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Abstract	This article discusses the development of a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project in the historic resort town of Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. It builds on critical theoretical agendas in community-based archaeologies by asking how Black feminist theory-informed CBPR could help archaeologists create meaningful, equitable, and theoretically grounded relationships with local communities. Through rigorous archaeological investigations, CBPR methodologies can empower communities to use the past to effect social change on their terms. By collaborating with communities to strengthen and expand existing heritage programs, archaeologists can share their skills, knowledges, and critical points of view while actively minimizing power imbalances and increasing accountability.	
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Keywords (separated by '!')	Community-based participatory research - Collaborative archaeology - Black landownership - Community construction	
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Footnote Information		
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# 1 Seeking Radical Solidarity in Heritage Studies: Exploring 2 the Intersection of Black Feminist Archaeologies 3 and Geographies in Oak Bluffs, MA

4 Jeffrey J. Burnett<sup>1</sup>

5 Accepted: 9 March 2021

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## 8 Abstract

9 This article discusses the development of a community-based participatory research  
10 (CBPR) project in the historic resort town of Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. It builds  
11 on critical theoretical agendas in community-based archaeologies by asking how  
12 Black feminist theory-informed CBPR could help archaeologists create meaningful,  
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mizing power imbalances and increasing accountability.

18

19 **Keywords** Community-based participatory research · Collaborative archaeology ·  
Black landownership · Community construction

20

“No voting on who gets to be people.” N.K. Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate* (2016)

21

## 22 Introduction

23

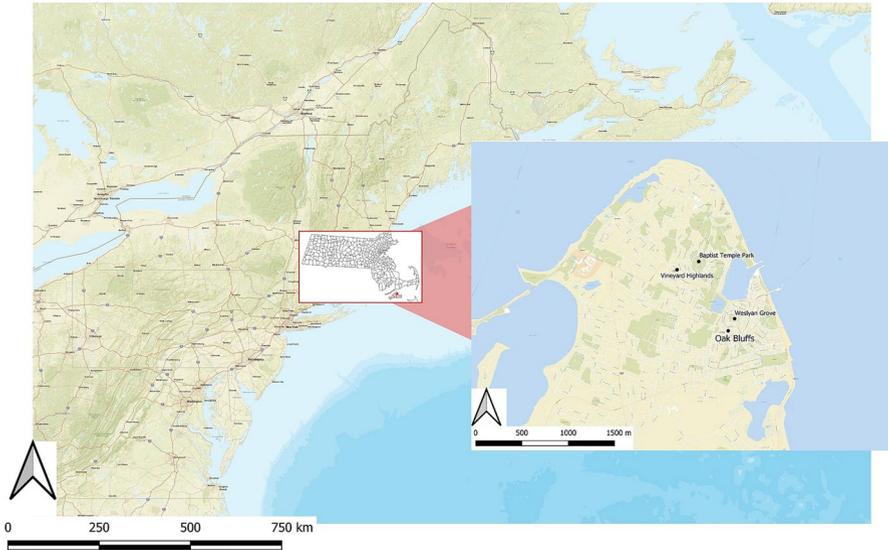
24 In this article I discuss the early-stage development of a community-based participa-  
25 tory research (CBPR) project that explores the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth  
26 century history of the resort town of Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts (Fig. 1). This article  
27 follows other recent publications that extend critical theoretical agendas into com-  
munity-based archaeologies (Bloch 2020; Cipolla et al. 2019; Kiddey 2020). I aim

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Map Showing Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts and the Location of Martha's Vineyard



**Fig. 1** A map showing the location of Martha's Vineyard and the town of Oak Bluffs in relation to the continental US. The Vineyard highlands, Baptist Temple Park, and Wesleyan Grove Camp Grounds are all highlighted. Map created by the author using QGIS

AQ2

28 to add to these perspectives by asking how Black feminist theory-informed CBPR  
29 can create meaningful, equitable, and theoretically grounded relationships with local  
30 community members and organizations with the goal of producing rigorous investi-  
31 gations of the past that empower communities to use the past to effect social change  
32 on their own terms. I believe the intersection of these frameworks can help radically  
33 reshape the discipline of archaeology itself, not by making it possible for archaeolo-  
34 gists to use new methods and theories to reproduce oppressive structures and justify  
35 our presence in communities, but to re-imagine the discipline from the ground up.  
36 Both Black feminist archaeology and CBPR have been, and continue to be, deployed  
37 to alter who does archaeology, how archaeology does its work, and what archaeol-  
38 ogy is used for.

39 In community-based collaborative archaeology projects of the African diaspora,  
40 Black feminist theories and methodologies create the potential for radical solidar-  
41 ity. Radical solidarity can be defined as “a self-interrogating and always open-ended  
42 capacity to acknowledge and respond to indefinitely many heterogeneous perspec-  
43 tives” (Medina 2013:277). Black feminist theory and practice assert that analyses  
44 of heterogeneous human perspectives and lived experiences are vital to producing  
45 accurate understandings of our social world and redressing structural inequalities,  
46 including race, gender, class, and sexuality-based inequalities.

47 Through the application of a concept of radical solidarity grounded in Black  
48 feminist theory, CBPR projects can assert the need for a multivocality that allows  
49 the broadest possible community participation and remains critical of past oppres-  
50 sions and conscious of dominant narratives. Demonic grounds (McKittrick 2006)

51 represent one theoretically grounded way to frame a project so that, from the begin-  
52 ning, the production of discordant historical narratives is not smoothed over but,  
53 instead, embraced. The concept of demonic grounds is also used to understand com-  
54 plex and contradictory historical narratives of the community of Oak Bluffs, Mas-  
55 sachusetts that refuse a single, cohesive story.

56 Drawing from Katherine McKittrick's (2006) concepts of *Black geographies*  
57 and *demonic grounds*, I explore how these can be utilized in community-based col-  
58 laborative archaeology of the African diaspora to position archaeology to recognize  
59 and work for pre-existing social justice-orientated heritage efforts in a community.  
60 Archaeologist Ayana Omilade Flewelling (2017) applies McKittrick's concept to dis-  
61 cuss how historical narratives that direct viewers towards a white patriarchal lens  
62 of place disavow, but do not erase, demonic grounds or "the complex position and  
63 potentiality of black women's sense of place" (Flewelling 2017:71). Defined as such,  
64 demonic grounds are spaces rife with contradictions that reveal the complexity of  
65 quotidian life that cannot be silenced but are often repressed for the sake of narrative  
66 cohesion. This narrative cohesion ultimately reinforces patriarchal white suprema-  
67 cist histories of place and society, even as demonic grounds present the possibility  
68 of disrupting both.

69 Community-based participatory archaeologies begin with the goal of democra-  
70 tizing the past by working with variously marginalized communities to ensure they  
71 are directly involved with the creation and dissemination of historical knowledge  
72 (Atalay 2012:3–4; 2014:48–49). Some challenges archaeologists face in engaging in  
73 collaborative work include ensuring this work is rigorous, that it addresses ongoing  
74 systems of oppression, and that it refuses to "Other," dehumanize, essentialize, or  
75 patronize the communities studied and the experiences of individuals and groups in  
76 the past and the present. Sonya Atalay (2020:10–11) identifies that a goal of feminist  
77 scholarship is to produce engaging narratives "as a humanizing yet rigorous means  
78 of doing science." She thus advocates for the discipline of archaeology to draw on  
79 Indigenous sciences that center narrative teaching to make compelling stories "an  
80 obligatory aspect of what archaeologists do." Atalay (2020:10–11) points out that  
81 archaeological training often does not include or value "knowledge mobilization  
82 skills," or the ability to create compelling narratives that entwine archaeological  
83 data with present-day communities and present-day problems.

84 To address this, Atalay (2020:10) advises that archaeologists not be the sole  
85 creators of narratives, but rather partner with communities as co-creators to ensure  
86 the work is culturally appropriate and that local knowledge is not appropriated. As  
87 with other aspects of CBPR, the groundwork for creative results dissemination must  
88 be established early on and be scaffolded through all phases of a project. Here the  
89 need for full participation is framed by a striving for radical solidarity starting at  
90 the very beginning of a project. Only by understanding and foregrounding local  
91 concerns can a community-based collaborative project be successful in Oak Bluffs.  
92 In this instance, success is defined as archaeology that highlights social relation-  
93 ships, fosters long-term engagement, and benefits the community in real ways (Ata-  
94 lay 2012:63–77). Adapting collaborative archaeology is about making archaeology  
95 work for communities already learning, preserving, sharing, and benefiting from  
Oak Bluffs' history.

