



# Seeking Radical Solidarity in Heritage Studies: Exploring the Intersection of Black Feminist Archaeologies and Geographies in Oak Bluffs, MA

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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.

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

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

## Introduction

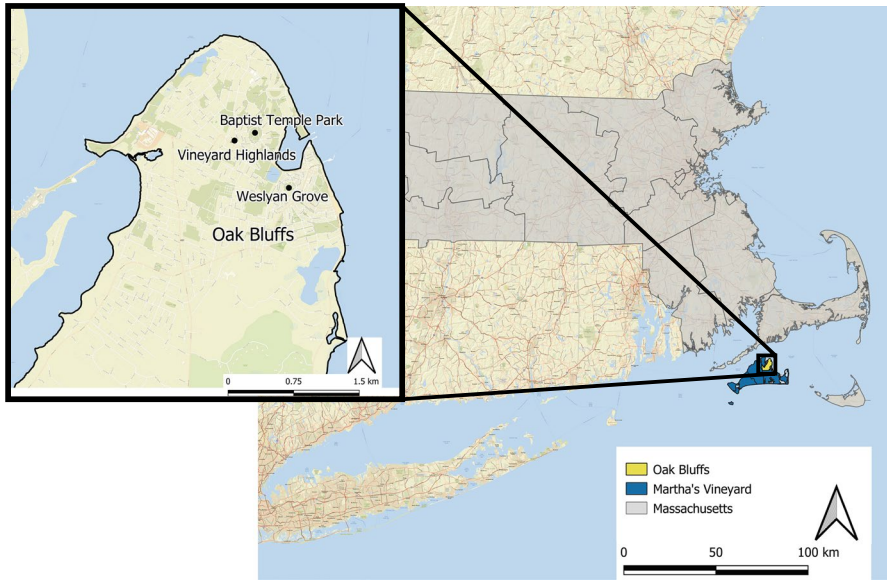
In this article I discuss the early-stage development of a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project that explores the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of the resort town of Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts (Fig. 1). This article follows other recent publications that extend critical theoretical agendas into community-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

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

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

Through the application of a concept of radical solidarity grounded in Black feminist theory, CBPR projects can assert the need for a multivocality that allows the broadest possible community participation and remains critical of past oppressions and conscious of dominant narratives. Demonic grounds (McKittrick 2006) represent one theoretically grounded way to frame a project so that, from the beginning, the production of discordant historical narratives is not smoothed over but, instead, embraced. The concept of demonic grounds is also used to understand complex and contradictory historical narratives of the community of Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts that refuse a single, cohesive story.

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

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

To address this, Atalay (2020:10) advises that archaeologists not be the sole creators of narratives, but rather partner with communities as co-creators to ensure the work is culturally appropriate and that local knowledge is not appropriated. As with other aspects of CBPR, the groundwork for creative results dissemination must be established early on and be scaffolded through all phases of a project. Here the need for full participation is framed by a striving for radical solidarity starting at the very beginning of a project. Only by understanding and foregrounding local concerns can a community-based collaborative project be successful in Oak Bluffs. In this instance, success is defined as archaeology that highlights social relationships,

fosters long-term engagement, and benefits the community in real ways (Atalay 2012:63–77). Adapting collaborative archaeology is about making archaeology work for communities already learning, preserving, sharing, and benefiting from Oak Bluffs' history.

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

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

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

I begin by first defining the concepts of collaborative archaeology, archaeology of community, and McKittrick's “demonic grounds,” as they are used here. Then I present a brief history of Oak Bluffs, paying particular attention to occupations spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Next, I explore the ongoing process by which I began constructing relationships with community members, descendants, and history professionals. Future directions for the project emerge from these connections and conversations. Inherent in this discussion is the hope that these early relationships form foundational social connections that will allow future aspects of the research to be community-driven and, in time, fully participatory

(Atalay 2012:55–59, 63–66, 2014:56–57). The article then ends with a brief conclusion summarizing these ideas and suggesting a place for archaeology to positively impact the Oak Bluffs community and pre-existing heritage work.

