



ANTI-RACIST ARCHAEOLOGY

YOUR TIME IS NOW

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The year 2020 quickly drew the world's attention to anti-Black racism and structural violence. Statements of solidarity and claims for change have emerged in a multiplicity of spaces. As white archaeologists aim to address this global movement within the field and ask us, again, "what can we do?" or "what is an anti-racist archaeology?," we believe it is necessary to have yet another serious conversation.

Anti-racism work is not new. This has been the work of countless people, social movements, activists, scholars, artists, communities, and organizations for decades. As Black/Afrodiasporic PhD students, we particularly want to honor those who have come before us and opened avenues to make our presence possible in the academy through their many struggles, whether in Black/Africana studies or in any other fields of knowledge. We wish to acknowledge that we are following the steps of our intellectual elders, including Black archaeologists such as Theresa Singleton, Cheryl LaRoche, Maria Franklin, Whitney Battle-Baptiste, and Anna Agbe-Davies.

Here, we want to share common and personal feelings, thoughts, and critical reflections. We write from our own places of speech. Nkem Ike's research centers on race massacres and anti-Black violence in the United States. Gabrielle Miller's work engages the expressions and legacies of freedom and resistance in an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century free Black community in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Gabby Omoni Hartemann is Afroguianese and their research is rooted in an anti-colonial re-understanding of archaeology and deals with past and present relations between the land and Afro Amazonian communities in the Guianas.

We are not a monolith. We are people with varying insights, epistemologies, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Despite the diversity of our perceptions, we are aware of the ways in which violence is constructed against Black people through systems that ignore, discourage, erase, and exploit us as contributors and knowledge producers. In this, we share similar feelings because we have all seen it and felt it. We know that the academy wasn't built for us and that our place in it is

disruptive to a field that has historically marginalized us and continues to capitalize on our identities.

The phrase, "Black Lives Matter," might be relatively new, but we have always stated and have been aware of the fact that our lived experiences are important and should be prioritized. We want to compel white archaeologists to not fall into the hype of the current political context that makes you more susceptible to listening about Black violence just because it is trendy right now. Are you going to limit yourself to this moment of uprising and protests, or will the current focus on the "Black Lives Matter" movement endure? Who are going to be the people doing the work after this topic is no longer sexy?

We are committed to doing this work for the rest of our lives, and we cannot pick and choose when to engage with it. We advocate for an anti-racist approach to archaeology. This approach cannot be fully implemented when only Black people talk about racism within the field. It has to also include white people examining the ways in which they perpetuate violence and oppress Black people.

Nkem

The conversation around Black Lives Matter and its relationship to Black people within academia should be centered on preservation. If white folks truly care about Black lives, then they must begin taking into account the emotional labor that goes into educating white people and the often-uncompensated amount of time Black people spend doing just this. In the classroom, at conferences, and even in social situations, Black people are expected to engage in conversations about race, often pushing their own fatigue aside in an effort to help others grow and learn. However, expectations placed on Black people to regularly contribute their minds, bodies, and spirits to educating white people takes an emotional toll. As a result, Black people's efforts at mental, emotional, and physical preservation can manifest as anger, rage, sadness, pain, distancing, and even disengaging with conversations surrounding race altogether. All of these tactics of survival and preservation are valid. I've heard too many young Black academics say, "Y'all, I'm tired."

When these words are spoken, every Black person in the room is painfully familiar with those feelings of exhaustion and exasperation. I imagine that each of us can remember specific instances when we told ourselves or were told by an elder that we need to protect our energy.

Right now, the country seems to have finally woken up and is loudly proclaiming that Black Lives Matter. It has become a slogan that is easy to say, to post on social media, or to include in our titles for publications and presentations. This slogan has also become something that billion-dollar companies and powerful institutions can post on timelines or in e-mails to faculty, staff, and students, while, at the same time, contributing no real, tangible, actionable changes. True support of Black lives entails being aware of the needs of Black people. It also lies in the centering of Black people as knowledge producers. What it does not entail is continuing to ask Black people to do all of the emotional labor for themselves, their institutions, or the world. When there is a continued reliance on Black voices within disciplines, institutions, and social circles where you see very few Black faces, you should ask yourself why that is the case. When Black people are constantly expected to engage in conversations about race, but white people are not, you should ask yourself why. When Black students, faculty, staff, and administrators are expected to be the only people to call out racism within institutions, while white people sit silent, you should ask yourself why. When Black people offer solutions to institutionalized problems and shortcomings, only to be met with hostility and defensiveness, you should ask yourself why. These are, at the very least, the questions white people should ask themselves because Black people have taken on the full burden of these issues for too long.