96 I will argue that archaeological conceptions of space and community, particularly  
97 those developed with Black feminist perspectives, can make room for community-  
98 based archaeology that seeks to engage with and extend preexisting heritage work in  
99 a community. This intervention helps to ensure community participation and owner-  
100 ship of a project that uses archaeology, rather than creating archaeologist-driven pro-  
101 jects. Understanding that people are always engaged in geographic struggles, those  
102 struggles over “the soil, the body, theory, history, and saying and expressing a sense  
103 of place” (McKittrick 2006:121), expands a notion of heritage work for archaeolo-  
104 gists. The best future for community-based participatory archaeology may be to col-  
105 laborate with communities to strengthen and expand existing heritage programs. In  
106 this way archaeologists can share their knowledges, skills, and critical points of view  
107 while actively minimizing power imbalances and increasing accountability.

108 As archaeologists, we have institutional access to valuable expertise, equipment,  
109 knowledges, training, and funds that can and should be shared with others who pro-  
110 duce knowledge about the past and who seek to use that knowledge to effect change  
111 in the present. Atalay (2012:71–74) discusses archaeology’s responsibility to help  
112 build our community research partners’ capacity to engage in archaeological work  
113 themselves and learn skills that will benefit the community and individual mem-  
114 bers in non-archaeological pursuits as well. In addition to skill acquisition, capac-  
115 ity building increases a community’s ability to refuse or consent to archaeological  
116 work and to make informed decisions about the benefits any collaborative project  
117 will bring.

118 While capacity building in this sense would require archaeologists to be involved  
119 with a project and possibly initiate conversations about a study using archaeology,  
120 it does not require archaeologists or the archaeology to drive the project. Archaeol-  
121 ogy and its attendant skills, technologies, and knowledges have their place, but those  
122 must not overshadow other aspects of the research and must prove their benefit to  
123 the community. A goal is to establish the relationships and knowledge necessary to  
124 work with community partners to decide the place of archaeology and the benefits it  
125 can bring from the very start of a project. The concept of demonic grounds provides  
126 a theoretical and methodical framework that can help provide a foundation on which  
127 ethical, self-reflexive, and ultimately constructive relationships may be made in the  
128 study of the African diaspora.

129 I begin by first defining the concepts of collaborative archaeology, archaeology  
130 of community, and McKittrick’s “demonic grounds,” as they are used here. Then  
131 I present a brief history of Oak Bluffs, paying particular attention to occupations  
132 spanning the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Next, I explore the ongo-  
133 ing process by which I began constructing relationships with community members,  
134 descendants, and history professionals. Future directions for the project emerge  
135 from these connections and conversations. Inherent in this discussion is the hope  
136 that these early relationships form foundational social connections that will allow  
137 future aspects of the research to be community-driven and, in time, fully participa-  
138 tory (Atalay 2012:55–59, 63–66; 2014:56–57). The article then ends with a brief  
139 conclusion summarizing these ideas and suggesting a place for archaeology to posi-  
140 tively impact the Oak Bluffs community and pre-existing heritage work.

141 **Community-Based Participatory Archaeology**

AQ3

142 A focus on engaging non-archaeologists, “the public,” in archaeological research  
143 has long been a part of archeological practice in North America (Colwell-Chan-  
144 thaphonh and Ferguson 2008:1–2). A brief exploration shows that the develop-  
145 ment of public archaeology, broadly defined, was influenced by growing critiques  
146 of anthropology and archaeology during the second half of the twentieth cen-  
147 tury. Criticism that forced some archaeologists to listen and respond came first  
148 from African descendant and Indigenous scholars and activists, and later, from  
149 the growth of postmodern, critical, and postprocessual theory and practice in  
150 the disciplines (Atalay 2012:34–36, 40; Franklin 1997; Lee and Scott 2019:85).  
151 The efforts to engage the public and include descendant communities in research  
152 responded to an internal and external critique of the colonial practices within tra-  
153 ditional archaeology.

154 Central issues raised by African descendant and Indigenous scholars and activ-  
155 ists focused on the authority over all pasts that white, mostly male, archaeologists  
156 uncritically claimed, how archaeological research reproduced regimes of colonial  
157 exploitation, and of the narrow research goals and methodologies that defined  
158 legitimate research (Atalay 2012:40–41; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson  
159 2008:3–6; Deloria 1969; Franklin 1997; La Roche and Blakey 1997; Lee and  
160 Scott 2019:85). The tactics of some activists and groups, such as the Civil Rights  
161 and Black Studies and Black Power movements (Drake 1978:100–102; Fairbanks  
162 1972; Lee and Scott 2019:85) and the American Indian Movement (AIM) (Atalay  
163 2012:40–43), forced anthropologists and archaeologists to recognize and respond  
164 to their critiques. In 1990, some of these critiques were addressed by the State in  
165 the legal requirements of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation  
166 Act (NAGPRA) (Atalay 2012:44; Colwell 2016:114).

167 NAGPRA offered no requirements for archaeologists to engage with non-  
168 Indigenous descendant communities, providing other historically marginalized  
169 communities no direct legal protection. The need for consultation and collabora-  
170 tion with African descendant communities was dramatically highlighted by the  
171 mishandling of the New York African Burial Ground excavations in the early  
172 1990s and the moves by community members, politicians, activists, and schol-  
173 ars of African descent to assert control over the project (La Roche and Blakey  
174 1997:84–86).

175 Indigenous and African descendant activists and scholars’ critique of who  
176 controls archaeological research and materials, who is involved, and who is  
177 excluded continues to shape the practice of archaeology. These interventions have  
178 been particularly impactful in the development of Indigenous, and collaborative  
179 archaeologies (Atalay 2006; 2012:34–41; Franklin 2001; Franklin and Lee 2020;  
180 Franklin et al. 2020).

181 Coinciding with these critiques were the post-modernist and postprocessual  
182 movements in anthropology and archaeology that emphasized scholarly reflex-  
183 ivity and self-reflection (Atalay 2012:41). Postprocessual archaeology, while  
184 not post-modernist itself, was deeply influenced by both post-modernism and

185 structuralism and made it acceptable for archaeologists to discuss the construc-  
186 tion of past and present meanings imbued in material culture, the agency of past  
187 peoples, and the importance of context to understanding artifacts and sites (Hod-  
188 der and Hutson 2003; Trigger 2006:444–448). Critical archaeologies, including  
189 feminist and Marxist archaeologies, engaged with the post-modernist project of  
190 decentering and disempowering hegemonic constructions of knowledge and dem-  
191 onstrating how material culture also shaped and embodied their producers' identi-  
192 ties (Chilton 1999:1–6; Trigger 2006:447). With their focus on consciousness-  
193 raising, the construction of meaning, and critiquing and decentering the scholarly  
194 gaze, postprocessual archaeologies paved the way for engaged archaeologies.

195 Responding to these continued critiques and the desire on behalf of many archae-  
196 ologists to make archaeology work for the broader public and descendant commu-  
197 nities, recent trends in public and collaborative archaeology have focused on redef-  
198 ining the relationship between archaeologists and collaborators as a partnership in  
199 which various types of expertise and knowledge are valued (Colwell 2016; Colwell-  
200 Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:1–2). Work focused on engaging non-archae-  
201 ologists includes Indigenous archaeologies (Atalay 2006; Colwell-Chanthaphonh  
202 et al. 2010; Nicholas 2001), public and engaged archaeologies (Franklin 1997; Little  
203 and Shackel 2007; McGuire 2008; Morris 2014; Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015),  
204 and collaborative and community-based archaeologies (Agbe-Davies 2010;  
205 Atalay 2012; Franklin and Lee 2020; McDavid 2002; Silliman 2008; Supernant and  
206 Warrick 2014). This diversity has dramatically expanded the methods and theories  
207 available to archaeologists wishing to engage various publics and has made some  
208 form of outreach an expected aspect of North American archaeological practice in  
209 the twenty-first century.

210 However, the value attached to engagement in archaeology has also led to the  
211 mislabeling of projects as collaborative, community-based, public, or engaged when  
212 consultation, outreach, or information dissemination would be more accurate (Ata-  
213 lay 2014:48; Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015:197–203; Silliman and Fer-  
214 guson 2010:48–49, 51–53). To resolve these distinctions, archaeologists need to  
215 define how their projects classify stakeholder communities, how they seek to cre-  
216 ate ties with some or all of these groups, and how communities will be included in  
217 the research. While many case studies of productive and successful collaborative  
218 projects exist, few examples outline how they start from the ground up. This lack  
219 of retrospection in an early-stage project and the inherent uncertainty of success,  
220 while daunting for researchers to discuss, may be necessary to build a generation of  
221 archaeologists who continue the work of transforming the practice of archaeology:  
222 who does archaeology and what and for whom archaeology works.