## Community-Based Participatory Archaeology

A focus on engaging non-archaeologists, “the public,” in archaeological research has long been a part of archaeological practice in North America (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:1–2). A brief exploration shows that the development of public archaeology, broadly defined, was influenced by growing critiques of anthropology and archaeology during the second half of the twentieth century. Criticism that forced some archaeologists to listen and respond came first from African descendant and Indigenous scholars and activists, and later, from the growth of postmodern, critical, and postprocessual theory and practice in the disciplines (Atalay 2012:34–36, 40; Franklin 1997; Lee and Scott 2019:85). The efforts to engage the public and include descendant communities in research responded to an internal and external critique of the colonial practices within traditional archaeology.

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

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

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

Coinciding with these critiques were the postmodernist and postprocessual movements in anthropology and archaeology that emphasized scholarly reflexivity and self-reflection (Atalay 2012:41). Postprocessual archaeology, while not post-modernist itself, was deeply influenced by both postmodernism and structuralism and made it acceptable for archaeologists to discuss the construction of past and present meanings imbued in material culture, the agency of past peoples, and the importance of context to understanding artifacts and sites (Hodder and Hutson 2003; Trigger 2006:444–448). Critical archaeologies, including feminist and Marxist archaeologies, engaged with the postmodernist project of decentering and disempowering hegemonic constructions of knowledge and demonstrating how material culture also shaped and embodied their producers' identities (Chilton 1999:1–6; Trigger 2006:447). With their focus on consciousness raising, the construction of meaning, and critiquing and decentering the scholarly gaze, postprocessual archaeologies paved the way for engaged archaeologies.

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

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

In this article I engage with community-based participatory archaeologies that seek to change the process by which knowledge is produced. Community-based participatory archaeology is defined here as archaeologies built on community participation and leadership throughout all research stages, from design

and funding to implementation, dissemination, and curation. In particular, I engage with the methods and theories of CBPR in archaeology, as defined by Atalay (2012:56–59), who advocates “conducting research with, by, and for a community in ways that build community members’ skills and capacities.” Atalay (2012:59) reminds archaeologists that knowledge sharing is not enough. Collaborative research projects can only produce new types of knowledge by first questioning critically “what knowledge is produced, by whom, for whose interests, and toward what ends.” This participatory research model aligns with Silliman and Ferguson’s (2010:52–53) concept of full collaboration, wherein the “research goals and methods are developed and implemented jointly by archeologists and descendant group members.” CBPR models in archaeology are centered on performing research that is mutually beneficial for all parties, emphasizing that to do so requires radically altering how archaeology is practiced.

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

Community-based participatory archaeology of demonic grounds attempts to work within a version of a technician model of archaeology while also engaging in one of Atalay’s (2012:71) core concepts of CBPR: capacity building. Capacity building refers to how participation in archaeological research can help communities and community members acquire skills, capabilities, and/or resources applicable to research and transferable to other contexts. It considers how archaeologists may, in the right circumstances, facilitate the fullest possible collaboration, give up control, and build community capacity, even in the earliest stages of a research project. Connecting capacity building to the archaeology of demonic grounds asks how a project provides a community the means to alter how the complex and heterogeneous past is presented in the contemporary moment.

The early stages of a CBPR methodology focus on developing community-based partnerships built on the promise of community control to shift the balance of research power away from researchers and institutions towards local stakeholders. While altering this balance does not require the exclusion of academic archaeologists and their valuable knowledges and experiences, it does require a “substantive shift in control” (Atalay 2012:64). However, shifting control may be difficult for archaeologists and not the top priority for community members (Franklin and Lee 2020:138). Early on in a project, community members and archaeologists may feel most comfortable deferring to archaeological *expertise* in matters of planning and research design, despite stakeholders having clear goals

and desired outcomes. As such, it will take time to develop the relationships, capacity, and self-reflexive understanding for real power sharing to occur and it is necessary to begin building the relationships as soon as possible.