I find myself becoming unnerved by the fact that the conversations we are constantly asked to participate in only happen during national, visible instances of racial unrest that largely result from the killings of unarmed Black people. I know that my life matters, and Black people have been making that case, not only in the United States, but around the world. It is time for white people to recognize the same thing and to alter the ways they engage with Black people, our knowledge, and our research. I want to encourage and challenge white people to do the work. There are infinite educational and historical resources that can speak to your inquiries and questions, both online and offline. This is important to consider because although white people might feel comfortable asking Black classmates, colleagues, and friends about issues surrounding race, we don't always have the answers, and we owe no one our insights and experiences. Even as I craft this essay and see what my friends and colleagues are also writing in this article, it is clear that nothing we are saying has not already been said. The questions we are asking and the suggestions we are putting forth for consideration have been stated time and time again. I want to emphasize that this is

not meant to discourage white people from self-reflection and unpacking the ways in which they are complicit in acts of violence and oppression against Black people but instead should serve as a call for them to utilize the resources already available to dismantle the practices and politics that perpetuate it.

Gabrielle

I first saw this invoice a couple years ago (Figure 1), and seeing the itemization of the unspoken labor myself and my colleagues are expected to engage in on a daily basis was striking. Prior to the global pandemic, my Black and brown colleagues and I were already exhausted. Exhausted from existing in spaces that don't value our humanity, that don't affirm our diverse ways of knowing, or that don't respect our methodologies. Exhausted from the expectation to produce exceptional work and educate our white colleagues on all things associated with race. Exhausted from operating at extreme levels of burnout and still being told that we're "needed" on more anti-racism committees but not needed to provide expertise on our various specializations. We are expected to fulfill all of these duties in addition to processing the continuous assault on the Black consciousness, having to move through collective grief, organizing, and fear while maintaining academic excellence. Prior to the recent influx of interest in Black politics among our white colleagues, we have been holding each other up, affirming our collective voices, and providing community resources long before our issues became "interesting" to white academia.

Why has it taken so long for white academics and institutions to acknowledge all that Black academics have been providing them for so long? The reason why this invoice was so striking to me was not because I didn't understand the value of myself or my colleagues but because I realized how powerful monetizing our contributions would be to our white counterparts. If anything speaks to the collective colonized mind, it's monetary value. Whether or not Black ideas, labor, or energy are valued intrinsically in white spaces, there is certainly a benefit that is recognized by adding a Black voice or presence. In academia, this often looks like tokenization, the addition of a Black body without any serious consideration of the concerns and ideas that originate from it. But let's be real: academic institutions benefit greatly from this presence in more than a symbolic sense. There is real social capital to be gained from keeping and using Black faculty and students as a commodity in the social market. Institutions gain much more from the political and social capital gained from tokenization than Black folks gain in this pervasive dynamic.

While Black academics are doing the labor- and time-intensive work of real community collaboration and critical applied research, we are also busy cleaning up the reputations of the institutions that continue to exploit us and the communities we study. This work occurs all while institutions simultaneously

undermine the ability for Black academics to gain any real positions of authority and power. One way this is evident is by the example of the tenure process. Institutions claim to value the work and perspectives of their Black colleagues but often discount many aspects of their work in respect to what contributes to achieving tenure. After our universities task us to do endless hours of educational work—teaching our colleagues the basics of anti-racism, prioritizing the sensitivities and needs of white students, and organizing committees to fix their failings in diversity and inclusion—these efforts are more often considered extra-curricular rather than essential. While our white counterparts have the already arduous task of conducting research, teaching, and publishing, we as Black academics are doing all of this and also carrying the weight of the sins of colonialism. This invoice contains only a fraction of the emotional labor Black and brown folks do in spaces that expect marginalized folks to carry the burden of whiteness. If we were to apply this invoice to an academic setting, we could itemize the previously listed efforts and much more.

If colonial institutions are incapable of valuing the contributions of their Black employees in ways that are affirming and humanizing, at the very least they could stick to the rivers and the lakes that they're used to—capital wealth. Let's be frank: these institutions were designed to perpetuate the commodification of Black folks, so let's not pretend that these relationships aren't transactional. If you can't love us, pay us. If you can't see us, pay us. If you can't speak our language, pay us. Because we had to learn how to praise you, see you, how to be fluent in your language. In your language, monetary investment is placed into the things you value. How can we believe that you are serious about "increasing diversity," anti-racism, or any other trendy social justice flavor of the week if you aren't even showing us what our value is by your own standards? So long as you expect us to carry your burdens and do your labor for free while you lavish in the abundance it provides, you prove that your colonial mind still runs off the fumes of enslavement. The wisdom of my ancestors taught me that if someone is going to step to you, they better come at you correct. Show us respect and pay us our dues first, and then we can talk. Meanwhile, I have work to do. Google some anti-racism resources, I heard Noname has a book club . . .