223 In this article I engage with community-based participatory archaeologies  
224 that seek to change the process by which knowledge is produced. Community-  
225 based participatory archaeology is defined here as archaeologies built on com-  
226 munity participation and leadership throughout all research stages, from design  
227 and funding to implementation, dissemination, and curation. In particular, I  
228 engage with the methods and theories of CBPR in archaeology, as defined by  
229 Atalay (2012:56–59), who advocates “conducting research with, by, and for  
230 a community in ways that build community members’ skills and capacities.”

231 Atalay reminds archaeologists that knowledge sharing is not enough. Collabora-  
232 tive research projects can only produce new types of knowledge by first ques-  
233 tioning critically “what knowledge is produced, by whom, for whose interests,  
234 and toward what ends” (2012:59). This participatory research model aligns with  
235 Silliman and Ferguson’s (2010:52–53) concept of full collaboration, wherein the  
236 “research goals and methods are developed and implemented jointly by archeolo-  
237 gists and descendant group members.” CBPR models in archaeology are centered  
238 on performing research that is mutually beneficial for all parties, emphasizing  
239 that to do so requires radically altering how archaeology is practiced.

240 CBPR challenges archaeologists to involve others and relinquish power to pro-  
241 vide space to open themselves up for the possibility of critique. In calling for  
242 archaeologists to go beyond collaboration, Marina La Salle (2010:416) asks, “on  
243 what basis do archaeologists claim the right to have *any* control? And is that right  
244 justified?” Challenging archaeologists “to change the roles we still play in per-  
245 petuating systemic inequality,” La Salle (2010:416) suggests a new model for col-  
246 laborative archaeology, one that calls on archaeologists to “not *drive* research, but  
247 rather, if invited, act as *technicians*” for communities who wish to use archaeol-  
248 ogy (emphases in original). LaSalle’s vision for archaeology is not an easy ask for  
249 either archaeologists or communities seeking to use archaeology to explore the  
250 past. However, it is also a powerful suggestion of what may be required of any  
251 group that intends to build a fully collaborative participatory research program.

252 Community-based participatory archaeology of demonic grounds attempts to  
253 work within a version of a technician model of archaeology while also engaging  
254 in one of Atalay’s (2012:71) core concepts of CBPR: capacity building. Capac-  
255 ity building refers to how participation in archaeological research can help com-  
256 munities and community members acquire skills, capabilities, and/or resources  
257 applicable to research and transferable to other contexts. It considers how archae-  
258 ologists may, in the right circumstances, facilitate the fullest possible collabora-  
259 tion, give up control, and build community capacity, even in the earliest stages of  
260 a research project. Connecting capacity building to the archaeology of demonic  
261 grounds asks how a project provides a community the means to alter how the  
262 complex and heterogeneous past is presented in the contemporary moment.

263 The early stages of a CBPR methodology focus on developing community-  
264 based partnerships built on the promise of community control to shift the balance  
265 of research power away from researchers and institutions towards local stake-  
266 holders. While altering this balance does not require the exclusion of academic  
267 archaeologists and their valuable knowledges and experiences, it does require a  
268 “substantive shift in control” (Atalay 2012:64). However, shifting control may  
269 be difficult for archaeologists and not the top priority for community members  
270 (Franklin and Lee 2020:138). Early on in a project, community members and  
271 archaeologists may feel most comfortable deferring to archaeological *expertise* in  
272 matters of planning and research design, despite stakeholders having clear goals  
273 and desired outcomes. As such, it will take time to develop the relationships,  
274 capacity, and self-reflexive understanding for real power sharing to occur and it is  
275 necessary to begin building the relationships as soon as possible.

276 CBPR, while broadening what archaeological investigations can look like,  
277 requires archaeologists to develop deep understandings of the past, present, and  
278 future of the communities in which they plan to work. This methodology also  
279 requires archaeologists to perform self-reflexive labor in considering the institu-  
280 tional and personal limitations of archaeology, including questioning if archae-  
281 ology may or may not be beneficial for a specific community and how multiple  
282 scales and expressions of institutional racism, colonialism, capitalism, sexism,  
283 and neoliberalism affect archaeology's capacity to aid communities in doing  
284 "good" heritage work (Atalay 2006:281–282; 2014; Franklin 1997; La Salle and  
285 Hutchings 2016:174–175; Lee and Scott 2019:85–86; Lightfoot 2008; McDa-  
286 vid 2011; Nicholas 2001). Social ties relate directly to the process of doing all  
287 archaeology, but for collaborative, community-based projects, building, maintain-  
288 ing, and acknowledging social ties are explicit parts of the methodology. Collabo-  
289 rating with community partners allows archaeologists to learn from local experts,  
290 incorporate diverse ideas into all stages of work, ensure a project's outcomes are  
291 oriented toward social justice, and know what kind of archaeology and engage-  
292 ment is appropriate.

293 Accepting change, failure, and refusal as inherent to collaborative work allows  
294 archaeologists to both participate in the co-production of knowledge and to affirm  
295 a commitment to socially beneficial work. Since the late 1980s, archaeologists  
296 have been increasingly called to recognize that our work "is a form of sociopo-  
297 litical action" (McGuire 2008:xi; Tilley 1989:109). One response to this call has  
298 been the discipline's democratization through public, activist, and collaborative  
299 archaeologies. Nonetheless, in our political present, for multi-vocal collaborative  
300 projects to enact social change, both archaeologists and communities must retain  
301 the authority to refuse racist, anti-science, and reactionary voices (González-  
302 Ruibal et al. 2018:510–511). Furthermore, communities must maintain the abil-  
303 ity to refuse archaeology, and social justice-orientated collaborative projects must  
304 consciously work to build a community's capacity to autonomously manage and  
305 share their heritage (La Salle and Hutchings 2016:173). Successful balancing of  
306 democratization, authority, and community control over research is achievable  
307 only if archaeologists do the early work of introducing themselves and their ideas  
308 and, from the very start, incorporate the considerations and capacities of local  
309 communities and contexts.

310 It is also critical for archaeologists to clearly identify the communities they  
311 seek to collaborate with and adjust those definitions with the community's help  
312 to ensure all identified parties have the opportunities and means to collaborate  
313 meaningfully. Atalay (2012:69–70) identifies including the largest segment of the  
314 community possible as a significant challenge faced by CBPR projects. Citing  
315 her work in Çatalhöyük, Atalay argues that the same tactics will not work for all  
316 social persons; intersections of class, race, and gender must be considered. Kris-  
317 tian Douglass et al. (2019:324–326) present several ways of evaluating degrees  
318 of community collaboration. However, defining community(ies) has never been  
319 straightforward, neither in anthropological thought and practice nor in how the  
320 term has been deployed outside our discipline (Agbe-Davies 2011:576–584;  
321 O'Gorman 2010).

## 322 Archaeology of Communities

323 Communities need not be cohesive groups, nor restricted to geographic areas;  
324 in archaeology, the inclusion of broadly or narrowly defined descendant groups  
325 further complicates the construction and identification of community collabora-  
326 tors (Agbe-Davies 2010:384–385; Supernant and Warrick 2014:564). It is not  
327 within the purview or a goal of this discussion to define monolithic parameters  
328 of community. Instead, I acknowledge the complexity of the term and the need  
329 for archaeologists to be self-reflexive when defining the potential community  
330 of interest in order not to circumscribe potential collaborators before a project  
331 begins (González-Tennant 2014:44).

332 Collaborative, community-based archaeologies and the archaeology of com-  
333 munities intersect in exciting ways, as both highlight the ability of heritage work  
334 to contain and negotiate multiple, entangled, and sometimes conflicting perspec-  
335 tives (Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015; Silliman 2016). These archaeolo-  
336 gies have focused on redefining the relationship between archaeologists and col-  
337 laborators as a partnership in which various types of expertise and knowledges  
338 are valued. Bringing together multiple systems and forms of knowledge rigor-  
339 ously and respectfully is an essential practice in collaborative work and one of its  
340 most transformative processes and products (Atalay 2012:76; 2014:54–55; 2019).  
341 In CBPR, multiple knowledges must be utilized to develop project goals, meth-  
342 ods, and ethics from the start, while structural constraints and a participant's right  
343 to refuse are respected (Clark and Horning 2019). Similarly, the archaeological  
344 study of communities has expanded the concepts of community and commu-  
345 nity members to include intra-community discord (Harris 2014), affect (Arjona  
346 2017:46–47; Tarlow 2012), and nonhumans in the construction and development  
347 of space, place, and identities (Dawdy 2016).