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

Accepting change, failure, and refusal as inherent to collaborative work allows archaeologists to both participate in the coproduction of knowledge and to affirm a commitment to socially beneficial work. Since the late 1980s, archaeologists have been increasingly called to recognize that our work "is a form of sociopolitical action" (McGuire 2008:xi; Tilley 1989:109). One response to this call has been the discipline's democratization through public, activist, and collaborative archaeologies. Nonetheless, in our political present, for multivocal collaborative projects to enact social change, both archaeologists and communities must retain the authority to refuse racist, antiscience, and reactionary voices (González-Ruibal et al. 2018:510–511). Furthermore, communities must maintain the ability to refuse archaeology, and social justice-orientated collaborative projects must consciously work to build a community's capacity to autonomously manage and share their heritage (La Salle and Hutchings 2016:173). Successful balancing of democratization, authority, and community control over research is achievable only if archaeologists do the early work of introducing themselves and their ideas and, from the very start, incorporate the considerations and capacities of local communities and contexts.

It is also critical for archaeologists to clearly identify the communities they seek to collaborate with and adjust those definitions with the community's help to ensure all identified parties have the opportunities and means to collaborate meaningfully. Atalay (2012:69–70) identifies including the largest segment of the community possible as a significant challenge faced by CBPR projects. Citing her work in Çatalhöyük, Atalay argues that the same tactics will not work for all social persons; intersections of class, race, and gender must be considered. Kristian Douglass et al. (2019:324–326) present several ways of evaluating degrees of community collaboration. However, defining community(ies) has never been

straightforward, neither in anthropological thought and practice nor in how the term has been deployed outside our discipline (Agbe-Davies 2011:576–584; O’Gorman 2010).

## Archaeology of Communities

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

Collaborative, community-based archaeologies and the archaeology of communities intersect in exciting ways, as both highlight the ability of heritage work to contain and negotiate multiple, entangled, and sometimes conflicting perspectives (Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015; Silliman 2016). These archaeologies have focused on redefining the relationship between archaeologists and collaborators as a partnership in which various types of expertise and knowledges are valued. Bringing together multiple systems and forms of knowledge rigorously and respectfully is an essential practice in collaborative work and one of its most transformative processes and products (Atalay 2012:76, 2014:54–55, 2019). In CBPR, multiple knowledges must be utilized to develop project goals, methods, and ethics from the start, while structural constraints and a participant’s right to refuse are respected (Clark and Horning 2019). Similarly, the archaeological study of communities has expanded the concepts of community and community members to include intracommunity discord (Harris 2014), affect (Arjona 2017:46–47; Tarlow 2012), and nonhumans in the construction and development of space, place, and identities (Dawdy 2016).

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

Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2007), focusing on the lives of enslaved people of African descent, similarly uses archaeological studies of domestic life and homeplace to understand the construction and maintenance of communities through daily communal activities. This research weaves together theories of “home-space” and “yardspace” to connect the home, landscapes, and community. For Battle-Baptiste (2007:236–237), the creation of a homeplace shaped both the landscape and individual members of the enslaved community, thus shaping the community itself. In this setting, communal activities performed in shared yards linked multiple families, extended the comfort and safety of the household, and produced a landscape that was beyond the understanding of enslavers (Battle-Baptiste 2007:240–245).

