who sat quietly beside him nodding, physically positioned herself in the way of the earthmover tasked with demolishing part of the fort's wall. For the Herbert family and others, there is little concern over the color of Saddle Hill, or that such a thing is even important. Locals view Saddle Hill as part of Nevisian history and believe it should receive the same international attention and support as other archaeological sites in the Caribbean.

Numerous individuals visited us during our time at Saddle Hill. News of an international group of archaeologists working at the site quickly spread across the island. We had daily visitors to the site, and others came to the public day organized by the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society. The majority of these individuals were eager to share their theories about the site's construction, its place in Nevisian history, and the developmental potential of the area as a resource for the citizens of Nevis and tourists alike. The majority of these visitors came from nearby villages, were of African descent, and never questioned the importance of the site as central to their conception of Nevisian identity. Many of these visitors regaled us with stories of visiting the site decades earlier with their parents. They told us how trekking to the summit of Saddle Hill remains a powerful bonding experience for families today.

The project's explicit interest in the intangible aspects of heritage motivated us to pay particular attention to these experiences and supported the interpretation of

Saddle Hill as a site of living heritage. The unstructured and structured interviews complemented our archaeological work and repeatedly demonstrated the centrality of the site in local memory. The site's impressive stone walls were more than a curiosity of some bygone colonial era. Saddle Hill represents for many locals a tangible manifestation of Nevis' place in world history, connecting the island and its inhabitants to the outside world and countering narratives which might represent Nevis as provincial or out-of-touch with the modern world. It is curious that a site of colonial power should become a central location of memory and identity-making for members of the African diaspora, and only through our exploration of the intangible does an alternative value of Saddle Hill's tangible remains emerge. The local value of the site is not tied to a racialized identity. A new interpretation emerges requiring us to understand the cosmopolitan and mixed nature of Nevisian self-representation. This represents an important example of how decolonizing archaeological practice (and perspective) is key to collaboratively engaging local communities. While such a realization does not alter the technical aspect of conducting archaeology (e.g., excavation), it does alter the methodology with regards to inclusion of stakeholder perspectives *throughout* the course of archaeological investigations. In this case, it also altered our choice of site and alerted us to the local value of heritage resources in important ways.

There is an alternative explanation as to why Saddle Hill may speak to Nevisians: the colonization of the mind. This explanation suggests that Nevisians may neglect their own sites in favor of colonial sites. I find this explanation unsatisfying. After all, what type of a site is quintessentially Nevisian? While the internationalization of colonial tropes (e.g., white as primary and black as secondary) does occur in Caribbean contexts (Fanon 1965 [1952]), this line of thinking runs the risk of removing the agency of local communities. Are we willing to deny this agency to locals in regards to defining their own identity? I have made the decision to privilege the accounts of our informants, and the Herbert family comprise key informants cogently expressing the broader cosmopolitan identity of Nevisians today. We spoke with dozens of visitors during the 2012 field season who shared similar interests in the site. While a small group of island administrators may have blocked attempts at commemorating the site in the past, the current island administration is championing this type of collaborative work.

## **Decolonizing collaborative archaeology in the Caribbean**

Postcolonial archaeology represents a recent, ongoing, and active process examining the relationship between the postcolonial critique and archaeology (Gosden 2001; 2004). In the past decade postcolonial archaeology has attracted a strong company of scholars, evidenced by recent volumes on the subject (Liebmann and Rizvi 2008; Lydon and Rizvi 2010; Schmidt 2009). A central focus of much of this research concerns the exercise of power by first-world researchers following foundational work in related disciplines (Said 1978; Trouillot 1995). A nascent tradition of postcolonial archaeology is developing in the Caribbean. The majority of this work focuses on the importance of creating local archaeological expertise. Caribbean-born archaeologists are understandably

critical of the continued dominance by foreign academic elites regarding the representation of Caribbean pasts and presents (Jiménez and Ramos 2008). This foreign perspective has stifled our understanding of past indigenous lifeways which are already difficult to reconstruct given the rapid and nearly complete extermination of native populations throughout the region (Alegria 1997). This precludes the formation of an indigenous archaeological practice and privileges a continental and land perspective which views island history through the lens of isolation. The adoption of an island and sea perspective reorients interpretations of prehistoric Caribbean peoples and their views regarding the sea—instead of viewing the sea as a border, these peoples would have viewed the seas as an extension of their world (Torres and Ramos 2008). Rivera-Collazo (2011) sees the abandonment of framing devices like isolation as a primary step towards the decolonization of Caribbean archaeology.