348 Another vector for expanding the conception of community is through the  
349 archaeological use of cultural critic and Black feminist writer bell hooks' (2015  
350 [1990]) conception of "homeplace." Her concept of homeplace argues the homes  
351 of Black women should be understood as hard-earned sites of resistance and  
352 restorative intimacy. These homes were the "places where all that truly mattered  
353 in life took place" (2015 [1990]:41–42). Describing the affectual experience of  
354 entering her grandmother's home, hooks (2015[1990]:41) writes, "that feeling of  
355 safety, of arrival, of homecoming," contrasting it with walking there, "the bit-  
356 terness of that journey, that constant reminder of white power and control." In  
357 this experience, a house and front porch become a precious refuge following the  
358 dangerous and dehumanizing act of journeying through hostile, white-controlled  
359 space. While clearly distinct, it is also clear that these two geographies are co-  
360 generative. An expanded view of community allows us to explore how separation  
361 and interconnection shape the construction of communities and the experiences  
362 of living in them.

363 Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2007), focusing on the lives of enslaved people of  
364 African descent, similarly uses archaeological studies of domestic life and home-  
365 place to understand the construction and maintenance of communities through

366 daily communal activities. This research weaves together theories of “home-  
367 space” and “yardspace” to connect the home, landscapes, and community. For  
368 Battle-Baptiste (2007:236–237), the creation of a homeplace shaped both the  
369 landscape and individual members of the enslaved community, thus shaping the  
370 community itself. In this setting, communal activities performed in shared yards  
371 linked multiple families, extended the comfort and safety of the household, and  
372 produced a landscape that was beyond the understanding of enslavers (Battle-  
373 Baptiste 2007:240–245).

374 Anthony Martin (2019) reanalyzes the nineteenth-century Andover, Massachu-  
375 setts home of Lucy Foster, a woman of African descent, through census records, her  
376 labor, and her ceramic assemblage. Martin (2019:100–104) reconceptualizes Lucy  
377 Foster’s labor and house as establishing a homeplace, an act of resistance to the  
378 “patriarchal culture of New England” in the early nineteenth century. The original  
379 analysis, performed by white archaeologists in the mid-twentieth century, obscured  
380 how Foster and her home interacted with the Black community of Andover. In Mar-  
381 tin’s (2019:107) reanalysis, Foster’s extensive ceramic assemblage is not anomalous  
382 with her identity as a single Black woman, but, rather “evidence of labor and resist-  
383 ance in the homeplace.”

384 Utilizing census records, Martin mapped Lucy Foster’s proximity to other people  
385 of African descent, revealing how her home was situated within a nexus of commu-  
386 nal celebrations and labor. These activities resisted white oppression and helped to  
387 construct and maintain the Black community of Andover (Martin 2019:108–110).  
388 Martin thus engages with a definition of community that recognizes how daily  
389 resistance within racialized landscapes constructs and requires Black space because  
390 of the oppression of constructed White space (see also Martin 2018:308–310).

391 The original analysis of the Lucy Foster site interpreted the material culture and  
392 records from a white lens, one that Martin (2018:107) writes “prevent[ed] the audi-  
393 ence from visualizing Lucy Foster in Black space.” Foster is placed at the margins  
394 of white space in that analysis, viewed as a domestic servant who travels from her  
395 home to work. On the other hand, Martin centers Foster within a community that  
396 existed between and beyond the farmhouse. By *re-placing* Foster in a vibrant net-  
397 work of Black life, Martin helps to reconstruct the geography and intimacy of the  
398 historical Black community. Foster existed in both Black and white space, just as the  
399 community of Andover was defined because of, not despite, this partial separation  
400 of space.

## 401 **Black Feminist Geographies**

402 The critical and social political interventions that Black feminist archaeologies  
403 offer—including a recognition of the ways that multiple vectors of social identity  
404 including race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality shape the experiences, actions,  
405 and worldview of individuals in the past and present—is compatible with McK-  
406 ittrick’s Black feminist geographies. The root of these theoretical and methodologi-  
407 cal movements is in the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality insists on the  
408 recognition of how multiple aspects of identity shape the experiences of oppression

409 of women of color, and particularly Black women, and that these experiences are  
410 unique from those of either men of color or white women (Crenshaw 1995). Kim-  
411 berlé Crenshaw (1995:357–358) argues that ignoring identity-based oppressions  
412 reproduces patriarchal, white supremacist structures, even in anti-oppressive work.  
413 Intersectionality thus grounds explorations of the particular oppression faced by  
414 Black women (and all subjugated peoples) and is also defined by a commitment  
415 to social change that uplifts all, particularly Black women (Battle-Batiste 2016  
416 [2011]:69–70; Combahee River Collective 1981; Franklin 2001).

417 Black feminist thought argues that the spatial knowledges, experiences, and  
418 actions of Black women, as well as other non-white and oppressed subject posi-  
419 tions, form a particular understanding of the world. These understandings inform,  
420 and are informed by, existence within and opposition to oppressive structural hier-  
421 archies based on socially-constructed differences (Franklin 2001:109). McKittrick  
422 (2006:11–12) terms these oppressive structures “racial-sexual-gendered domina-  
423 tion,” highlighting the intersectional nature of oppression and the need to center rad-  
424 ical Black female thought and action. A Black feminist theoretical framework values  
425 the embodied knowledge of African descent people as a site of resistance, but it also  
426 recognizes that it cannot be reduced to only knowledge-in-the-body, or biological  
427 knowledge. A Black feminist framework demands recognition that people of Afri-  
428 can descent inform and generate oppositional knowledges, peoples whose lives are  
429 always theoretical, always geographic (McKittrick 2016:4), and always in commu-  
430 nity. Just as the social construction of race is a geographic act of placing, knowing,  
431 and marginalizing, the social construction of race is also an act of community, acts  
432 of both separation and interconnection.

433 Battle-Baptiste (2016 [2011]:20–44) has argued that Black feminist studies  
434 in the archaeology of the African diaspora are accomplished through a combina-  
435 tion of theoretical lenses, including Black feminisms, critical race theory, oral his-  
436 tory, anthropological theory, and African diaspora theory. To this end, this article  
437 engages with Katherine McKittrick’s (2006:6) Black feminist geographies, which  
438 claim that the social construction of space in traditional geography depends on the  
439 placement of people in hierarchies of human difference, reifying white supremacist  
440 racial ideology. Black spatial practices and ontologies redefine and re-map nor-  
441 mative space that is always racialized, gendered, and classed (Flewellen 2017:73;  
442 McKittrick 2006:xxvi). This conception of geography posits that there are multiple,  
443 socially constructed ways of interpreting landscapes, recognizing the alternative,  
444 often repressed, geographies of subjugated peoples. These geographies create new  
445 possibilities for being and for imagining the world that resist and disrupt colonial  
446 and white supremacist spatial imaginaries.

447 McKittrick (2006:134) redefines Black women’s geographies as “demonic” in  
448 order to ask, “what happens when black womanhood, black femineity, black wom-  
449 en’s spaces, places, and poetics are ‘Not on the margins?’” (emphasis in the origi-  
450 nal). McKittrick contends that asking this question asserts that Black women’s spa-  
451 tial ontologies are part of “a larger story of human geography,” not outside of this  
452 story. Black women’s heterogeneous experiences of racial-sexual-gendered domina-  
453 tion take place in geographic space and reveal moments of contestation that connect  
454 the social construction of space to ongoing locations of struggle, de-naturalizing

455 spatial marginalization (McKittrick 2006:135). For McKittrick (2006:4–5), tra-  
456 ditional patriarchal white supremacist geographies deny the possibility of Black  
457 self-possession, view the space of Blackness homogenized as ungeographic and  
458 dispossess(able), and posit that “the black body often determines how the landscape  
459 around the black body is read.” In this, possession, of self or land, is viewed through  
460 racial and gender hierarchies that assert people of African descent cannot possibly  
461 possess either. McKittrick (2006:11–12) argues that Black women’s geographies,  
462 their understandings of space/place/body, constitute a critique of the racial-sexual-  
463 gendered domination of colonialism and patriarchal white supremacy. She argues  
464 that experiences of domination produce alternative geographic perspectives and  
465 alternative spaces that are difficult to see from a hegemonic lens because “Black  
466 geographies, ostensibly, do not make sense in a world that validates spatial processes  
467 and progress through domination and social avowal” (McKittrick 2006:9).