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

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

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

## Black Feminist Geographies

The critical and social political interventions that Black feminist archaeologies offer—including a recognition of the ways that multiple vectors of social identity including race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality shape the experiences, actions, and worldview of individuals in the past and present—is compatible with

McKittrick's Black feminist geographies. The root of these theoretical and methodological movements is in the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality insists on the recognition of how multiple aspects of identity shape the experiences of oppression of women of color, and particularly Black women, and that these experiences are unique from those of either men of color or white women (Crenshaw 1995). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995:357–358) argues that ignoring identity-based oppressions reproduces patriarchal, white supremacist structures, even in antioppressive work. Intersectionality thus grounds explorations of the particular oppression faced by Black women (and all subjugated peoples) and is also defined by a commitment to social change that uplifts all, particularly Black women (Battle-Batiste 2016:69–70; Combahee River Collective 1981; Franklin 2001).

Black feminist thought argues that the spatial knowledges, experiences, and actions of Black women, as well as other non-white and oppressed subject positions, form a particular understanding of the world. These understandings inform, and are informed by, existence within and opposition to oppressive structural hierarchies based on socially constructed differences (Franklin 2001:109). McKittrick (2006:11–12) terms these oppressive structures “racial-sexual-gendered domination,” highlighting the intersectional nature of oppression and the need to center radical Black female thought and action. A Black feminist theoretical framework values the embodied knowledge of African descent people as a site of resistance, but it also recognizes that it cannot be reduced to only knowledge-in-the-body, or biological knowledge. A Black feminist framework demands recognition that people of African descent inform and generate oppositional knowledges, peoples whose lives are always theoretical, always geographic (McKittrick 2016:4), and always in community. Just as the social construction of race is a geographic act of placing, knowing, and marginalizing, the social construction of race is also an act of community, acts of both separation and interconnection.

Battle-Baptiste (2016:20–44) has argued that Black feminist studies in the archaeology of the African diaspora are accomplished through a combination of theoretical lenses, including Black feminisms, critical race theory, oral history, anthropological theory, and African diaspora theory. To this end, this article engages with Katherine McKittrick's (2006:6) Black feminist geographies, which claim that the social construction of space in traditional geography depends on the placement of people in hierarchies of human difference, reifying white supremacist racial ideology. Black spatial practices and ontologies redefine and remap normative space that is always racialized, gendered, and classed (Flewellen 2017:73; McKittrick 2006:xxvi). This conception of geography posits that there are multiple, socially constructed ways of interpreting landscapes, recognizing the alternative, often repressed, geographies of subjugated peoples. These geographies create new possibilities for being and for imagining the world that resist and disrupt colonial and white supremacist spatial imaginaries.

McKittrick (2006:134) redefines Black women's geographies as “demonic” in order to ask, “what happens when black womanhood, black femineity, black women's spaces, places, and poetics are ‘*Not* on the margins’?” (emphasis in the original). McKittrick contends that asking this question asserts that Black women's spatial ontologies are part of “a larger story of human geography,” not outside of this

story. Black women's heterogeneous experiences of racial-sexual-gendered domination take place in geographic space and reveal moments of contestation that connect the social construction of space to ongoing locations of struggle, de-naturalizing spatial marginalization (McKittrick 2006:135). For McKittrick (2006:4–5), traditional patriarchal white supremacist geographies deny the possibility of Black self-possession, view the space of Blackness homogenized as ungeographic and dispossess(able), and posit that “the black body often determines how the landscape around the black body is read.” In this, possession, of self or land, is viewed through racial and gender hierarchies that assert people of African descent cannot possibly possess either. McKittrick (2006:11–12) argues that Black women's geographies, their understandings of space/place/body, constitute a critique of the racial-sexual-gendered domination of colonialism and patriarchal white supremacy. She argues that experiences of domination produce alternative geographic perspectives and alternative spaces that are difficult to see from a hegemonic lens because “Black geographies, ostensibly, do not make sense in a world that validates spatial processes and progress through domination and social avowal” (McKittrick 2006:9).

