An Archaeological Investigation of Enslavement at Gamble Plantation

S. Matthew Litteral
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An Archaeological Investigation of Enslavement at Gamble Plantation

by

S. Matthew Litteral

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I have compiled information from archives, remote sensing, and archaeological excavation to shed light upon an understudied chapter of Florida’s history, specifically, African American heritage components at Gamble Plantation. My goal is to provide a better understanding of the daily lives of enslaved individuals who were held in bondage at Gamble Plantation (8MA100), located along the Manatee River in Ellenton, Fl. Through my work, I hope to engage descendant communities in future archaeological research and promote a more balanced and inclusive historical narrative for Gamble Plantation State Park.
CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Research Design

If you opt for a tour at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park (Figure 1.1), a friendly and knowledgeable tour guide will lead you out of the visitor center and towards an elegant antebellum mansion. Before setting foot inside the stately house, your guide is sure to regale you with some swashbuckling stories about the property’s first owners. This speech will conclude with a grateful nod to the Daughters of the Confederacy, who graciously donated the house and grounds. You will walk away from the tour thoroughly informed about the lives of early planters in Florida, such as Major Robert Gamble, the original owner of the property. Unfortunately, the daily lives of the other 180 people who lived, worked, and often died on this plantation will remain a mystery to you.

Figure 1.1. The façade of Gamble Mansion (This and subsequent photos by author, 2017)
Little is known about the enslaved individuals that were forced to work on sugar plantations in southern Florida. Unfortunately, this lack of information is a common phenomenon at plantation sites across the South. However, more contemporary archaeological frameworks such as activist and critical theory help to provide a range of perspectives that improve public appreciation for how the past has influenced the present (Agbe-Davies 2010, Epperson 2004, Orser 2010). My theoretical perspective is influenced by theorists that emphasize how archaeology does not occur within a vacuum (Agbe-Davies 2010, Battle-Baptiste 2007). Archaeological research has real consequences for living communities and is subject to our own personal biases. Archaeologists have the obligation to conduct our work in a manner that is responsible and respectful to living people. This role provides archaeologists with a great deal of power, but also responsibility to the communities in which we work and to the nation at large.

The goal of this thesis is to evaluate what is known about the enslaved community at Gamble Plantation and recommend ways to move forward in bringing the history of slavery in Florida to light. This thesis develops several web-based platforms and suggestions to set the ground work for community-engaged public heritage, through the creation of an online open-access GIS web-application for reporting stories and archaeological discoveries (detailed in Chapter 4), through genealogical research into the individuals and families enslaved at Gamble, and through archaeological and remote sensing research (LIDAR findings are open access at https://ropitz.github.io/GamblingWithThePast/) to try to identify features on the landscape that reflect the lives and labor of those enslaved at the plantation. In this thesis, I have compiled information from archives, remote sensing, and archaeological excavation to shed light upon an understudied period of Florida’s history. I also helped develop and
implement archaeological excavation at the site, this included public archaeology days, during which the public was invited to participate and learn.

There are numerous stakeholders whom should be considered moving forward in archaeological investigations at Gamble. Stakeholders in the historical narrative at Gamble Plantation include Ellenton and local community residents, private landowners, State Park employees, the Daughters of the Confederacy, the historic preservation society, the descendants of those who were enslaved, and the general public. Navigating the conflicting interests, motivations, power dynamics, between these stakeholders has been a challenging aspect of this thesis research due to the amount of time required to sort through various stakeholder dynamics. For the purposes of this research, the interests of all stakeholders have not been addressed equally. I challenge the narrative that has been promoted by the Daughters of the Confederacy. I feel that their influence over the story presented at Gamble for the last 100 years has led to a grave misrepresentation of history. Unfortunately, the erasing and simplification of dark and complex histories is a common phenomenon at many state parks (Shackel 2002). I am attempting to disrupt this phenomenon, in my own small way, through this thesis.

Organization of Thesis

In Chapter 2, I provide a history of Gamble Plantation. I emphasize historical resources that provide information about people who were held in bondage at Gamble Plantation. I then discuss the contentious and politically charged history behind the master-slave narrative currently offered at the site. I also discuss previous archaeological research which has been conducted. The literature review in Chapter 3 is an exploration of theoretical concepts and frameworks which have influenced and shaped my work. I discuss the methodologies I employed in Chapter 4, these include archival research, LIDAR data
analysis, georeferencing using GIS software, excavation, public archaeology, and the creation of an online web application for the sharing of archaeological information.

My findings are detailed in Chapter 5, which highlights documentary evidence, and landscape analysis using LIDAR and GIS, as well as the known archaeological record at the site. In Chapter 6 I discuss the implications of my findings and what I learned about those who were enslaved at Gamble Plantation. Lastly, I provide a project summary and suggestions for future research at the site.

It is necessary to acknowledge my own positionality and identity and how it has influenced my research. My interest in the site stems largely from my own personal inclinations for both archaeology and advocacy. At Gamble, I recognize the enslaved people who were wiped clean from the historical narrative, which is a grave injustice, both to the memory of those who suffered enslavement and to their descendants, as well as visitors to the park who may view the institution of slavery through the “rose colored glasses” proliferated by reconstruction-era propaganda. Learning about the enslaved and adding their stories to the historical narrative is my way of being an advocate for the enslaved. Of course, my interpretations are no doubt limited by my own positionality as a white, college educated male in the 21st century. To expand my inherent perspective, I seek to engage with a broader range of scholarship and experiences (Baker 1998; Battle-Baptiste 2011; Jackson 2012; Vlach 2014).
CHAPTER 2:

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Florida in the mid 19th Century

Florida’s long history of human habitation spans some 14,000 years, beginning with early Native American hunter-gatherers. Culturally diverse indigenous groups maintained rich oral traditions detailing their tribal history for millennia before any Spanish explorers recorded their exploits. Manatee county was home to the Tocobaga and Calusa tribes prior to Spanish contact, these mound building cultures left behind monumental shell mounds which dot the coastal landscape to this day. Juan Ponce de Leon led the first European expedition into modern day Florida in 1513, leaving death, disease, and ruination in his wake as he established Spanish colonial rule (Hoffman 1997).

According to research conducted by Jane Launders in the 1990s, many enslaved Africans during the time of Spanish colonial rule allied with Native Americans who might help them escape, while free Africans typically preferred to stay loyal to the Spanish in order to receive a share of the expeditions profits (Launders 1999). During the early Spanish period Launders found that the ratio of African men and women was relatively equal, she posits that this was due to a lack of labor-intensive industries and the maintenance of family units (Launders 1998).