468 Thus, Black land possession, one example being the construction of homeplace, is  
469 an act of geographic imagination that counters hegemonic understandings. Mapping  
470 this recognizes firstly the social constructedness of space and secondly that these  
471 spaces signal a different sense of place (McKittrick 2006:5). Re-incorporating hetero-  
472 geneous narratives of space does not require essentialization to be understood and  
473 shared. Rather, narratives that include complexity and contradiction allow an alter-  
474 native way of viewing the past and imagining the future. The power of “demonic  
475 ground” is not just that it is a way to denaturalize the spatial construction of race,  
476 gender, and class, but that it makes it possible to imagine something different. We  
477 see this in Martin’s reexamination of Lucy Foster, where her labor and homeplace  
478 are reimaged as essential to supporting part of a joyful community.

479 How can collaborative archaeology explore, interpret, and share the historical and  
480 ongoing spatial construction of racialization and sexualization when dominant nar-  
481 ratives and geographies deny that these processes are spatial at all? Carol McDa-  
482 vid (1997:114), in asking if it is feasible to “create a public interpretation of [the  
483 Levi Jordan Plantation] in the geographic vicinity of the (still standing) plantation  
484 house,” recognized the possibility for public interpretation to flatten historical nar-  
485 ratives. Using critical theory and engaging with descendants of both the enslaved  
486 and enslavers, McDavid (1997:118–119) tells a “*both/and*” narrative, discussing  
487 both the Black history and the white histories of the plantation (emphasis in the  
488 original). This methodology works to make all descendant communities “comfort-  
489 able with the expression of their divided, sometimes contested, histories” (McDavid  
490 1997:118–119). Flewelling (2017) expands the practice by interrogating where on the  
491 plantation landscape these multiple histories are presented. Flewelling (2017:81–84)  
492 finds that, at the Kingsley Plantation, the narrative placement of Anna Kingsley, a  
493 woman of African descent who variously occupied positions of the enslaved, a plan-  
494 tation manager, and an enslaver, in the kitchen house marginalizes her to the domes-  
495 tic realm, the imagined periphery of the plantation, far from the spaces classed as  
496 white, male, and managerial that she was also a part of.

497 While the historic plantation presents Anna Kingsley’s complex and contradictory  
498 historical position through narrative signage (Flewelling 2017:76), placing the narra-  
499 tive in the kitchen locates Kingsley in an expected, and thus ignorable space, and  
500 renders her presence elsewhere ungeographic. Doing so resists how the historical

501 memory of Kingsley's life challenges the white dominant narrative of plantation  
502 life, one that asserts that plantation owners as white and Black females as enslaved.  
503 Fleweller (2017:84) suggests, as an interanimation, that by imagining that Kingsley  
504 "could occupy any space at any time" the entire plantation landscape can be trans-  
505 formed into the paradoxical space of McKittrick's demonic ground. I suggest that a  
506 collaborative archaeology centered on Black feminist archaeologies and geographies  
507 can transform communities into a paradoxical space that produces anti-essentialist  
508 historical narratives of place that recognize the raced, classed, and gendered experi-  
509 ences and constructions of space. The production of an anti-essentialist historical  
510 narrative requires a radical solidarity built on an intersectional understanding of full  
511 collaboration. This form of collaboration is required for a successful CBPR project  
512 exploring the diverse history of Oak Bluffs in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth  
513 centuries.

### 514 **Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts: Becoming a Resort Town** 515 **in the Nineteenth Century**

516 According to the Aquinnah Wampanoag, the history of the Island of Noepe, now  
517 called Martha's Vineyard, begins with Moshup, who separated the island from the  
518 mainland by dragging his foot to the cliffs of Aquinnah (Wampanoag Tribe of Gay  
519 Head [Aquinnah] 2020). Identified archaeological sites in Aquinnah on the island  
520 date back at least 9,000 years and the Wampanoag and their ancestors were the first  
521 peoples to occupy Noepe. Although contact between the Wampanoag Nation and  
522 Europeans occurred sporadically from as early as the sixteenth century, permanent  
523 English colonization of the Island began in 1642. That year, Thomas Mayhew Sr., an  
524 English settler and missionary, was appointed Governor of the island, while Indig-  
525 enous political and social structure organized Noepe into four sachemships of the  
526 Wampanoag (Herbster and Miller 2016:3–5; Herbster and Miller 2018:2–3). At the  
527 time, the Wampanoag of Aquinnah held, and still hold, their ancestral lands on a  
528 geographically isolated peninsula on the far southwest of the island. The Common-  
529 wealth of Massachusetts made these lands a reservation immediately following the  
530 onset of the American Revolutionary War in 1776, which they remained until the  
531 town of Gay Head, later Aquinnah, was incorporated in 1870, against the unani-  
532 mous objections of the Wampanoag Indian residents (Herbster and Miller 2016:3–5;  
533 Herbster and Miller 2018:2–3; Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head [Aquinnah] 2020).

534 The ancestral lands of the Wampanoag of Chappaquiddick are Tchequiaquidenet,  
535 or Chappaquiddick Island, an island to the west of Martha's Vineyard separated by  
536 Katama Bay. In 1788 the lands still under tribal control were divided by the Com-  
537 monwealth of Massachusetts between settler-colonizers and Ingenious Chappaquid-  
538 dick peoples. The Chappaquiddick tribe retained only one-fifth of Chappaquiddick  
539 Island, divided into two reservations totaling 800 acres. The tribe held the lands  
540 until 1869 when the Massachusetts Indian Enfranchisement Act was passed, at  
541 which point the lands were deeded to tribal members and Chappaquiddick became  
542 part of Edgartown (Chappaquiddick Wampanoag Tribe 2016).

543 By the 1850s, the whaling industry on the Island, which was never large to begin  
544 with, declined sharply, and few other industries employed a significant number of  
545 people on the Island (Finley 2019:28–30; Railton 2006:160, 178, 185–186). At that  
546 time, however, East Chop, which is situated on the north-central side of the island  
547 and would later become Oak Bluffs, began to develop a reputation as a summer des-  
548 tination both for religious revivals and secular tourism (Finley 2019:28, 39–40; Rail-  
549 ton 2006:152, 196–197). Wealthy white industrialists, white Methodists, and Afri-  
550 can American, Indigenous, immigrant workers and entrepreneurs were all integral to  
551 the burgeoning leisure industry of Oak Bluffs, though not without loss, conflict, and  
552 tension (see Cromwell 1997; Dresser 2010; Finley 2019; Hayden and Hyden 1999;  
553 Railton 2006; Weintraub 2005).

554 By the late nineteenth century, the resort destination of Oak Bluffs, then part  
555 of the town of Edgartown, was fast becoming an economic powerhouse. The Oak  
556 Bluffs community generated most of the town's tax revenue, but residents were  
557 excluded from political and financial decisions made in Edgartown center and the  
558 community received few municipal services. This tension and political, social, and  
559 economic disconnections resulted in the secession of Oak Bluffs from Edgartown,  
560 the success of which was made possible by Black and Indigenous voters in Farm  
561 Neck, Eastville, and Indigenous-controlled Aquinnah (Finley 2019:48–49; Holland  
562 1997:11–14).

563 The Black communities of Oak Bluffs in the late nineteenth and early twenti-  
564 eth centuries have been categorized as three distinct, but not isolated, groups: those  
565 who lived on Martha's Vineyard year-round, those who came to work during the  
566 busy summer months, and those who primarily came during the summer, as guests,  
567 renters, or to their summer cottages (Cromwell 1997:47–48; Holland 1997:15–22).  
568 Class was likely at the core of many distinctions within and between the African  
569 American communities of Oak Bluffs. Those whose families were long term resi-  
570 dents of the Vineyard and those who came to work during the resort's busy season  
571 would continue working during the summer months, while those who could afford  
572 to rent or own a summer cottage were part of an elite group who could spend all or  
573 part of their summer at leisure (Cromwell 1997:48–52). However, businesses and  
574 social and religious institutions likely served as a bridge between these two groups  
575 and led to summer guests becoming landowners and year-round residents. These  
576 places were social hubs where visitors and long-time residents would gather, often  
577 away from the eyes and exclusionary policies of whites and white-owned businesses  
578 (Holland 1997:16–22; Hayden and Hayden 1999).