Thus, Black land possession, one example being the construction of homeplace, is an act of geographic imagination that counters hegemonic understandings. Mapping this recognizes firstly the social constructedness of space and secondly that these spaces signal a different sense of place (McKittrick 2006:5). Reincorporating heterogeneous narratives of space does not require essentialization to be understood and shared. Rather, narratives that include complexity and contradiction allow an alternative way of viewing the past and imagining the future. The power of “demonic ground” is not just that it is a way to denaturalize the spatial construction of race, gender, and class, but that it makes it possible to imagine something different. We see this in Martin's reexamination of Lucy Foster, where her labor and homeplace are reimagined as essential to supporting part of a joyful community.

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

While the historic plantation presents Anna Kingsley's complex and contradictory historical position through narrative signage (Flewellen 2017:76), placing the narrative in the kitchen locates Kingsley in an expected, and thus ignorable space, and renders her presence elsewhere ungeographic. Doing so resists how the historical memory of Kingsley's life challenges the white dominant narrative of plantation life, one that asserts that plantation owners as white and Black females as enslaved. Flewellen (2017:84) suggests, as an interanimation, that by imagining that Kingsley "could occupy any space at any time" the entire plantation landscape can be transformed into the paradoxical space of McKittrick's demonic ground. I suggest that a collaborative archaeology centered on Black feminist archaeologies and geographies can transform communities into a paradoxical space that produces anti-essentialist historical narratives of place that recognize the raced, classed, and gendered experiences and constructions of space. The production of an anti-essentialist historical narrative requires a radical solidarity built on an intersectional understanding of full collaboration. This form of collaboration is required for a successful CBPR project exploring the diverse history of Oak Bluffs in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

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

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

The ancestral lands of the Wampanoag of Chappaquiddick are Tchepiaquidenet, or Chappaquiddick Island, an island to the west of Martha's Vineyard separated by Katama Bay. In 1788 the lands still under tribal control were divided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts between settler-colonizers and Ingenious Chappaquiddick peoples. The Chappaquiddick tribe retained only one-fifth of Chappaquiddick

Island, divided into two reservations totaling 800 ac (324 ha). The tribe held the lands until 1869 when the Massachusetts Indian Enfranchisement Act was passed, at which point the lands were deeded to tribal members and Chappaquiddick became part of Edgartown (Chappaquiddick Wampanoag Tribe 2016).

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

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

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

Alidade M. Cromwell (1997) refers to the period from 1900 to World War II as a time of gradual growth and change for Oak Bluffs' African American communities. Not only was there an increase in the number of African Americans living on Martha's Vineyard, from 132 in 1890 to 295 by 1940, but the development of numerous African American-led and owned institutions served as cornerstones that helped shaped the heterogeneous groups into a self-described community (Cromwell

1997:50, 52–62). During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many wealthy white summer visitors could no longer afford to vacation on the island or to employ the staff they relied on to care for the houses and make those trips comfortable. Cottages were left unused, and Oak Bluffs' position as a resort community itself was threatened. Middle-class African Americans bought many of these cottages, revitalizing them as well as the resort town itself (Railton 2006:420; West 1996:240). This period built on the foundations previous landowners had constructed and helped to further Oak Bluffs as a popular resort town for African Americans.