Spanish control of Florida proved tenuous, over the next 300 years, Florida transitioned between Spanish, French, and British rule until it was finally admitted into the Union as the 27th U.S. state in 1845. When Spain ceded control of Florida many free Africans evacuated to Cuba
with the Spanish. African militiamen and their families were relocated at the expense of the Spanish crown (Launders 1998). Most free Africans that remained in Florida after Spanish rule were effectively pushed out by white supremacist Americans that wished to impose their two caste racial system upon them, many later migrated to Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico (Launders 1998).

The untamed wilderness of the Florida frontier became a refuge for people fleeing persecution during the colonial period. Specifically, Native American groups, free people of color, and those escaping enslavement. Colonial conflicts between the Spanish and British also prompted the movement of people seeking freedom. Escaped enslaved people from British colonies were given freedom by the Spanish after converting to Catholicism in the early 18th century. Many of these newly freed individuals came together to establish the first settlement of free people of color in North America, Fort Mose, near St. Augustine (Deagan and Landers 1999).

The Seminole were relative late comers to the state, migrating to Florida after initial Native American populations were decimated by disease and conflict with Europeans. They were one of the last Native American tribes to maintain cultural independence from whites and continuously occupied regions of South Florida, resisting the Indian Removal and Armed Occupation Acts (Covington 1993). The resulting conflicts comprised the Seminole Wars.

Maroon colonies, comprised of African Americans who escaped institutional slavery in the southern United States, existed in remote locations across Florida in the early to mid-19th century. These colonies existed in areas virtually uninhabited by whites, in marginal and difficult to access locations. Archaeological work done at maroon sites has enriched the study of enslaved Africans, by expanding the narrative outside of plantation contexts where most research has focused (Weik 1997). One such colony, known as Angola, likely existed within 20 miles of the
land which would become Gamble Plantation. We may never know whether or not those enslaved at Gamble Plantation were aware that such an outpost of freedom existed so close to home. Angola was raided and destroyed decades before Robert Gamble, Jr. set foot in the region, the colony’s survivors fled south to the British Bahamas, where many of their descendants remain to this day (Baram 2008). The destruction of Angola was the result of a fierce slave raid led by Andrew Jackson’s troupes, including Lower Creek Native Americans associated with his planter supporters. Three-hundred black settlers were captured, while 250 were able to escape (Rivers 2000).

After Spain ceded Florida to the United States in 1821, a wave of wealthy emigrants from Kentucky, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia moved into Middle Florida. They brought with them their planter culture and the intention of building a society akin to the one they had left behind. The development of this new “Old South” depended on the removal of free blacks and Native Americans away from profitable lands and into marginal areas (Baptist 2002: 17). The Second Seminole War was the inevitable result of this forced removal, which was fueled and legitimized by Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act of 1829 (Rivers 2000). This act sanctioned the forced removal of Native American people in the East from their ancestral land and their movement westward along routes that would become known as the trail of tears. Many people died as a result of this forced removal, and its dark ramifications are felt to this day.

In 1842, the Armed Occupational Act prompted the movement of many white settlers into South Florida. This act granted 160-acre homesteads to the head of any family who resided for five years in a designated area. Settlers had to guard their holdings from local Native Americans and could not live within two miles of a military post. Hundreds of incoming settlers
made their homesteads along the Manatee River, in this government sanctioned stealing of Native American land.

There were multiple economic, political, and environmental factors which culminated in Robert Gamble, Jr. choosing the shores of the Manatee for his sugar venture; however, he did not come to possess his lands through the Armed Occupation Act. Planters such as the Gamble and Braden families were convinced sugar would make slave holders rich in the Manatee River country, away from the short growing seasons and frost of northern Florida counties such as Leon, Madison, and Jefferson, where earlier attempts to grow sugar had failed (Rivers 2000).

Large plantation owners in Florida usually imposed labor practices that were common in the Old South cotton lands. Planters opted for the gang system with a clear division of labor between men, women, the young, and the old. At the Middle Florida plantations of George Noble Jones and Nancy DeLaughter hoe gangs, plow gangs, and trash gangs were used to cultivate the land. Hoe gangs consisted of women, plow gangs of men, and the trash gang was comprised of the young and the old (Rivers 2000).

Robert Gamble, Jr. was born in 1813 at White House Plantation near Richmond, Virginia (Figure 2.1). In the latter half of the 1820s, his father John Grattan Gamble (1779-1852) and uncle, Robert H. Gamble (1780-1867), relocated the family to the Tallahassee area of North Florida. John Grattan Gamble established Waukeena Plantation in Jefferson County, and by 1827 held 55 enslaved laborers. Robert H. Gamble also established a plantation nearby, comprised of 8,000 acres and 40 enslaved persons. The Gamble brothers planted cotton and tobacco and experimented with sugar cane in the 1820s and 1830s (Roland et.al. 2004; Silpa 2008).
In 1833, John Grattan Gamble was elected president of the newly formed Union Bank of Tallahassee. During his time as president, he developed a real estate mortgage institution intended to assist planters by offering mortgages and loans at two thirds of total property value. Declining cotton prices from 1836 through the early 1840s led to a regional economic downturn, and a market collapse in Tallahassee. Members of the Gamble family began to seek out alternative cash crops and industries to expand their holdings and wealth (Schene 1976).

Robert Gamble, Jr. left home in 1835 to serve in the local Tallahassee militia and fought in the Second Seminole War at the Battle of the Withlacoochee. In 1836 he was accepted to West
Point, but did not graduate from the institution, returning to Florida in the late 1830s (Schene 1972). Upon his return, he had several friends who had already set up homesteads along the Manatee River. They sent Gamble reports of the progress they had made in only a short time, and the favorable planting conditions of the region. Before deciding to purchase the land that would become Manatee River Plantation, Gamble carefully surveyed the area to ensure that the property would be suitable for planting sugar cane and that the shore line would be adequate for his shipping needs (Wiggins 2003).

In 1841, Gamble realized that it would not be long before applications would be made under the Armed Occupational Act, after which, large parcels of fertile land would no longer be available. He purchased his land from the US government, not under the Armed Occupation Act, and by 1844 efforts to clear the property began. In an article for the Tallahassee Floridian, Gamble recalled the early days of his settlement in the area:

In 1844 I carried ten of my negro men to the river and commenced operations; this was just at the close of the seven years war with the Seminoles, so that after living in a stockade for that length of time upon the extreme frontiers of Middle Florida, I found myself again living upon the frontier, there being no white face between me and the everglades (Tallahassee Floridian, 28 September 1888).