579 Alidade M. Cromwell refers to the period from 1900 to World War II as a time  
580 of gradual growth and change for Oak Bluffs' African American communities. Not  
581 only was there an increase in the number of African Americans living on Martha's  
582 Vineyard, from 132 in 1890 to 295 by 1940, but the development of numerous Afri-  
583 can American-led and owned institutions served as cornerstones that helped shaped  
584 the heterogeneous groups into a self-described community (Cromwell 1997:50,  
585 52–62). During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many wealthy white summer  
586 visitors could no longer afford to vacation on the Island or to employ the staff they  
587 relied on to care for the houses and make those trips comfortable. Cottages were  
588 left unused, and Oak Bluffs' position as a resort community itself was threatened.

589 Middle-class African Americans bought many of these cottages, revitalizing them  
590 as well as the resort town itself (Railton 2006:420; West 1996:240). This period  
591 built on the foundations previous landowners had constructed and helped to further  
592 Oak Bluffs as a popular resort town for African Americans.

593 Oak Bluffs became a center of African American economic, social, and religious  
594 life on Martha's Vineyard in part because of the historical presence of people of  
595 African descent, especially in the Farm Neck community and in part because of the  
596 small but growing base of homeowners and businessowners in the Highlands and  
597 Downtown areas. Oak Bluffs in the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth cen-  
598 tury was reportedly the only town in which people of African descent who were not  
599 members of the Indigenous Aquinnah-Wampanoag community could readily pur-  
600 chase land (Railton 2006:380).

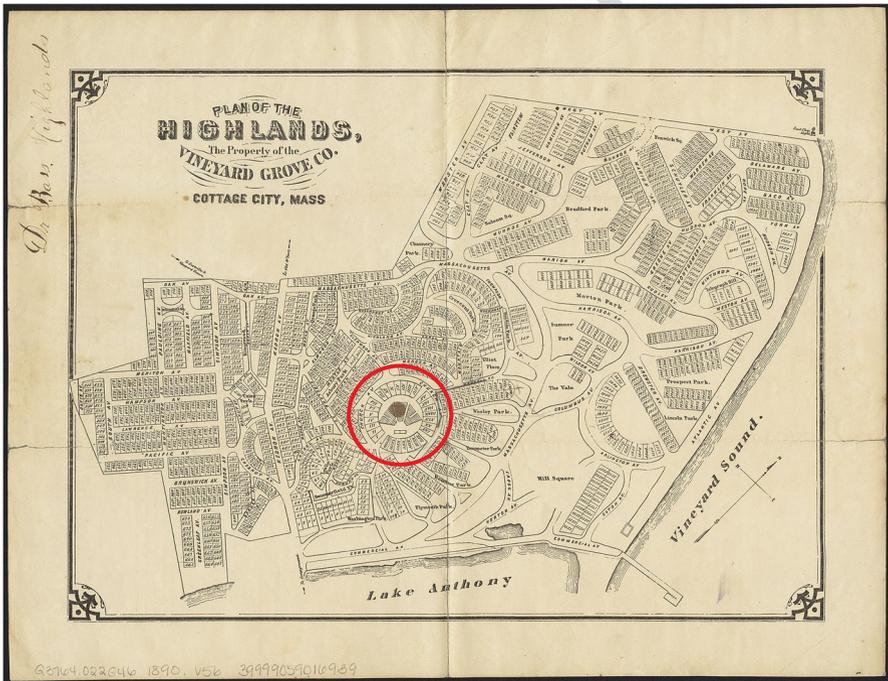
601 Nevertheless, even in Oak Bluffs, landownership was often restricted to marginal  
602 areas or was only possible through a white intermediary (Cromwell 1997:62). Racist  
603 rules and regulations thus enforced de facto segregation, limiting Black residents'  
604 and visitors' ability to enjoy Island amenities, rent housing, or patronize restaurants  
605 and clubs (Dresser 2010:82–87; Hayden and Hayden 1999:40–41). Black-owned  
606 institutions and private homes proved vital to providing places for African Ameri-  
607 cans to enjoy Martha's Vineyard and mitigate the effects of race-based segregation  
608 on the island. Hayden and Hayden (1999), building on the work of Cromwell (1997),  
609 Holland (1997), and Weintraub and Tankard (1998) of The African American Herit-  
610 age Trail of Martha's Vineyard (AAHT), further identified the people and places  
611 that helped shape the African American communities on Oak Bluffs and Martha's  
612 Vineyard. Additionally, these histories clearly demonstrate that African American  
613 homeownership, business, and religious institutions helped create and sustain not  
614 just African American communities, but Oak Bluffs itself as a resort destination.

## 615 **Starting slowly**

616 In starting research on Oak Bluffs, I attempted to align my methodologies to the  
617 ideas of CBPR by focusing on the identification of stakeholder communities and  
618 the development of relationships with possible research partners. My methods were  
619 a mixture of archival research and snowball-style sampling, where a core set of  
620 interviews and meetings serve as a foundation that grows through recommendations  
621 and connections (McNeil and Chapman 2005:50–51). They were designed to gain  
622 insights into the people and groups with a stake in and knowledge of the history of  
623 African descendant communities in Oak Bluffs. Although I see exploring the entire  
624 expanded community as a future project, I made a pragmatic decision during the  
625 first season to focus primarily on establishing connections with African American  
626 institutions, experts, and stakeholders. This was based on the temporal restrictions  
627 of preliminary fieldwork, the comparative lack of published historical information  
628 on the Black residential community, and my understanding that the project I pro-  
629 posed could not happen without support and collaboration from the African Ameri-  
630 can descendant community and present-day residents.

631 One of main the goals of both the archival research and interviews was to intro-  
632 duce myself and my project ideas to stakeholders and potential collaborators and to  
633 further develop my research interests with community input. Secondary goals were  
634 to identify what resources were available to me as a researcher, who would be will-  
635 ing to collaborate, and what collaborators would be interested in exploring through  
636 a future project. I hoped to identify avenues of research that were feasible and would  
637 benefit the community. Lastly, my goals were to establish the beginnings of a CBPR  
638 project based on what I can now define as radical solidarity that recognizes the need  
639 to explore, confront, and redress intersectional racial, gender, and class oppressions  
640 in the past and present. Beyond serving to introduce myself and develop relation-  
641 ships, these conversations indicated broad community interest in the history of sites  
642 in the Highlands area, particularly Baptist Temple Park (Fig. 2), which was the loca-  
643 tion of week-long Baptist revivals from 1877 to the 1930s (Anonymous 1937).

644 In this section I will briefly highlight some of the conversations and archival  
645 sources which indicated community interest in the history of the Highlands area  
646 and Baptist Temple Park and how those histories connect to struggles over memory  
647 and space in Oak Bluffs. My main points of contact on Martha's Vineyard were the  
648 AAHT, the Oak Bluffs Polar Bears, the owner of the historic Shearer Cottage, the



**Fig. 2** A plan for the Highlands community in Oak Bluffs ca. 1890 showing plots for sale. Baptist Temple Park (circle) is in the center of the most densely sub-divided section of the Highlands. Original image courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library. Highlights added by author

649 Martha's Vineyard Museum, and the Aquinnah-Wampanoag Tribal Historic Preser-  
650 vation Office. Each of these groups are actively preserving and sharing the history  
651 of Martha's Vineyard in distinct ways and maintain social and scholarly connec-  
652 tions with each other. Further connections grew from these initial meetings, some-  
653 times directly and sometimes through my interactions with local organizations or  
654 at community events. I conducted these interviews as conversations without survey  
655 questions and took handwritten notes. Interviews were loosely structured around  
656 introducing myself as an archaeologist, my research interests in the growth and  
657 experiences of African American communities and individuals in Oak Bluffs, the  
658 interviewees' perspectives on this history, and what role, if any, archaeology could  
659 play in ongoing heritage and memory efforts. No formal oral history interviews were  
660 conducted during this stage.

661 From this work I learned that there is a great deal of primary source material pre-  
662 served and available for research, especially deed records and the files of community  
663 organizations and churches. I learned that there is community support for histori-  
664 cal investigations, that there are a number of threatened or razed homes that hold  
665 historic value, and that community memory is threatened by increasing land value  
666 and an aging local population. However, currently, there are individuals who retain  
667 this memory and local organizations working to preserve and teach it. I see future  
668 archaeological work engaging with and building on these structures.