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

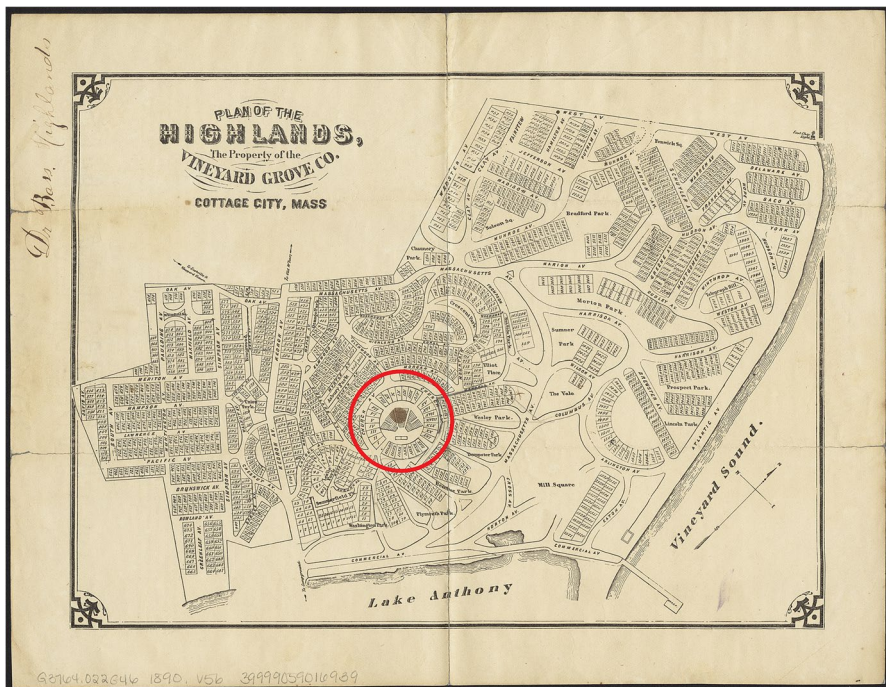
Nevertheless, even in Oak Bluffs, landownership was often restricted to marginal areas or was only possible through a white intermediary (Cromwell 1997:62). Racist rules and regulations thus enforced *de facto* segregation, limiting Black residents' and visitors' ability to enjoy island amenities, rent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

## Starting slowly

In starting research on Oak Bluffs, I attempted to align my methodologies to the ideas of CBPR by focusing on the identification of stakeholder communities and the development of relationships with possible research partners. My methods were a mixture of archival research and snowball-style sampling, where a core set of interviews and meetings serve as a foundation that grows through recommendations and connections (McNeil and Chapman 2005:50–51). They were designed to gain insights into the people and groups with a stake in and knowledge of the history of African descendant communities in Oak Bluffs. Although I see exploring the entire expanded community as a future project, I made a pragmatic decision during the first season to focus primarily on establishing connections with African American institutions, experts, and stakeholders. This was based on the temporal restrictions

of preliminary fieldwork, the comparative lack of published historical information on the Black residential community, and my understanding that the project I proposed could not happen without support and collaboration from the African American descendant community and present-day residents.

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



**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

In this section I highlight some of the conversations and archival sources which indicated community interest in the history of the Highlands area and Baptist Temple Park and how those histories connect to struggles over memory and space in Oak Bluffs. My main points of contact on Martha's Vineyard were the AAHT, the Oak Bluffs Polar Bears, the owner of the historic Shearer Cottage, the Martha's Vineyard Museum, and the Aquinnah-Wampanoag Tribal Historic Preservation Office. Each of these groups are actively preserving and sharing the history of Martha's Vineyard in distinct ways and maintain social and scholarly connections with each other. Further connections grew from these initial meetings, sometimes directly and sometimes through my interactions with local organizations or at community events. I conducted these interviews as conversations without survey questions and took handwritten notes. Interviews were loosely structured around introducing myself as an archaeologist, my research interests in the growth and experiences of African American communities and individuals in Oak Bluffs, the interviewees' perspectives on this history, and what role, if any, archaeology could play in ongoing heritage and memory efforts. No formal oral history interviews were conducted during this stage.