This article is one of the few historical documents that mentions those held in bondage by Gamble. These ten men were likely held by other members of the Gamble family prior to being relocated to South Florida. Members of the Gamble family fostered a complicated network of interrelations between enslaved people held at their numerous plantations. Laura Wirt Randall, the future wife of Robert Gamble, Jr., wrote letters to several family members in Maryland and Virginia mentioning slave marriages on her father’s plantation. Enslaved women held by her
father were married to men held by her maternal uncle, John Grattan Gamble. She wrote about providing a few of the enslaved women dresses for their weddings (Rivers 2000).

These marriages would have been carefully considered by the planter class, who viewed those they held in bondage as valuable personal assets, not to be treated lightly. There is nothing to suggest that the preferences of the enslaved were taken into consideration at all, although enslaved laborers often found resourceful ways to assert their individual agency. From letters alone, it is impossible to say whether these were arranged unions calculated between members of the Gamble family, or instances of leniency, in which an enslaved laborer was permitted to marry a spouse from a neighboring plantation for love. However, it is certain that a gifted wedding dress hardly makes up for the deprivation of one’s most basic human rights and the exploitation of women’s bodies for reproductive labor (Hartman 2016).

By 1847, Gamble held 69 enslaved laborers, and by 1855 the number increased to 151 (Schene 1981). When he finally sold the plantation in December of 1858, Gamble held 185 enslaved people. The bill of sale, from Gamble to Cofield and Davis, who would later purchase the plantation, notes that 41 of the total 185 individuals sold were being held at Nehamathla Plantation in Leon County (1858 Bill of Sale, Gamble File, Clerk of Court, Manatee County Courthouse). Nehamathla was owned by John Grattan Gamble, but managed by Robert Gamble, Jr. as administrator of his father’s estate.

Those enslaved by Gamble were made to construct his opulent mansion and expansive sugar mill (Figure 2.3) brick by brick. Bricks were made on site by enslaved workers from both locally sourced yellow clay, and tabby. Tabby is a concrete-like building material similar to the coquina utilized for colonial construction on Florida’s east coast, except tabby is made by hand, rather than being a naturally occurring limestone. The tabby at Gamble was made by enslaved
laborers by crushing thousands of oyster shells, many likely sourced from local Native American mounds and middens. The complex architecture of both the mansion and the mill suggests that there were many highly skilled workers at Gamble. Unfortunately, skilled black laborers are too often overlooked in histories of plantation architecture (Jackson 2012; Vlach 2016).

The enslaved also dug 16 miles of canals, to create drainage, forever altering the marshy landscape along the river. These canals are still visible and functioning to this day (Figure 2.2). Enslaved laborers turned what was once swamp, into well drained and productive farmland.

Enslaved Africans cleared the fields, planted and harvested the sugar cane that was brought to the mill, and processed the cane into molasses. Processing sugar requires a number of labor intensive steps; chopping the cane, grinding, and then heating the resulting liquid until sugar crystallization occurs. The labor cost of producing sugar would have been huge had Gamble, or other plantation owners, actually paid their laborers. The huge profitability of the sugar industry prior to emancipation depended upon the free labor of enslaved Africans (Mintz 1986). Gamble’s sugar mill was powered by cutting edge steam technology. He had two 50 horsepower steam engines to drive the cane mill. Boilers were used to evaporate cane juice with steam pans for granulating the sugar. A separate steam engine ran his grist and saw mill and supplied water to the boilers (Schene 1972).
Figure 2.2. LIDAR map of Ellenton showing canal system
(Created by author using LAStools)
The early steam technologies at Gamble was operated by enslaved Africans, they were very dangerous and ran the risk of explosion, due to a lack of air tight engineering. The working conditions inside the mill were hinted at by Robert Gamble, Jr. in his 1888 memoir;

While the mill was in motion a solid mass of cane five feet wide and 14 inches high passed continuously between rollers, and was so effectually crushed that the bagasse as it passed from the rollers was nearly as dry as tinder, cut in two at every joint, and if applied to the mouth while inhaling would produce partial suffocation by its dry impalpable powder. (*Tallahassee Floridian*, 28 September 1888).

From this account, it becomes clear exactly how terrible working conditions in the mill would have been for the enslaved who labored there day and night. They would have worked in extreme heat, with explosive machinery, in a building full of tinder, all while being suffocated by an “impalpable powder”. It is no doubt that these conditions would have had a huge impact on the health of the enslaved, however a lack of physical and documentary evidence complicates any specific assertions about the health of these individuals.

Gamble also described the brick construction of his sugar mill in the memoir he wrote for the Tallahassee Floridain;

All these bricks were made on the spot and by my own force, and with the exception of one white workman, as boss brick layer, they were all laid by my own negroes; the most intelligent being selected and under the guidance of Mr. Godard, who was one of the “armed occupationists” and a master workman, they did good and loyal work (*Tallahassee Floridian*, 28 September 1888).
The name of the man who Gamble refers to as “most intelligent”, appears to be lost. However, the story of an enslaved man’s agency lies hidden in Gamble’s recollection. Through his assertion of individual agency and personal aptitude, this enslaved laborer gained valuable skills in bricklaying and engineering, assuming these were not skills he already possessed. This would have increased his status on the plantation, while also allowing him to learn a trade, likely an invaluable asset upon emancipation. Skilled labor is often underrepresented in discussions of plantation enslaved peoples. However, Jackson (2012) underscores that this is a valued asset that could incorporate knowledge Africans brought with them and that predate the transatlantic slave trade.

Figure 2.3. Artistic Rendering of Gamble’s Sugar Mill (“Gamble sugar mill at Ellenton, Florida. 184-?”). Black & white photonegative, 4 x 5 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/141795>, accessed 23 October 2019)
Many of Gamble’s personal records about day to day life and managing the plantation were destroyed in a fire that ravaged Tallahassee in the later part of the 19th century. When the Patten family came to own the property in the 1870s, Gamble presented them with copies of many records, including a map showing the layout and location of the plantation. Unfortunately, according to historian Michael Schene, the Patten descendants in possession of these documents have discouraged any attempts to access or learn more about these materials (Schene 1981).

Gamble hired overseers to enforce day-to-day operations at the plantation. He likely relied upon these men very heavily, as managing his father’s estate often required his presence in Tallahassee, especially in the latter years of his sugar venture. Gamble’s only known overseer was Nathaniel P. Hunter, who worked at the plantation in 1857 during the 3rd Seminole War (Covington 1954). Hunter likely only supervised the plantation for a brief period; typically, overseers were replaced frequently. They were often viewed as brutish by the more genteel planter class and despised by the enslaved people they oppressed (Rivers 2000). Gamble placed only one man in charge of overseeing nearly 200 individuals, this illustrates his heavy reliance upon enslaved Africans for the day to day operations of his plantation. Enslaved Africans were the primary actors in altering and maintaining the landscape of the plantation (Jackson 2008).