669 From the perspective of the AAHT, the official memory of Oak Bluffs as taught  
670 in local schools, written in the major histories of the area, and remembered in the  
671 local museum silences the history of people of color on the island. Two directors  
672 of the organization, Carrie Camillo Tankard and Elaine Cawley Weintraub, started  
673 planning the Heritage Trail in 1989 in response to this lack of representation, with  
674 a particular emphasis on creating a history accessible to African American students  
675 in the local high school (AAHT 2020; personal interview with Carrie Camillo Tank-  
676 ard and Elaine Cawley Weintraub, July 26, 2019). The goal of the AAHT is two-  
677 fold: the first is the construction of "a physical trail celebrating the stories of African  
678 American people on the Island," identifying, commemorating, and researching "the  
679 selected sites that told the story" (AAHT 2020); the second is focused on increasing  
680 the educational outcomes for local high school students of color by making visible  
681 the impacts people of African descent have had on the history and development of  
682 the island (personal interview with Elaine Cawley Weintraub, July 22, 2019).

683 Since its inception in 1998, the AAHT has successfully incorporated sites of  
684 African American history and memory into the cultural landscape of Martha's Vine-  
685 yard. As of 2019, the heritage trail has grown to include thirty sites (AAHT 2020).  
686 Despite their success, however, the group does not have access to all of the sites they  
687 deem significant to the African American history of the island. At one such site,  
688 Baptist Temple Park, lack of landowner has prevented the AAHT from commemo-  
689 rating the location. Both Ms. Carrie Tankard and Ms. Elaine Weintraub believe the  
690 Baptist revivals held at the site in late nineteenth century were instrumental to the  
691 Highlands area becoming an attractive place for middle-class African Americans  
692 to vacation. For them the site is a crucial aspect of the narrative of a community  
693 built on Black homeownership (personal interview with Elaine Cawley Weintraub,  
694 July 22, 2019; personal interview with Carrie Camillo Tankard and Elaine Cawley

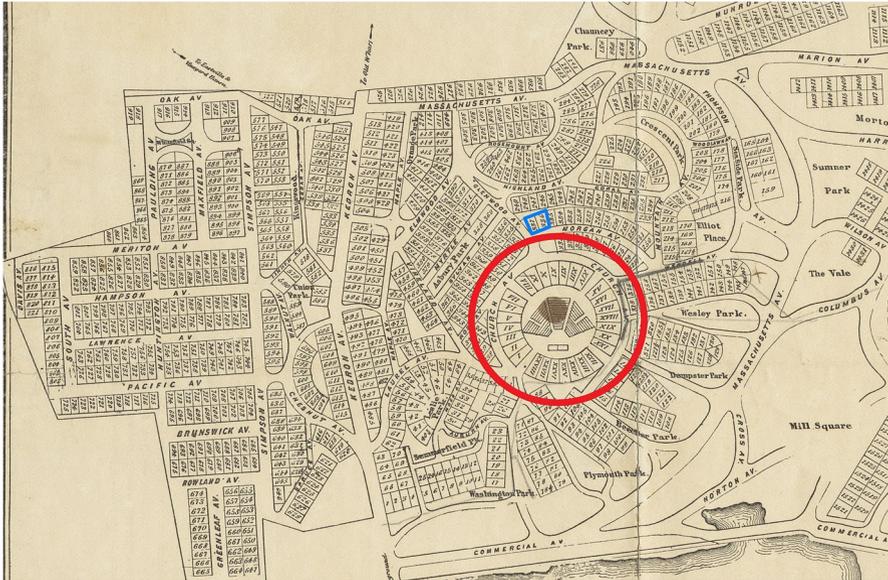
695 Weintraub, July 26, 2019). These understandings are congruent with those of Crom-  
696 well (1997) and with the memories of Dean Denniston, whose father was a local  
697 Baptist preacher (Lee 1996). While the AAHT's in-person tours of Oak Bluffs pass  
698 by Baptist Temple Park and comment on its history, the organization's ability to cre-  
699 ate and share a narrative of the site is hampered by their lack of access.

700 The Polar Bears is a Black woman-led social group that teaches the embodied  
701 memory of the past during communal swims and early-morning exercises in the  
702 brisk Atlantic waters of Oak Bluff's Town Beach (Peters 2012). These activities  
703 are connected directly to the history of early-twentieth century Black laborers and  
704 domestic workers who made time to enjoy this same beach during the less-than-  
705 ideal hours of the day provided by their employment. During the communal swims,  
706 new and experienced Polar Bears share history, spread news, and get to know each  
707 other. The importance of the Highlands as a center of African American life came  
708 out during casual conversations and more structured interviews with two long-time  
709 Polar Bears. These conversations highlighted the destruction and sale of African  
710 American-owned homes in that part of Oak Bluffs. In these conversations, Baptist  
711 Temple Park, the sites of the demolished "Twin Cottage," and Bradley Memorial  
712 Church (not in the Highlands) were suggested as possible research opportunities  
713 (personal interview with the Oak Bluffs Polar Bears, July 16 and 22, 2019).

714 Another community member who has worked to preserve and share the African  
715 American history of Oak Bluffs is Lee Jackson Van Allen, who runs a historic inn  
716 called Shearer Cottage. Henrietta and Charles Shearer, Van Allen's great-grandpar-  
717 ents, purchased a vacation home in the Highlands in 1903 from which Henrietta also  
718 ran a laundry service. In 1912 the family opened the home as an inn, catering to  
719 middle-class African Americans who were barred from segregated lodgings in Oak  
720 Bluffs (Hayden and Hayden 1999:63–66; Lee 1999; Shearer Cottage 2020; personal  
721 communication with Lee Jackson Van Allen, July 18, 2019). As such, Shearer Cot-  
722 tage was instrumental for opening the island up to African American summer vaca-  
723 tioners. Shearer Cottage was the first site dedicated on the Heritage Trail, is included  
724 in the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture's  
725 "Power of Place" exhibit (Smithsonian 2020a), and has been run and maintained by  
726 four generations of the Shearer family.

727 In a recorded interview with Martha's Vineyard Museum oral historian Lind-  
728 say Lee (1999), Ms. Jackson Van Allen shares that Henrietta and Charles Shearer  
729 purchased a home in the Highlands area because of the Baptist revivals there. Van  
730 Allen recounts how Charles Shearer, a member of Boston's Tremont Temple Bap-  
731 tist church, attended revivals held at Baptist Temple park and "fell in love with the  
732 island." Deed records show that the Shearers purchased lots 336 & 337 (Dukes  
733 County Registry of Deeds 1903, Book 107:96–97), located just outside of Baptist  
734 Temple Park (Fig. 3). Like others, Ms. Jackson Van Allen cites the presence of Afri-  
735 can American homeowners in the Highlands as a major factor leading to Oak Bluffs  
736 becoming a vacation destination for African Americans. Shearer Cottage remains a  
737 living example of this history.

738 Census records (US Bureau of the Census [USBC] 1900, 1902) support this  
739 narrative. In Oak Bluffs and Martha's Vineyard in 1900, sixty percent of Black  
740 identified households owned, rather than rented, their homes (USBC 1900). This



**Fig. 3** Close up of the ca. 1890 map, showing the location of lots 336 and 337 (rectangle) purchased by Henrietta and Charles Shearer in 1903 in the Highlands area of Oak Bluffs show relationship to Baptist Temple Park (circle). Original image courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library. Highlights added author

741 percentage was derived from my exploration of the 1900 census schedules for Dukes  
742 County, Massachusetts, the county that includes all of Martha's Vineyard. The  
743 use of census data can be problematic due to the inconsistent and politically and  
744 socially motivated construction of racial categories in the census (Omi and Winant  
745 2014:121–122) and bias against people who may be less visible on the landscape.  
746 However, it still provides a useful baseline and context for understanding homeown-  
747 ership on Martha's Vineyard.

748 National and state homeownership numbers were derived from the population  
749 aggregates and owned and rented home counts provided in the 1902 census report  
750 on home ownership (USBC 1902:712, 716). In the 1902 census report, the racial  
751 categorization of households was determined by the racial categorization of the  
752 person identified as the head of household (USBC 1902:ccviii). For comparative  
753 consistency I used the same method to categorize households in Oak Bluffs, but  
754 I acknowledge that this erases interracial households and families and reproduces  
755 patriarchal bias in the census. From these published aggregates, I identified home-  
756 ownership percentages for both the US and Massachusetts, for the total number of  
757 households, for households categorized as Black, and those categorized as white in  
758 the census.