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

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

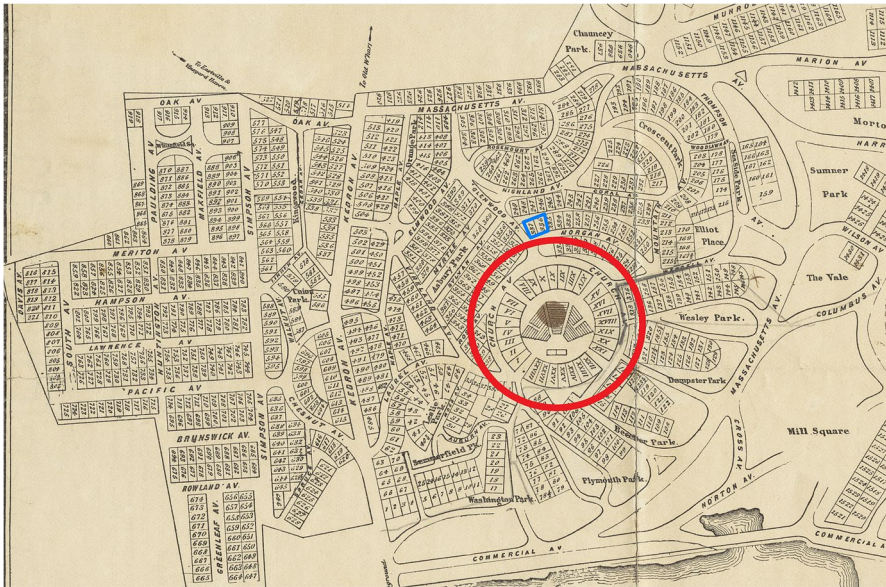
Since its inception in 1998, the AAHT has successfully incorporated sites of African American history and memory into the cultural landscape of Martha's Vineyard. As of 2019, the heritage trail has grown to include 30 sites (AAHT 2020). Despite their success, however, the group does not have access to all of the sites they deem significant to the African American history of the island. At one such site, Baptist Temple Park, lack of landowner has prevented the AAHT from commemorating the location. Both Ms. Carrie Tankard and Dr. Elaine Weintraub believe the Baptist revivals held at the site in late nineteenth century were instrumental to the

Highlands area becoming an attractive place for middle-class African Americans to vacation. For them the site is a crucial aspect of the narrative of a community built on Black homeownership (personal interview with Elaine Cawley Weintraub, July 22, 2019; personal interview with Carrie Camillo Tankard and Elaine Cawley Weintraub, July 26, 2019). These understandings are congruent with those of Cromwell (1997) and with the memories of Dean Denniston, whose father was a local Baptist preacher (Lee 1996). While the AAHT's in-person tours of Oak Bluffs pass by Baptist Temple Park and comment on its history, the organization's ability to create and share a narrative of the site is hampered by their lack of access.

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

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

In a recorded interview with Martha's Vineyard Museum oral historian Lindsay Lee (1999), Ms. Van Allen shares that Henrietta and Charles Shearer purchased a home in the Highlands area because of the Baptist revivals there. Van Allen recounts how Charles Shearer, a member of Boston's Tremont Temple Baptist church, attended revivals held at Baptist Temple park and "fell in love with the island." Deed records show that the Shearers purchased lots 336 and 337 (Dukes County Registry of Deeds 1903, Book 107:96–97), located just outside of Baptist Temple Park (Fig. 3). Like others, Ms. Van Allen cites the presence of African American homeowners in the Highlands as a major factor leading to Oak Bluffs becoming a



**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

vacation destination for African Americans. Shearer Cottage remains a living example of this history.

Census records (US Bureau of the Census [USBC] 1900, 1902) support this narrative. In Oak Bluffs and Martha's Vineyard in 1900, 60% of Black identified households owned, rather than rented, their homes (USBC 1900). This percentage was derived from my exploration of the 1900 census schedules for Dukes County, Massachusetts, the county that includes all of Martha's Vineyard. The use of census data can be problematic due to the inconsistent and politically and socially motivated construction of racial categories in the census (Omi and Winant 2014:121–122) and bias against people who may be less visible on the landscape. However, it still provides a useful baseline and context for understanding homeownership on Martha's Vineyard.

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

**Table 1** Comparison of Homeownership Rates from 1900 censusRacial 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)

households, for households categorized as Black, and those categorized as white in the census.