The scant postcolonial perspective in Caribbean archaeology is puzzling since foundational postcolonial texts originate from the region and were penned by Caribbean nationals who examined the harsh, lived experiences of the region's colonized citizenry (Fanon 1965 [1952]; Césaire 1972 [1965]). One is left to wonder if this absence is partly the result of Caribbean archaeology following a centuries-old pattern in the region. Namely, the process by which larger academic institutions choose contexts on larger islands in much the same way as early colonial nations initially claimed the larger islands for themselves, leaving subsequent nations (or institutions in this analogy) the smaller contexts either through an inability to control them or lack of interest in doing so. While Wilson's (1989; 2007) work on Nevis is an exception to this trend, it is undeniable that maintaining systems of academic knowledge production plays a role. However, my central point regarding the color of heritage refers to a more subtle process, one of *misrecognition* as it relates to our failure to perceive biases affecting the very selection of which sites we choose to investigate as archaeologists.

Misrecognition as defined by Bourdieu describes the inability to recognize any particular practice “which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 168). Bourdieu conceptualizes misrecognition as a form of symbolic violence. Although it bears some resemblance to the Marxist idea of false consciousness, misrecognition should not be confused with the process whereby subordinated groups come to view social inequality as inevitable and natural (Leone 1999). In addition, the utility of false consciousness as an explanatory tool, and particularly its denial of subordinated group agency, has been recently questioned by others (Mrozowski 2006). Misrecognition is related to Bourdieu's views on habitus, which refers to the deeply socialized dispositions embodied by agents. Habitus does not govern all human action, such as highly ritualized practices drawing on ancient ideologies wherein the individual's agency is restricted. The agency of individuals reciprocally interacts with the structures of society. Orser (2007) references Bourdieu's famous phrase that “structured structures [are] predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu 1990: 53), a phrase which underlines the idea that agents reproduce social structures through their habitus—those enculturated opinions and actions produced from growing up within a specific cultural setting. Bourdieu's ideas of habitus state that such interactions can be conscious, but more typically are not. Misrecognition and the symbolic violence it supports describes a slippery process and

has reemerged in recent discussions in rejection of the explanatory power of the concept of false consciousness (Kaplan 2012). This slippery process means that, even if we recognize some ontological truth, we may fail to adjust our behavior and practices in sufficiently transformative ways. The act of coloring heritage represents a key form of archaeological misrecognition and requires a conscious process of decolonization to address it. This begins with recognizing that our understanding of sites may be unintentionally limiting with regards to the types of value archaeologists assume communities place upon specific sites.

Historical archaeology's increased attention to colonization and colonialism has been lauded by some as being a primary arena of postcolonial archaeology (Liebmann 2008: 4). However, those efforts have tended to valorize European achievement while subjugating the agency of non-European peoples through metaphors and terms like "cultural encounter, cultural entanglement, or embracing of modernity" (Holl 2009: 141). Collaborative archaeology of the African diaspora runs a similar risk of unintentionally re-inscribing specific and sometimes negative representations of Afro-Caribbean communities. In part, this risk is the result of archaeologists focusing on contexts which can reduce or ignore black agency. Investigations of Caribbean plantation contexts continue to outnumber other contexts in general, but also with regards to the African diaspora (Armstrong and Hauser 2009). This focus on plantation contexts within African-American archaeology is well documented in the literature. With the exception of Black Lucy's Garden (Baker 1980; Bullen and Bullen 1945), archaeological investigations of African-American life during the mid and late-twentieth century focused almost exclusively on plantation contexts (Adams and Boling 1989; Ascher and Fairbanks 1971; Ferguson 1980; Otto 1980). Critiques of plantation archaeology in the 1990s questioned the value of such approaches and challenged archaeologists to focus on broader social contexts regarding our reasons for selecting sites, the performative nature of the discipline, and the need to pay closer attention to the communities which might engage with our research (Franklin 1997; McDavid 1997; Potter 1991). These sentiments inspired a generation of archaeologists to investigate additional African-American contexts such as free black towns (Shackel 2010), mortuary contexts (La Roche and Blakey 1997), the recent and contemporary past (Davidson 2007; 2008), and antislavery resistance (Weik 2012). It is also important to note that innovative treatments of plantation contexts continue to reveal important aspects of African-American life. My desire to expand the focus of African diaspora archaeology is akin to Potter's (1991) critique of plantation archaeology. In other words, my discussion is not aimed at unduly critiquing other research, but rather hopes to suggest a possible reorientation for some archaeologists interested in a specific form of collaborative practice.