EMOTIONAL LABOR INVOICE

Marginalized Folks Inc.

TO: Potential Ally
Privileged Folks Ltd.

SERVICE PROVIDER	SPECIALIZATION	DUE DATE
Marginalized Person You Know	Existing in Oppression	DUE ON RECEIPT

DESCRIPTION	#	UNIT PRICE	LINE TOTAL
Helped you understand your racism/sexism/transphobia/ableism/etc.		\$ 100.00	
Endured your microaggression(s)		\$ 200.00	
Taught you about microaggressions & structural oppression		\$ 300.00	
Explained something about structural oppression you could've Googled		\$ 125.00	
Clarified that you are not entitled to my time		\$ 250.00	
Clarified that you are not entitled to my pain		\$ 350.00	
Softened my reaction to spare your feelings		\$ 500.00	
Made you feel like a "good" ally		\$ 600.00	
Listened to "Not all . . ." and similar derailments/fragility		\$ 750.00	
Smiled when you apologized for not speaking up in the meeting		\$ 1,000.00	
Subtotal			
Marginalization Tax Adjustment			\$ 1,500.00
Amount Due:			

Figure 1. Artwork by Anastasia Collins, Simmons University Library, reproduced here under Creative Commons license.

Gabby

Fundamentally, the maintenance of a supposed innocence regarding the structural reproduction of inequalities within knowledge production, and specifically archaeological knowledge production, is one of the main barriers for the change many claim they wish for. Though some scarce, well-meaning initiatives have made a first step in this direction by guaranteeing the presence of some Black folks in their space, too much remains to be done. The presence of our bodies in hegemonic spaces is not enough if our knowledge, our knowledge systems, our world-senses, our languages, and other forms of transmitting knowledge remain systematically excluded and invalidated. Isn't it ironic that a field of knowledge that is

supposed to be affirming of the existence of people outside the white, Eurocentric, western, modern, cisgender norms fails to consider *us* as knowledge producers?

Archaeology as a discipline continues to be actively engaged in reproducing the structural inequalities of this hegemonic, colonialist, modern western order of the world. What defines archaeological knowledge today is still the same set of references, written by white, western, European or Euroamerican, English- or French-speaking, cisgender individuals. The core definitions of what archaeology is and who it serves is still overwhelmingly composed of the thoughts and world-perception of this minority, in the legacy of the colonial and racist hierarchy that restricts them as those who can think and those who can know. This implies that any work that does not cite this same minority is not recognized as legitimate. This implies that any person not in this privileged minority must first learn their knowledge system, their understanding of the past, their notions of time, materiality, and space, in order to do archaeology and have their work recognized and legitimated. The negligence around the structural racist violence that is inherent to fieldwork is a disciplinary complicity in the exclusion of Black students from the field of archaeology.

To me specifically, as an archaeologist from and based in the region referred to as the Global South, it also implies being compelled to learn western languages, through extremely expensive courses of English and French (considered the “languages of knowledge”), to access archaeological theories and methodologies. It implies that scholars from the Global South are encouraged to publish in languages that are not their own and are not accessible to their communities in order to have their work validated. These disciplinary conditions posit that accessing archaeological knowledge is reserved for only a few and that our mere physical presence in hegemonic space doesn’t guarantee us an equitable position since we still have many more layers of work to do than our white, western counterparts.

Where are our knowledge, our words, our world perceptions in the work you do about us and about those who are not you, those who still suffer and who have been othered by the same system you profit from? How many Indigenous thinkers do you use in the theoretical and methodological approaches to your research about the Indigenous past? How many African and Afrodiasporic thinkers do you use in your theoretical and methodological approaches to your research about the African and Afrodiasporic past? Who do you read, listen to, and cite to create interpretations of the contexts you study? Are the ideas, theories, and methodologies of archaeologists and anthropologists from the Global South present in your students’ syllabus? Acknowledging that archaeology’s core disciplinary rules reproduce structural inequalities means that an internal, epistemological shift is necessary.