759 Comparing these figures to the Dukes County census data (Table 1), I found that,  
760 of the total number of African American households on Martha's Vineyard recorded  
761 in 1900 (43), sixty percent owned, rather than rented their homes. This was higher  
762 than the rate of homeownership in the US overall at the time (47%), the national

**Table 1** Comparison of Homeownership Rates from 1900 census

AQ5

Racial Breakdown of Homeownership in 1900<sup>a</sup>

	Percentages of Homes with African American Heads of House Owned out of Total	Percentages of Homes with European American Heads of House Owned out of Total
Oak Bluffs	60%	78%
Martha's Vineyard	60%	69%
Massachusetts	17%	33%
United States	22%	50%

<sup>a</sup>Percentages of homeownership were calculated based on the total number of homes owned and rented. Homes that could not be identified as either were excluded. Oak Bluffs and Martha's Vineyard data taken from the author's survey of 1900 US population census for Dukes County, Massachusetts (USBC 1900), while data for Massachusetts and the United States was found in the 1900 Census Report Volume II (USBC 1902:ccvi, 712, 716)

763 rate of Black homeownership (22%), and the national rate of white homeownership  
 764 (50%). The demography of Massachusetts matched national patterns at the time  
 765 when broken down by race (USBC 1902:ccviii, 712, 716). Martha's Vineyard and  
 766 Oak Bluffs are therefore outliers in terms of African American homeownership.

767 Published memoirs, oral history recordings, scholarly works, and archival docu-  
 768 ments demonstrate that the construction of Oak Bluffs as a place for African Ameri-  
 769 cans to live, work, and vacation can be linked to control over space and property.  
 770 Many people who became yearly summer vacationers or full-time residents of Oak  
 771 Bluffs recount that their first introduction to the Island was through friends or family  
 772 who owned a cottage there (Cromwell 1997:48; Lee 1999; Nelson 2005). These sto-  
 773 ries add important depth to Oak Bluffs' well-known identity as a welcoming place  
 774 for Black vacationers (Cromwell 1997; Taylor 2017; Smithsonian 2020b).

775 This research project seeks to learn from and establish links with those preserv-  
 776 ing and sharing the island's history. I believe that archaeology can potentially add to  
 777 these efforts and that these individuals and groups could be essential partners in a  
 778 CBPR project that utilizes archaeology along with established methods and yet-to-  
 779 be-established methods of research and outreach. These conversations indicate that  
 780 there may be community support for a historical study of the Highlands area, and  
 781 specifically of Baptist Temple Park, focusing on questions of community building  
 782 and homeownership. Additionally, the current lack of access to that important site  
 783 presents an entry point for archaeology to make a positive impact on existing herit-  
 784 age efforts. Indeed, an unexpected outcome of this research has been establishing a  
 785 dialogue with the local organization that owns the Baptist Temple Park property and  
 786 a tentative plan to explore what archaeology of the site may entail (personal com-  
 787 munication with Craig Dripps, February 22 and 25, 2020). Through introduction of  
 788 possible archaeological investigations and the relationships built in the early stages  
 789 of the project, heritage groups in the community with a complicated history are find-  
 790 ing new ways to engage with the history of Oak Bluffs and each other.

791 The next step of any potential project will be to use these preliminary results  
 792 to develop ways to assess broader community interest in a research project in the

793 Highlands and to propose specific research and social and civic outcomes that will  
794 structure the project. After that, the goal will be to engage in a collaborative research  
795 design led by the broadest possible segment of the local, descendant, and research  
796 communities. The connections made and information learned in the first steps of  
797 this research have produced a foundation to build upon. Success in these steps  
798 would result in the collaborative development of research questions and goals, of a  
799 dynamic, scaffolded research design to address these questions, and a clearly defined  
800 set of expected benefits for the community. Ideally, such a project would include but  
801 not be centered on archaeology.

## 802 Conclusion

803 The history Oak Bluffs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows that the for-  
804 mation of the African American communities that made the town a welcoming place  
805 for people of African descent was not inevitable, but a process by which individuals  
806 actively navigated race-based and class boundaries and oppressions to make places  
807 on the landscape their own. Homeownership is inherently constructive, it allows  
808 people to control space, to grow their property, to pass it on to their children and  
809 relatives, and to invite others to visit or live. In general, it builds community.

810 Nedra Lee (2014:30), writing about African American landownership, notes  
811 that homeowning “emphasized the preservation and continuation of family ties and  
812 social networks through land.” Land marked internal social differentiation and land-  
813 ownership can problematize flat discussions of race and class which undertheorize  
814 the Black middle-class experience after emancipation. Heritage research exploring  
815 the African American communities of Oak Bluffs, MA recognize the experiences of  
816 class differences across racial lines (Lee 2014:65), not only the intersecting oppres-  
817 sions of race, gender, and class, but the quantitative and qualitative limits of the  
818 power and wealth of Black elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.  
819 For many years, archaeologists have shown how by engaging with Black feminist  
820 philosophies, the discipline can expand the discussion of such ideas of difference  
821 and inequality in reflexive and community-engaged ways.

822 CBPR may be at its most rigorous, productive, and ethical when archaeologists  
823 add their varied and flexible skills to programs and individuals already conducting  
824 heritage research in a community, expanding and building capacity within the exist-  
825 ing heritage ecosystem. Engaging with McKittrick’s (2006) thesis that people are  
826 always engaged in historical and geographical struggles—struggles over the pro-  
827 duction of space, body, and community—means archaeologists have only to expand  
828 their conceptions of what heritage work looks like to see that alternative histories are  
829 not forgotten or even silenced, but disavowed, as Flewelling (2017) points out. Once  
830 this diversity of ongoing work is witnessed, identifying the place where archaeology  
831 may best fit in and what the discipline can add, begins. This requires both the devel-  
832 opment of relationships with potential community partners and a deep understand-  
833 ing of the local context.

834 An investigation of the history of Oak Bluffs as a pluralistic resort community  
835 means engaging with those already working to reveal the paradoxical space—the

836 demonic grounds—that traces the complex location of women of African descent  
837 within local, regional, and global systems. Calling for a type of collaboration  
838 that decenters archaeology does not deny the power of archaeology backed by  
839 academic institutions and outside funding. Rather, it highlights how collabora-  
840 tive relationships establish the researcher’s accountability to partners and the  
841 researcher’s stake in the community.

842 What resources does archaeology possess and transmit to communities, that  
843 could challenge the racialized geography of white patriarchal histories? In Oak  
844 Bluffs, historical narratives, shared in heritage tours, oral histories, and pub-  
845 lished works discuss Blackness existing beyond the margins, a radical act that  
846 transforms social space and historical memory (hooks 2015 [1990]:21–22). The  
847 AAHT has used these resources and novel research to create a robust memory  
848 landscape that re-places Blackness on the landscape of Oak Bluffs and Martha’s  
849 Vineyard with the goal of improving their local community. Archaeology, even  
850 without excavation, may be able to help extend the AAHT memory landscape  
851 into currently inaccessible sites like Baptist Temple Park. In this way, commu-  
852 nity-based collaborative archaeology can support and strengthen individuals and  
853 organizations that are re-mapping spaces of African American placemaking. Such  
854 a research project recognizes the need to confront the material and social conse-  
855 quences of placing people of African descent on the margins and what is to be  
856 gained if they occupy the center.

857 By centering the geographic understandings of Black women in Oak Bluffs and  
858 expanding the notion of community, it becomes possible to view placemaking as an  
859 act of spatial resistance. I believe this is what McKittrick (2006:61–63) means when  
860 she invokes subaltern spatialities and the power of the “not-quite spaces” of Black  
861 women to construct oppositional paradoxical ways of being in the world. A focus  
862 on the specific conceptions and experiences of Black women though Black feminist  
863 theory indicates how alternative ways of thinking and being in the world can chal-  
864 lenge and disrupt instances and systems of oppression through explicit practices of  
865 resistance and refusal. These perspectives were not just theoretical but accompanied  
866 by material actions. By considering both theory and action, heritage programs can  
867 better imagine what a different interpretation of the past may look like and how to  
868 create those potentialities in the future. As we take the next steps of a CBPR pro-  
869 ject on the history of Oak Bluffs, I look forward to the surprising, informative, and  
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