In this regard, Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity is another useful concept for a postcolonial archaeology of Caribbean contexts. This concept is useful for decolonizing Caribbean archaeology because it accurately references the complex interaction of national and international networks of *being* (Hauser and Hicks 2007: 262). Perhaps more importantly, hybridity highlights the ambivalence of what qualifies as African diaspora heritage. This ambiguity need not solely reference unequal power relationships between colonizer and colonized. Hybridity highlights multiplicity and stresses "the empowering nature of transcultural forms

that often make space for anticolonial resistance through the challenging of binary categories” (Liebmann 2008: 5). Therefore, hybridity should be seen as a complimentary concept alongside cosmopolitanism as both ideas embrace an active ethical stance relating to the representation of other people’s pasts.

The process of recognizing how we color heritage is part of a larger anthropological project to decolonize academic research (Harrison 1991; Ndlovu 2009; Smith 1999). The deep affinity Nevisians feel for Saddle Hill underscores the need for archaeologists to escape essentializing tropes of black and/versus white. In addition to opening our sense of collaborative archaeology to new ways of conceptualizing heritage across and beyond color lines, archaeologists may consider embracing additional methodologies from heritage studies. Expanded approaches drawing on intangible heritage (e.g., oral histories) offer us ways of connecting with communities and better understanding local perspectives regarding what constitutes locally-important heritage. This is a key methodological consideration if we are to avoid the creation of what González-Ruibal (2009) terms “heritage victims.” The colonial legacy of what constitutes archaeological practice in the Caribbean inhibits this goal. This includes the view that archaeology is solely concerned with excavation and artifact analysis—a view many Nevisians now hold based upon their experiences with specific archaeologists. Such an understanding of archaeology restricts true collaboration. Addressing this misrepresentation requires us to embrace oral histories and other methods for researching intangible heritage. This includes expanding the popular conception of archaeology to include these methods.

A key methodology for decolonizing Caribbean heritage rests upon the successful construction of research projects paying attention to the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is defined as the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills (e.g., musical instruments and artworks) present in a culture, along with instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therein” (Byrne 2009: 229). Researchers increasingly understand that tangible heritage (e.g., archaeological sites) only “becomes ‘heritage’ when it becomes recognizable within a particular set of cultural or social values, which are themselves ‘intangible’” (Smith and Akagawa 2009: 6). The colonial legacy of Caribbean archaeology can restrict our ability to successfully combine both aspects of heritage into a cogent research design. As one Nevisian heritage worker remarked to me: “archaeologists don’t collect oral histories.” This is an unfortunate perspective since many historical archaeologists working in other locations regularly integrate oral histories into their research. This integration has allowed archaeologists to successfully situate oral history alongside archaeological and documentary data in numerous American contexts (Brown 1973; Christman 2010; Purser 1992; Schuyler 1974; 1977). Outside of these contexts, an explicitly postcolonial archaeology increasingly recognizes oral history as more than an additional dataset, but also as vital to the practice of historical archaeology (Meskell 2005; Schmidt 1997; 2006; Schmidt and Walz 2007). This perspective has made little headway within the Caribbean where a divide between tangible and intangible heritage remains, mirroring the divide between cultural and natural. It is also important for historical archaeologists to personally become involved in the collection of oral testimony. The importance of participating in the act of interviewing allows archaeologists to center their interests while demonstrating a profound respect for local

communities. My work on Nevis benefited from this integration. This type of work also provides students with valuable ethnoarchaeological experience. I also routinely include cultural anthropology students in my field projects.