Local historian Julia Floyd Smith wrote that the log cabin in which Gamble lived prior to the construction of his mansion was later occupied by his overseers (Smith 1964). Archaeological and historical investigations have yet to determine the precise location of this cabin, which was likely in close proximity to the mansion.

Financial difficulties due to declining sugar prices prompted Gamble’s decision to entrust his Manatee River plantation to close family members. In 1856, Robert Gamble, Jr.’s sister Julia
and her husband Allan MacFarlane assumed Gamble’s mortgage and took ownership of the plantation. Two years later in December of 1858, the plantation was sold for $190,000 to New Orleans bankers, John Calvin Cofield and Robert McGuinn Davis. In 1859 Cofield and his wife Ann moved into the Gamble Mansion and managed the plantation for the following two years. According to the 1860 census, the Cofields hired an overseer of mulatto ancestry, named George W. Graham (Matthews 1983). The census shows that Graham was originally from Alabama, but little else is known about the story of this mixed-race man or his treatment of those enslaved at the plantation. Marriage records show that he married a woman named Manthy Cason in August of 1860, during his time at the Manatee Plantation (Florida County Marriages, 1823-1982, State Archive, Tallahassee). A pension filing from his widow in 1891, suggests that he fought and died in the Civil War (National Archives and Records Administration. *U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934*).

After several years of disappointing profit margins, the Cofields left the Manatee River Plantation and returned to New Orleans. In spring of 1862, the Confederate government seized the property and sold what remained of the processed sugar (Schene 1972). Captain Archibald McNeill was placed in charge of the plantation and lived in the mansion until 1873. During McNeill’s time at the mansion, Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin was harbored at the mansion for two weeks in 1865, as McNeill abetted his escape from the country. Benjamin found passage on a ship headed for Bimini disguised as an African American cook, from there he made his way to England where he had an illustrious career as a barrister (Schene 1982). Benjamin’s brief sojourn at the mansion peaked the Daughters of the Confederacy’s interest in the site and prompted the organizations efforts to preserve the site in the mid to late 1920s.
For most of the duration of the Civil War, the mansion was occupied by Mrs. McNeill and her small children, her son’s wife, an enslaved man referred to as Old Albert, and a few other enslaved people who were maintained on the plantation after sugar operations ceased (McDuffeel 1933). It is unclear what became of many of those enslaved after Cofield and his wife left the property. Some may have been sold at local markets, while others might have been moved to other plantations owned by Cofield and Davis in Louisiana. Confederate commissary records show that they were provided with $8,000 worth of goods from Gamble Plantation in February of 1864 (Leland M. Hawes Collection, Special Collections Department, Tampa Library, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida). This suggests that although sugar operations ceased, some production on the plantation continued, requiring enslaved labor.

Dr. Charles D. Hentz visited the plantation shortly after the war, while the McNeills still occupied the mansion. In a letter, he described the first moments of his visit in October of 1865:

We had to wade out, there being no wharf – We first went through the large negro quarter – (Many of the houses built of palmetto logs, and thatched with the leaves) – and visited the large and handsome dwelling house --; two stories high – roomy and airy – with large porticoes built of tabby – Mrs. McNeill and children were there – Capt. McN. having gone up to Tampa this morning – We got a good many oranges – looked about with a telescope at the houses over the river and c – We then went into the plantation – visited the vast ruins of the sugar house, burned by the Yankees some two years ago – and abominable piece of Vandalism --; there are four huge chimneys of brick standing – the walls in ruins… (Stowe 2000).

Dr. Hentz provides a valuable first-hand account of the plantation. He remarks that enslaved people built many houses made of palmetto, presumably somewhere between the river
and the mansion. The 1860 Manatee County census shows that there were at least 50 enslaved dwellings on the plantation, possibly organized into several large house groupings (U.S. Census Bureau). Though the houses mentioned by Dr. Hentz were close to the river, other documentary evidence from subsequent owner George Patten, suggests there were slave quarters near the sugar mill as well.

George Patten was a cotton commission merchant from Savannah, Georgia. He purchased the former Gamble Plantation in 1873 after Cofield and Davis lost the property to foreclosure. Patten relocated his large family to the Gamble mansion and resided there for the remainder of his life. Later in life, Ida Mel Patten (George Patten’s granddaughter), wrote that her grandfather relocated several of his former enslaved laborers to the property. Ida Mel’s recollections are evidence of another important African American heritage component at the site.

Who were these free people that relocated to the Florida frontier? Did they come of their own free will, or did they feel coerced by the uncertainty of life during the Reconstruction period? Ida Patten wrote that these free people of color moved into the houses that were once occupied by the plantations enslaved laborers (Patten-Weasner 1980). Her account suggests that at least some of the former homes of enslaved people survived the Civil War and were occupied through the late Victorian era by free people of color from Georgia.

Shortly after purchasing the former plantation, George Patten subdivided the land for resale. In 1888 he wrote an advertisement and letter describing the condition of the property at the time of his purchase;

At the time of my purchase it [the sugar mill] had been destroyed by Federal troops form blockading vessels. The sugar house valued at $100,000 was burned with fences and
Negro houses, and the plantation was entirely abandoned (1888 Letter and Advertisement, George Patten File, Clerk of Court, Manatee County Courthouse).

It would appear that none of the enslaved people held by Gamble and Cofield and Davis remained on the property after emancipation.

The history of one African American family associated with the Gamble Plantation was recorded for posterity in the 1970s. A small booklet containing family stories and information is on file at the Manatee County Archives (Burton Family History, Nelson Burton File, Clerk of Court, Manatee County Courthouse). Of particular relevance to the history of Gamble are the stories of Nelson and Mariah Washington Burton. Nelson Burton is among the enslaved listed on the bill of sale to Cofield and Davis, four women by the name of Mariah were also listed, however, her story seems to be more closely tied to the McNeill family who occupied the plantation during and shortly after the Civil War. The McNeill’s took special interest in Mariah’s mixed-race daughter, Brilla, and provided her with an education and property.

The Judah P. Benjamin Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) began raising money for the purchase and restoration of the mansion in 1923, and in 1925, they donated the site to the state for preservation as a memorial to Judah P. Benjamin. Until the late 1970s, the UDC’s control of the narrative presented at Gamble went unchecked. The mansion served as a museum of Confederate history (Figure 2.4). Each room in the mansion became representative of a succeeding state. The house was primarily used to showcase Confederate memorabilia with little emphasis on the history of the site, with the exception of Judah P. Benjamin’s brief stay as he fled the country.
In 1977, State Naturalist Major Jim Stevenson made a valiant effort to alter the narrative at Gamble plantation. He wished to move the emphasis away from Confederate history and focus on the history of the site itself and the people who lived there, particularly the enslaved laborers. He developed a new script for park guides and new historically accurate interpretations for rooms throughout the mansion.