Comparing these figures to the Dukes County census data (Table 1), I found that, of the total number of African American households on Martha's Vineyard recorded in 1900 (43), 60% owned, rather than rented their homes. This was higher than the rate of homeownership in the US overall at the time (47%), the national rate of Black homeownership (22%), and the national rate of white homeownership (50%). The demography of Massachusetts matched national patterns at the time when broken down by race (USBC 1902:ccviii, 712, 716). Martha's Vineyard and Oak Bluffs are therefore outliers in terms of African American homeownership.

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

This research project seeks to learn from and establish links with those preserving and sharing the island's history. I believe that archaeology can potentially add to these efforts and that these individuals and groups could be essential partners in a CBPR project that utilizes archaeology along with established methods and yet-to-be-established methods of research and outreach. These conversations indicate that there may be community support for a historical study of the Highlands area, and specifically of Baptist Temple Park, focusing on questions of community building and homeownership. Additionally, the current lack of access to that important site presents an entry point for archaeology to make a positive impact on existing heritage efforts. Indeed, an unexpected outcome of this research has been establishing a dialogue with the local organization that owns the Baptist Temple Park property and a tentative plan to explore what archaeology of the site may entail (Craig Dripps,

February 22, 25, 2020, pers. comm.). Through introduction of possible archaeological investigations and the relationships built in the early stages of the project, heritage groups in the community with a complicated history are finding new ways to engage with the history of Oak Bluffs and each other.

The next step of any potential project will be to use these preliminary results to develop ways to assess broader community interest in a research project in the Highlands and to propose specific research and social and civic outcomes that will structure the project. After that, the goal will be to engage in a collaborative research design led by the broadest possible segment of the local, descendant, and research communities. The connections made and information learned in the first steps of this research have produced a foundation to build upon. Success in these steps would result in the collaborative development of research questions and goals, of a dynamic, scaffolded research design to address these questions, and a clearly defined set of expected benefits for the community. Ideally, such a project would include but not be centered on archaeology.

## Conclusion

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

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

CBPR may be at its most rigorous, productive, and ethical when archaeologists add their varied and flexible skills to programs and individuals already conducting heritage research in a community, expanding and building capacity within the existing heritage ecosystem. Engaging with McKittrick’s (2006) thesis that people are always engaged in historical and geographical struggles—struggles over the production of space, body, and community—means archaeologists have only to expand their conceptions of what heritage work looks like to see that alternative histories are not forgotten or even silenced, but disavowed, as Flewellen (2017) points out. Once

this diversity of ongoing work is witnessed, identifying the place where archaeology may best fit in and what the discipline can add, begins. This requires both the development of relationships with potential community partners and a deep understanding of the local context.

An investigation of the history of Oak Bluffs as a pluralistic resort community means engaging with those already working to reveal the paradoxical space—the demonic grounds—that traces the complex location of women of African descent within local, regional, and global systems. Calling for a type of collaboration that decenters archaeology does not deny the power of archaeology backed by academic institutions and outside funding. Rather, it highlights how collaborative relationships establish the researcher’s accountability to partners and the researcher’s stake in the community.

What resources does archaeology possess and transmit to communities, that could challenge the racialized geography of white patriarchal histories? In Oak Bluffs, historical narratives, shared in heritage tours, oral histories, and published works discuss Blackness existing beyond the margins, a radical act that transforms social space and historical memory (hooks 2015:21–22). The AAHT has used these resources and novel research to create a robust memory landscape that replaces Blackness on the landscape of Oak Bluffs and Martha’s Vineyard with the goal of improving their local community. Archaeology, even without excavation, may be able to help extend the AAHT memory landscape into currently inaccessible sites like Baptist Temple Park. In this way, community-based collaborative archaeology can support and strengthen individuals and organizations that are remapping spaces of African American placemaking. Such a research project recognizes the need to confront the material and social consequences of placing people of African descent on the margins and what is to be gained if they occupy the center.

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

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