Postcolonialism is not simply a new gloss, or perspective, exposing the unequal power relationships between elite academics and local communities. The expansion of archaeological practice to include intangible heritage illuminates the complex and multifaceted local views of historical sites. Acknowledging and respecting the local view of Saddle Hill as an integral part of Nevisian history requires that I decolonize my own view of what counts as African diaspora heritage in the Caribbean. One practical effect of this ongoing realization is a more explicit engagement with oral testimonies for my students during future field seasons. For instance, during the 2013 field season, students had the opportunity to conduct structured interviews investigating Nevis' rich heritage. The implications of de-coloring heritage on Nevis are being actively managed to engage local communities. This is not an easy task since we are working against deep colonial traditions of archaeology which privilege foreign elite interests at the cost of local concerns. This requires a process of education and an attempt to rearticulate what constitutes archaeological practice in the minds of locals and archaeologists alike.

### **Concluding comments**

The colonial legacy of archaeology is a global phenomenon (Gosden 1999), and representations of sites which deny agency to local groups is not restricted to past interpretations of Great Zimbabwe or the earthen mounds of North America. A process of misrecognition continues to obscure the potential of many sites to support collaborative archaeological projects. This process is centered around the coloring of places along the lines of externally-defined ethnic and racial affiliations based on a selective view of a site's historical significance. A process of decolonization has begun in many areas around the globe, typically aided by the development of an indigenous archaeology. In the Caribbean, where indigenous groups quickly vanished after the colonial encounter, the active decolonization of archaeological practice increasingly will rely upon emerging collaborative methodologies. These cannot simply be transposed from other contexts, and the creation of collaborative archaeologies recognizing complex and multivocal histories represents an important step forward in this process.

The case study for this article seeks to illuminate a perspective within historical archaeology that sometimes limits our ability to engage local communities in locally meaningful ways. Postcolonialism and movements to decolonize academic methodologies (Smith 1999) present archaeologists with a powerful reflexive perspective engendering the exploration of new inclusionary methods. This realization is producing a new collaborative archaeology on Nevis, one which positions the intangible and tangible aspects of heritage alongside one another. In addition to the extra time required from project personnel, such goals are difficult to realize because the colonial legacy of Caribbean archaeology produces skewed local views of what constitutes possible archaeological practice. A mixed methods approach to heritage situating intangible heritage (e.g., oral histories) alongside

tangible heritage (e.g., archaeology) expands our interpretations of sites and their place in local memory. On Nevis, this enlarges our perspective of which sites are constitutive of a Nevisian identity.

A central tenet of postcolonial archaeology is the active decolonization of the researcher's mind. The decolonization of our minds forces us to confront issues of misrecognition which often function as a form of symbolic violence actively silencing local groups and denying them the agency to define their own identity. While such silences are harmful to some communities, the loss is global. International researchers and heritage scholars are left with an essentialized representation of the world, one which denies the depth and complexity that are central to the human condition.

## Acknowledgements

This article and the research supporting it would not have been possible without the people of Nevis. I am particularly indebted to Evelyn Henville of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society and Edward Herbert of Peak Heaven. They have both helped me to better understand how archaeology can serve local interests. I am also grateful to the students of the annual Monmouth University field school in Caribbean historical archaeology. The project was made possible by funding from Monmouth University Wayne D. McMurray School of Humanities and Social Sciences as well as Monmouth University's Geographic Information Systems Program, which provided monetary and equipment support. I also want to extend a special thank you to my partner, Diana González-Tennant, who volunteers her time to serve as the project's assistant field director.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term NHSP was retired in 2013 after I decided to concentrate on the site of Fort Charles. The current project is entitled the Fort Charles Archaeological Project (FCAP).

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.nevis-nhcs.org](http://www.nevis-nhcs.org).

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## About the author

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