Figure 2.4. 1920s Confederate Soldier Reunion at Mansion (192-. Black & white photograph, 8 x 10 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/8994>, accessed 23 October 2019.)
The backlash Stevenson faced from the UDC was fierce. A long paper trail of letters from outraged UDC members and their husbands can be found on file at the State Park Archives in Tallahassee. Of primary concern was that the changes implemented by Stevenson would completely alter the property and that Gamble Mansion would no longer be represented as a true Confederate museum and memorial to Judah P. Benjamin, as was stipulated in the original contract between the state and the UDC when the property was donated. The UDC involved conservative senator and attorney, Tom Gallen, who in letters to Ney C. Laundum, Director of State Parks and Recreation, cited laws that worked in favor of the UDC.

It was codified in Florida law that the site should remain a memorial to Judah P. Benjamin in perpetuity. Compromises were eventually made, two rooms in the back of the house were left as commemorative to Judah P. Benjamin’s stay and the emphasis on enslaved labor was removed from the park guide script. This script is still in use by park employees today, as the controversy between the UDC and the state lies dormant. The UDC continue to play a huge role in shaping the white-washed narrative at Gamble.

This has hugely impacted my work as I confront and attempt to poke holes in the accepted narrative. On the public Facebook profile for the archaeological field school at Gamble, I posted a photo of a canal next to the mansion (Community Archaeology at Gamble Plantation 2018). I provided a caption for the photo explaining that enslaved laborers were forced to dig over 16 miles of canals across the property, forever altering the landscape. This post was met with serious backlash from several citizens of Ellenton and DOC members who zealously followed the page. One citizen commented that she felt the post was detrimental to race relations, because it focused on the dark history of the site, and that the enslaved workers were likely proud of their accomplishment and of making a successful sugar plantation (Community Archaeology
at Gamble Plantation 2018). As historian Ibram X. Kendi recently articulated; “We paint over racist reality to make a beautiful delusion of self, of society. We defend this beautiful self and society from our racist reality with the weapons of denial” (Kendi 2018:1). In doing this project, I was up against nearly 100 years of twisting and manipulation of the historical narrative by the Daughters of the Confederacy. This master-slave narrative had been accepted by generations of white Ellenton townsfolk. Unfortunately, similar narratives have long been accepted by many Americans (Jackson 2011).

**Previous Archaeological Research**

In 1973, excavations were conducted at the ruins of Gamble Plantations sugar mill. This research was conducted by a history professor from Manatee Junior College and his students, along with volunteers from the Manatee County Historical Society. They mapped the ruins and conducted subsurface excavations. They found that though many of the walls have been destroyed most of the structures foundation footings remain below the surface of the ground. The findings from this endeavor were never formally published but several articles about the excavation appeared in local newspapers. These articles mention materials that were recovered from the mill at this time, such as a bearing cap from damaged machinery, however the current location of these artifacts is unknown. The public attention garnered by Professor Mullins archaeological investigation of the sugar mill led to the installation of a historical marker at the site in 1973 (Rolland et al. 2004).

In 1987 State Archaeologist Henry A. Baker conducted an auger survey of the mansion grounds. He identified concentrations of material culture, such as building materials, glass, and ceramics. In 1992, Baker returned to supervise the installation of a security system at the mansion which required trenches to be dug by park employees. They uncovered a historic reuse
midden, but no information about the findings of this excavation are available (Roland et. al. 2004).

Archaeological investigations at the Gamble plantation Sugar Mill were undertaken by the CRM group, Bland and Associates, Inc. in 2004. These investigations included remote sensing (ground penetrating radar) and the excavation of 306 shovel tests (Figure 2.5.). Shovel tests revealed limited cultural material from the 19th century; most of the materials recovered were unidentifiable scraps of metal and construction debris. Bland and Associates made recommendations for the preservation of the site, including stabilization of the structure and removal of trees and plants from around the structure.

In 2008, University of South Florida MA student Felicia Silpa wrote a thesis in which she proposed archaeological research designs for Gamble Plantation (Silpa 2008). She examined the nature of slavery at Gamble, and its impact on the plantation landscape. Through analysis of the plantation landscape she gained insight into the daily lifeways and activities of people who were enslaved at Gamble Plantation. The archaeological excavations in 2017 and 2018 followed many of Silpa’s recommendations (Silpa 2008).
Figure 2.5. Bland and Associates survey map. (Rolland et al. 2004)
CHAPTER 3:
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PLANTATION
ARCHAEOLOGY

In this chapter I overview theoretical perspectives which have influenced my interpretation of findings discussed later in the thesis. Unfortunately, a lack of information about enslaved is common phenomenon at plantation sites across the South. Fortunately, there has been a shift in contemporary archaeological frameworks which provide a range of perspectives that improve public appreciation for how the past has influenced the present (Orser 2010). I advocate for the understanding that archaeology does not occur within a vacuum (Agbe-Davies 2010). Our work has real consequences for living communities, and is subject to our own personal biases. Archaeologists have the obligation to conduct our work in a manner that is responsible and respectful to living people. This role provides archaeologists with a great deal of power, as well as responsibility to the communities in which we work and to the nation at large.

Archaeological research focusing on those enslaved at Gamble Plantation is crucial for offering a more realistic representation of the past. The cultural heritage of all the people that lived or worked on this plantation should be represented at this state park. The current master-slave narrative at the plantation site is designed to uphold systems of power that benefit whites and perpetuate the status quo (Jackson 2012). Though limited historical documentation of those
enslaved at Gamble exists, archaeological investigations may offer the public a broader interpretation of this population (Jackson 2012; Orser 1994; Singleton 2016).

In this literature review, I will examine the application of theoretical trends relevant to my research, with the end goal of situating myself within a critical archaeology framework. I will build my theoretical foundation by examining the application of theoretical perspectives in comparable studies and conclude with a discussion of the relevance of my work, and the importance of conducting my research from a critical perspective.

**Archaeology of the Enslaved**

My research required the identification of artifacts and features associated with the enslaved population at Gamble Plantation. The determination of identity in the archaeological record poses many challenges to historical archaeologists. These difficulties exist on both the theoretical and methodological level. Some archaeologists have criticized the study of enslaved Africans, and other ethnic minorities, as being a blatant examination of “the other” in a predominantly Anglo-American field (Orser 1998; Singleton 1995). However, the fact remains that these studies give a voice to individuals who were disenfranchised in life. Archaeologists have the responsibility to study these populations, because they have long been underrepresented, or all together unrecognized, in the historical record. The information gathered from investigations of the enslaved is one of archaeology’s greatest contributions to American history.