Black and Indigenous archaeologists all around the world have been engaged in this epistemological change for decades. Despite structural mechanisms still in place to exclude us and our knowledge from this field, bold and critical movements keep challenging the inequalities of the discipline through creative, politically engaged, and interdisciplinary approaches to archaeological work.

We have been building our work in response to this structural imbalance, to systemic racism and colonialism, to the hegemonic silencing of the stories about the past we have to tell. Therefore, it should be no surprise to witness the centrality occupied by communities in the archaeology we do, as we have acknowledged the need for archaeology to be in service of people for a long time. We have understood the potential for archaeology to help us tell our own stories in a western world that only gives value to euro-western written documents. We have occupied archaeology and learned about its theories, tools, and languages without undermining the knowledge, memory, and knowledge-transmission forms of our elders. We have created spaces for dialogue between western archaeologists and thinkers/knowledge holders from outside the discipline. We haven’t limited our work to disciplinary rules, and we have opened avenues for new archaeological methodologies and languages.

It is time to invert this colonial hierarchy. It is time for you to learn from the work we’ve been doing. It is time for you to follow our footsteps and actively engage in this decades-old work. It is time for you to show us, through your actions, that you are truly committed to creating an anti-racist archaeology.

Where Do We Go from Here?

This is not a conclusion but a jumping off point. We recognize that this problem is structural and will not be solved now, soon, or even within our own lifetimes. You have resources at your disposal to learn from the work of Black archaeologists and heritage professionals. There are organizations engaged in this mission that have been explicit regarding their need for financial support that you can donate to. However, at the end of the day, to truly confront racism, white archaeologists will have to give up certain traditional notions of power and expertise that are embedded in the field. It is now your moment to act and join us in this monumental task. It is up to you to support their long-term commitment.

For Black people, we want you to know that if you are tired, we feel you. If you are discouraged, we feel you. If you are angry and ready to fight, we feel that too. You are not alone. Do not let anybody deny the invaluable contributions you have made and will make. Here’s the reality: there can and should always be more voices from Black people. We hope this article serves you and validates feelings of wariness and frustration with the current state of the field of archaeology and the world.

ANTI-RACIST ARCHAEOLOGY

As members of the Society of Black Archaeologists (SBA), we specifically want to highlight the work that has been done constantly and continuously by the organization in its relatively short lifetime. An initiative particularly worth mentioning is the recent panel discussion “Archaeology in the Time of Black Lives Matter,” during which six Black scholars share their insights, knowledge, and experiences in order for archaeologists to critically rethink their practice. The recording of the panel discussion is available on the SBA’s website.

Read, Cite, and Include in Your Course Syllabi

Akin Ogundiran, Alexandra Jones, Alexis Adande, Alicia Odewale, Anna Agbe-Davies, Annelise Morris, Ayana Omilade Flewellen, Cheryl LaRoche, Cheryl White, Didier N’dah, George Abungu, Irislane Pereira de Moraes, Jannie Scott, Jerry Howard, Justin Dunnivant, Kodzo Gavua, Maria Franklin, Michael Blakey, Nedra K. Lee, Patrícia Marinho de Carvalho, Peggy Brunache, Rachel Engmann, Rachel Watkins, Rosinalda Corrêa da Silva Simoni, Sada Mire, Terrance Weik, Theresa Singleton, Tiffany Cain Fryer, Whitney Battle-Baptiste, William White, and others. We are aware that this is not an exhaustive list and we apologize for potentially leaving out invaluable contributions to the field.

Additional Forms of Support

As students and scholars committed to the longevity of work that supports Black and Indigenous organizations, scholars, and histories, we have compiled a list of organizations to consider supporting. In addition to studying and citing the works of Black scholars, we also strongly urge you to consider supporting these groups to help establish a sustainable foundation upon which this important work can continue. Thank you.

Society of Black Archaeologists (SBA)
<https://www.societyofblackarchaeologists.com/>

Archaeology in the Community (AITC)
<http://www.archaeologyincommunity.com/>

Diving with a Purpose (DWP)
<https://divingwithapurpose.org/>

Rede de Arqueologia Negra (Negrarqueo)
<https://www.instagram.com/negrarqueo/>

Indigenous Archaeology Collective (IAC)
<https://www.facebook.com/indigarchs/>

Association of Black Anthropologists (ABA)
<http://aba.americananthro.org/>



Canyon of the Ancients Credit: Bob Wick, BLM



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ARCHAEOLOGY FOR ALL.

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and advocate for the
preservation of the
archaeological record.

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