ARCHAEOLOGIES OF INVISIBILITY AND NEO-RACISM

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Kennewickman and his interlocutor may well be correct that systems of difference masquerading within other metaphors are simply new forms of race. In a rush to deliver race's death rites and paint racism as somehow irrelevant to archaeology, underlying differentiating categories like ethnicity, immigration, indigeneity, or nationalism risk becoming "neo-racist" substitutes for vulgar racial collectives. Yet while Kennewickman's polemic sounds a familiar color line consciousness that acknowledges the constructed nature of race, his struggle to step outside it is a familiar one confronted by many racialized subjects. In this textual dialogue, for instance, there is a telling separation between the voices of Kennewickman and S&S, who confront each other as a divided self, aspiring to mend an individuality torn by race and separated across time. In many ways, this divided racial subject is utterly the product racial ideology aspires to create. Kennewickman's internal disheaval is much like the "double consciousness" that twentieth-century African American scholars have placed at the heart of African diasporan life. In the most famous formulation of that idea, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that African America viewed the world through what he described as the "veil" of race. That veil restricted African American privilege and shaped all sense of self and collective, yet it was utterly invisible to White Americans who took racial privilege for granted.

However, Kennewickman sounds a counterintuitive lament that in a racialized archaeology, those *without* racial subjectivity—such as the White professor christened "Chicken Nuggets"—will "always live invisibly." The metaphor of invisibility could almost have been torn wholesale from Ralph Ellison's argument that Black America had been rendered "invisible" and dehumanized by racism's capacity to strip African culture, ignore fundamental injustices, and deny African America individual identity. Situated at the heart of American life, Ellison argued, African America was ironically effaced by racial ideology. For most African diasporan scholars, though, race's ideological design is to make racialized people "invisible" to a dominant gaze, and Kennewickman ironically yearns for just that invisibility.

The key question in any scholarship of race is how differentiating rhetoric is used to leverage inequality; archaeologically, the subsequent issue is how such rhetoric shapes the social practice of archaeology and in turn how material culture literally reproduces, negotiates, and resists such inequality. Kennewickman is skeptical of all sorts of collective distinction, and he is suspicious of the concrete reasons archaeologists make such divisions, but difference itself is not the issue; rather, the question is how difference was and is used to rationalize systematic inequalities like broken treaties, human rights inequities, and various racially exclusive citizen rights.

Scholars have often somewhat simplistically reduced race to color-based structural inequalities while disavowing biological difference, and the Kennewickman dialogue suggests that archaeologists have often merely taken aim on structural racist practices. Kennewickman's eagerness to confront race as an appropriately archaeological topic inevitably may be greeted by disdain that the social dimensions of race and racism are not useful archaeological metaphors and lack genuine material implications. Yet nothing could be more material than race and racism, and in a racialized society race is invested in all materiality. That easy philosophical statement, though, does not provide especially clear methodological guidance for how to interpret such a complex form of power in the most quotidian material culture. To further complicate matters, race took a vast range of contextually and historically specific forms. Nevertheless, this has never stopped archaeologists from interpreting equally dynamic dimensions of social identity such as ethnicity, class, or gender, so the question is how an archaeology of race might frame questions in ways that confront the link between race and materiality.

Kennewickman suggests that anthropologists have hollowly declared that race is not "real," and in some hands race has been rendered as an ideological falsity to simply dispel with the objectivity of archaeological analysis. Yet confirming that various social groups did not conform to period xenophobia risks missing the genuine power of such ideology on its targets and the conflicted consciousness racism has long produced. For instance, in a 1910 travelogue on life in African America, English visitor William Archer concluded that many African Americans were in fact model consumers, an identity that implied some significant stake in citizenship as well. Yet he indicated that "What troubled me throughout my domiciliary visits was the sense that (with one or two exceptions) these homes were not homes at all. ... They were no more homelike than the shopwindow rooms of the up-to-date upholsterer. If they were lived in at all, it was from a sense of duty, a self-conscious effort after a life of 'refinement.' They were, in short, entirely imitative and mechanical tributes to the American ideal of the prosperous, cultivated home" (Archer 1910:162–163). Ironically, these genteel African Americans so completely reproduced dominant ideals that Archer found them oddly *inauthentic*. Confronted by Black genteel consumers who recognized the symbolic power of such materiality, Archer felt compelled to somehow make these households invisible once again. However, these "entirely imitative" African-American homes were a clear statement of citizenship by a genteel Black class denied such rights despite their genuine affluence. The trappings of idealized American parlors provided material confirmation of self-perceived genteel standing, both resisting Black invisibility and embracing ostensibly White-exclusive ideological notions of consumer citizenship.

Even seemingly inauthentic racist beliefs often have successfully masqueraded as reasonable metaphors defining all social experience. To conclude that race is ideological and simply false does not wrestle with how such ideologies conflict their targets just as their repetition distorts others' view of those targeted racial collectives. In such a vision of race, distinctions between authentic experience and contrived racial representation are exceptionally problematic. Ideologies of Blackness, for example, were not simply intended to disempower Black Americans; rather, they were mechanisms that disciplined White people, fostered differentiating social and material practices, and provided psychological if not material advantages to those citizens classed as White. To address the depth of such ideologies we might most productively turn our archaeological attention to "White sites" and ask how various Europeans who came to be considered White secured and attempted to reproduce that status with material consumption. The targets of an archaeology of race cannot simply be people of color if we hope to fathom the persistent hold race has had on the White imagination.

That same position compels us to assess where we stand as a discipline. Most archaeologists probably do not think, as S&S suggests, that racial "reconciliation is impossible," but in the absence of clear statements on the color line and social justice it is difficult to gauge the discipline's racial politics. For guidance we might productively return to Du Bois' argument that double consciousness brings with it a unique political voice. For some thinkers, a distinctive color line consciousness made African America the most prescient of all observers of American life, because African Americans were systematically marginalized yet seated at the heart of the American experience. We might reasonably say much the same thing about indigenous peoples across the globe who were racialized in the wake of European colonization. No social and historical process could be more central to American if not world history than race and racism, yet it remained largely unaddressed in public space for most of five centuries. It is the tragic absence of that discussion archaeologists can now very productively confront and address.

References Cited

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