During the infancy of historical archaeology in the United States, archaeological investigations focused primarily on the wealthy and the famous (Orser and Fagan 1995). Archaeologists directed their attention to antebellum mansions in the south, and colonial
settlements in the North (Orser 1998). The usual goal of historical archaeology conducted during this period was reconstruction, which was beneficial for the development of historical tourism. As society changed in the 1960s, so too did the social sciences, with historical archaeology following suit. Orser argues that ethnic pride movements of the 1960s encouraged the development of an archaeology of the oppressed and forgotten (Orser 1998). Investigations of African Diaspora populations became a popular area of study, particularly New World slavery in the Americas. One of the first studies of the conditions of slavery through historical archaeology was conducted by Charles Fairbanks at Kinglsey Plantation in Florida. Fairbanks challenged the focus on plantation owners at plantation sites (Fairbanks 1968).

Some anthropologists have focused a great deal of theoretical thought on the political and economic factors associated specifically with the sugar industry during the colonial era (Mintz 1986). Sugar was a luxury commodity that was produced through the exploitation of indigenous people and enslaved labor in the New World. Europeans developed an understanding of sugar as a symbol of status and wealth. These political and economic factors were behind the development of the sugar industry during the colonial period.

In practice, the archaeological investigation of enslaved communities can be very challenging. Much of the material recovered at historic sites can imply social or economic status, but ascertaining the ethnic identity of those who interacted with the material is a daunting task. Artifacts with clear ethnic associations often make up only a small part of the archaeological assemblage, and they may be used over an extensive period, making them statistically less likely to be recovered (McGuire 1982:163). Archaeologists often depend upon historical records and oral histories to define the spaces most likely occupied by specific populations. Additionally, because ethnic identity is defined by living people, archaeologists may never really know how a
specific individual or population would have identified. For the purposes of this research, I hoped to uncover artifacts or features which may be associated with enslaved Africans at the site. The interpretation of which would shed light on the daily lives of the enslaved at the plantation and be valuable for confronting the master-slave narrative at Gamble.

Race is both an illusion and a lived reality in the United States, with categories in constant flux spanning time and space (Baker 1998). Critical race theory allows for the incorporation of multivocal perspectives, which consider race and racism as real factors with lasting historical impacts (Epperson 2004). Race and racism are real factors that I acknowledge in my research at Gamble, specifically when confronting the historical narrative constructed in large part by the Daughters of the Confederacy. This narrative perpetuates racist attitudes due to its omission of enslaved Africans. It is certain that the institution of slavery continues to have consequences in the present, because of its insidious role in shaping American social order (Epperson 2004). The position of the oppressed in such a complex and long-lasting system of structural violence is difficult to fully comprehend from the outside. Due to my own positionality as an outsider of the descendant community, my understanding of the African American experience is reliant upon the insights of others. I gained valuable insight, which helped to inform my findings (Chapter 5), from both a published family history (Burton Family History, Nelson Burton File, Clerk of Court, Manatee County Courthouse) and email correspondence with a living descendant of the enslaved.

In the early days of historical archaeology, ethnic affiliation was assigned by the identification of “ethnic markers”, these were artifacts believed to suggest the presence of a particular ethnic group (Orser 1998:662). This form of interpretation, Orser argues, is particularly vulnerable to bias. He states that “Many historical archaeologists today recognize
this kind of archaeological stereotyping as reifying perceived artifact associations, while investigating artifacts with a static ethnicity by assuming only an Irish individual could smoke from a pipe marked ‘Erin Go Bragh’” (1998:662). One may question the statistical likelihood of such a pipe having originally belonged to someone who was not of Irish ethnicity. However, it is important to recognize that many archaeological assemblages are not primary deposits.

Though archaeologists must be cognizant of the non-stagnant and fluid nature of material culture remains, artifacts with ethnic affiliation do warrant interpretation. These interpretations should be made with the understanding that artifacts are free to be manipulated by human actors (Orser 1998). Historic archaeologists who have “stepped beyond” the search for ethnic markers have begun with the studies of assimilation and ethnic boundary maintenance (Orser 1998:662). This shift in the study of ethnicity can, itself, create an inaccurate or static interpretation of the past. It often promotes the view of individuals being at constant odds between traditional and Anglo-American cultural practices (Voss 2005). Alicia Odewale argues that enslaved Africans had a duel mindset that wavered between survival and resistance which allowed them to persevere while coping with unique struggles (Odewale 2019). Her findings also shed light on the problematic nature of generalizing the experiences of the enslaved, as they are many and varied across time and space.

People in the past were dynamic actors in society and did not always experience life in terms of assimilation versus tradition (Voss 2005). New identities were created through the complex intermingling of culturally distinct groups. This process of exchange between groups and the resulting mixture of cultural practices and ideas is commonly referred to as creolization. The term ‘creolization’ when used to describe a material culture process, derives its meaning from linguistic theory, which defines creole language as the introduction of new vocabulary of
mixed origin onto a preexisting language structure (Deetz 1977; Ferguson 1992). From this perspective, creolized material culture is seen as a new form, developed through the mixing of peoples, but built upon an underlying traditional form. Therefore, creolized artifacts may be interpreted as both the continuation of the old and the development of the new. It is also important to recognize that creolization did not/does not happen in a historical vacuum, but is a continuing force in our modern world, exacerbated to a phenomenal scale by globalization (Glissant 2008).

Archaeologists such as Laurie have developed a slightly different definition of creolization, which stresses the persistence of traditional forms. Wilkie (1997:93) defines creolization as “a process that is represented by retentions in cultural values that become expressed in new ways due to cultural contact and relocation”.

Earlier perspectives, proposed by Mintz and Price (1976), contrast with Wilkie’s definition. They argued that the retention of African cultural expressions was merely a contributing factor in the development of new cultural forms. However, a more balanced definition of creolization is one that places equal emphasis between the persistence of tradition and the creation of new identities. The birth of new identities through the process of creolization, is known as ethnogenesis (Bateman 1990). Eugene D. Genovese has examined the development of “Afro-American” identity in the Americas (Genovese 1976). He suggests that slaves laid the foundation for a separate black national culture, while at the same time, enriched American culture as a whole.

Historically, much archaeological research focused on the persistence of “Africanisms” in creolized material culture, as resistance to European colonial pressures (Weik 2009; Wilkie 2000). The search for clear Africanisms perpetuated the illusion that the enslaved were
constantly faced with the dilemma of either maintaining their traditional lifeways or succumbing to acculturative colonial pressures of their oppressors. In Charles Fairbanks’s first investigation of enslaved laborers at Kingsley Plantation, he was disillusioned by the lack of Africanisms at the site (Fairbanks 1968). Fortunately, contemporary scholars have moved toward a more multifaceted understanding of the material culture and how the enslaved would have engaged with the objects and spaces that were a part of their daily lives (Jackson 2012; Marshall 2015; Minkiff 2018; Odewale 2019; Singleton 2016). Battle-Baptiste’s shifts the emphasis away from who the artifacts belonged to, and instead focuses on what these objects can tell us about the culturally significant transformation of space (Battle-Baptiste 2011).

Multiple avenues for either advert or subtle expressions of individuality were available in every realm of daily life, including, but not at all limited to, ceramic production. A great deal of research has been conducted on colonoware produced by enslaved individuals which provides insight into food ways and cultural expression (Singleton 1996).

Colonoware is a type of pottery created by African Americans in the New World, which displays a range of cultural influences, including African, Native American, and European (Chodoronek 2013). It is typically low fired, often undecorated, and take some European forms (Chadoronek 2013). When viewed as an expression of agency, material culture (such as colonoware) produced by enslaved Africans, and their descendants, takes on new meaning, which provides insight into their daily lives. Africans brought with them an enormous array of skills and traditional knowledge which translates to the material culture they left behind (Vlach 2016). A recent study by Mary Minkoff connected ceramics to identity. She argues that certain transfer print patterns were chosen by enslaved individuals to express feelings of aspiration, escapism, or solidarity (Minkiff 2018).
In addition to colonoware, another important artifact type associated with the subversion of oppression are objects which were utilized for magical or spiritual purposes. Spirituality and the use of magic were common ways in which the enslaved maintained their traditions, while at the same time, achieved a degree of social autonomy (Moses 2018). Also, the persistence of African perceptions of space, indicated by features such as root cellars, which are common in the upper south (Singleton 1995). An English sea-captain observed the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria utilizing spaces under the floors of their homes to store valuables (Singleton 1995). It has been suggested that the root cellar may have origins in Igbo cultural ideas of space. Archaeological evidence has indicated that these, often hidden, spaces may have been utilized by the enslaved to conceal objects from their oppressors (Singleton 1995). The root cellar has been interpreted to exemplify both the retention of traditional ideas as well as a form of social resistance.

Spiritual and magical practices were a pervasive part of the lives of enslaved Africans, therefore these practices are worthy of in-depth archaeological interpretation (Wilkie 1997). At Hermitage plantation, the historic home of Andrew Jackson, an assemblage of artifacts with strong spiritual association was unearthed. The materials were recovered from the site of five former enslaved households. These dwellings were occupied from 1821 until 1857-1858 (Russell 1997). The assemblage included hand shaped charms, lucky bones, pierced coins, glass beads, x marbles, prehistoric stone tools, odd smooth stones, and modified ceramic sherds (Russell 1997). Though no specific rituals were determined from the assemblage, the material culture clearly suggest that the enslaved were engaging in spiritual behaviors. These behaviors were most likely employed to achieve social and economic autonomy within the institution of plantation slavery (Russell 1997). Battle-Baptiste (2011) has also conducted much research at the Hermitage,
exploring African spirituality, specifically, the role it played in shaping conceptions of space on the plantation. By placing African American spirituality in a broader context, she found a connection between the practice of sweeping the yard on the plantation and the ritual gesture for ridding a place of evil spirits in regions of Central Africa (Battle-Baptiste 2011).

James Davidson critiqued the spiritual interpretation of hand shaped charms, like those found at the Hermitage. He found that hand shaped charms could more accurately be interpreted as ornate hook and eye clothing fasteners (Davidson 2014). His findings serve to caution archaeologists who may be tempted to assume the spiritual meaning of artifacts.

Interviews with formerly enslaved populations (conducted by the Works Progress Association during the Great Depression 1936-1938) were utilized by Wilkie (1995) to provide oral historic data about religious practices, which can prove particularly valuable to archaeological interpretations. Hoodoo was the supernatural belief in magic that could be utilized to control the actions and health of others (Wilkie 1995). This belief system was not only used for psychic retaliation against the master, but also as a treatment for ailments (Wilkie 1997). Regardless of the purpose for the deployment of hoodoo, these spiritual practices are a strong indicator of resistance to power structures forcibly imposed upon enslaved populations. This practice blatantly undermined Euro-American, particularly English spiritual world views, which were imposed upon enslaved laborers.

The interpretation of apparent spiritual objects can be very challenging when examining the material culture of the enslaved. Some archaeologists avoid making interpretations of artifacts that appear to have a spiritual association. In many enslaved communities, these objects can be quite mundane; it can be impossible to tell the difference from an everyday discarded bone, and one which was given spiritual meaning. However, these objects are fundamental to
understanding past lifeways and therefore warrant interpretation. Through the utilization of historical and ethnographic data, archaeologists have been able to make valid interpretations of spiritual objects in the archaeological record.

The first step in conducting archaeology of the enslaved, is to recognize the plantation as a distinct form of settlement. Without first understanding plantations as complex systems of agriculture and economy, and as sociocultural and political systems in their own right, it is impossible to understand any one specific aspect of plantation history (Courtenay 1980; Singleton 2016). Distinct behavior patterns, discernable in the archaeological record as material culture patterns, existed both within and between the inhabitants of the plantation, be they owners, managers, or laborers (Singleton 2016). Recognizing and interpreting these patterns is the key to understanding relationships of power at plantation sites.

Impacts from the plantation system and institutionalized racism are still being felt today. It is essential to acknowledge structural inequalities that are the direct result of racism, both on the historic plantation and in the present as “privilege bestowed upon white identity must be acknowledged and challenged,” (Roediger 1998; Epperson 2004:4). The current historical narrative offered at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park, which overlooks the history of transatlantic slavery, and is centered around the master-slave narrative (Jackson 2012) is a negative consequence of these structural inequalities. The Daughters of the Confederacy had both the literal capital to purchase the remaining plantation grounds, as well as the social capital to influence the portrayal of history at the site after its donation to the state of Florida. My goal is to help alleviate social injustice, by using archaeology to create begin the process of reconciliation, healing, and understanding in the community (Deetz et. al. 2015).
Historical archaeologists can apply critical race theory to achieve a more race-conscious perspective that is anti-essentialist (Epperson 2004). From a critical race theoretical perspective, “personal experiences of racial prejudice inform and strengthen theoretical analysis,” (Epperson 2004:1). This position recognizes that racism is not confined to the past, rather it is a part of our modern reality and ingrained into the daily lives of contemporary people. Under a critical race methodological framework, the voices the descendant community, become an invaluable asset for interpreting the past. I hope that this thesis will be a first step in identifying and connecting with the descendant community. By descendant community, I am not referring solely to individuals directly related to enslaved laborers at Gamble, but rather the group of people in the present who link themselves socially, politically, or economically to the enslaved (McDavid and Brock 2015).

The domestic sites of enslaved laborers, when viewed from a critical race perspective, offer a wealth of data from which interpretations about daily life may be made. Enslaved communities were epicenters of cultural production, as well as landscapes altered by the enslaved, to be places of comfort and safety (Battle-Baptiste 2007). A study of enslaved dwellings at Seville Plantation, illustrated that the spatial organization of the community was a result of economic and power relations forced upon the enslaved (Armstrong and Kelly 2000). Armstrong and Kelly argue that the typical linear layout of enslaved housing was transformed by the enslaved, as an expression of resistance and autonomy.

The Levi Jordan Plantation Website Project (McDavid 2002), had objectives similar to my own research. The project goal was to create a website for public access that would engage with politically and emotionally charged history and archaeology of an antebellum sugar plantation. The methodologies I utilize to produce this public product are similar to those
employed by the Levi Jordan Project. The goal of this research is to try to initiate collaboration with any descendants identified through this research. It is my desire to promote multivocality, so that a variety of people are included in long term research, and have the opportunity to participate in the conversation (McDavid 2002).

**Activist and Critical Theory**

As stewards of heritage resources, archaeologists have an obligation to conduct research that will be meaningful to the public. Going forward, the goal of this project is to develop a more community engaged and ethical interpretation of the past. Because I will be studying a historically disenfranchised population, I feel that this position is most appropriate. It would be unethical to conduct archaeological investigations which perpetuate the systematic silencing of African American perspectives. My research questions were heavily influenced by concerns raised during public meetings held with Ellenton community members. Unfortunately, none of the Ellenton community members that participated in the meetings were descendants of enslaved laborers. This community-based archaeological research was influenced by the activist theoretical frameworks of Sonya Atalay and Larry Zimmerman (Atalay et. al. 2014; Zimmerman 2010). Similar research, which has been based around community desires, includes M. Blakey’s work on the New York African Burial Ground Project (2008), and C. McDavid’s *Archaeologies that Hurt* (2000).

Scholarly entitlement is an ongoing issue within the discipline of anthropology. Archaeological researchers continue to conduct work to satisfy their own interests, or to fulfill contractual obligations. Findings are published in inaccessible reports and pricey academic journals, effectually alienating the public from their heritage. Many publications are written in jargon-laden prose. Even if a member of the general public could afford access to these
resources, misinterpretation and confusion would be likely. These limits and restrictions upon the accessibility of archaeological information essentially devalues the field, because our greatest value as a discipline is our ability to educate.

It is essential for archaeologists to recognize knowledge as a social resource, over which we have considerable power. Archaeologists control knowledge under the same principles that the elite use for control and mobilization of other resources within a political economic model: accumulation, context, matrix control, and ideology (Hirth 1996).

The accumulation principle involves the use of resource accumulation strategies as a way of utilizing resources for social rather than biological purposes (Hirth 1996). Archaeological knowledge is accumulated and justified for political purposes. Archaeologists benefit directly from the accumulation of knowledge, because it allows us to achieve our research goals, which in turn advance our careers and provide justification for the discipline within our socioeconomic system (Hirth 1996).

Context also plays a pivotal role in the control and mobilization of knowledge. The social context of the archaeological investigation, coupled with the destructive nature of archaeology, provides archaeologists with a great deal of power. Access to archaeological sites is limited, and when excavation is commenced we simultaneously destroy what we are trying to understand. Archaeologists supervise the accumulation of knowledge in a context that gives us near total authority, but also responsibility to those who will never have access to the source of our knowledge.

The matrix-control principle refers to the position of power from which the privileged may influence the production, accumulation, and flow of resources (Hirth 1996). Education and
training allow archaeologists to fulfil this principle. While conducting field work, the archaeologist has a monopoly over their own training in identification and interpretation. This situates us in a major matrix position from which we may influence the accumulation and flow of knowledge.

The ideology principle involves reinforcement of the justification for unequal access to resources (Hirth 1996). Archaeologists commonly develop a sense of site ownership, especially after leading projects at the same site for many seasons. This can lead to a desire for complete control of the knowledge which may be distributed or gained from a site. The sense of intellectual ownership represents the ideology principle, because it restricts access to knowledge for the archaeologist’s own self-interest (Hirth 1996).

These principles, through which archaeologists control knowledge, generate a very limited system of information production, interpretation, and distribution (Atalay 2016). This system is almost exclusively beneficial to archaeologists, and negatively impacts the community, because it alienates the general public from their heritage. By not properly disseminating our knowledge to the communities in which we work, archaeologists are unknowingly perpetuating the social inequality inherent in nationalism, colonialism, and globalization.

The context of my research, investigating the lives of enslaved African Americans at Gamble Plantation, is well-suited for critical and activist frameworks. In addition to the antebellum house and grounds, a monument commemorating Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin stands at the site. Because of limited historic documentation and insufficient archaeological evidence recovered from Gamble, visitors to the park learn little about the realities of slavery during their tour. On the contrary, they are told that the enslaved at Gamble had a relatively easy life because “Gamble armed his slaves”. Over the past 10 years,
archaeologists have done a great deal of research on how and why the stories of oppressed people are often left out of the historical narrative.

When I first visited the park, I remember feeling irritated by the omission of African American heritage. Why should the park only focus on white Confederate heritage, when enslaved laborers outnumbered whites on this plantation 180 to one? The majority of the total population at the site is being overlooked. I would go a step further, to say that many African American visitors to the park might feel quite uncomfortable. The version of history currently offered at Gamble Plantation has been influenced by idealistic notions of the “Old South”; Scarlett O’Hara in flouncing hoopskirts, whitewashed mansions, a time when life was simpler. This representation of the past needs more critical interpretations of the reality of slavery in U.S. plantation spaces, as advocated by Antoinette Jackson (Jackson 2011). I feel that ignoring this important aspect of the property’s history is disrespectful the memory of all the individuals who suffered the inhumanity of enslavement there.

Activist and critical theory offer weapons to challenge this social injustice. “Critical archaeology is a form of intellectual activism that analyzes the political nature of knowledge content and production by highlighting the intersubjectivity of archaeological research” (Atalay et al 2014:5). The current absence of knowledge at Gamble has undeniable political and sociocultural roots. The political and social power differential between the Daughters of the Confederacy and the African American descendant community, has impacted the current historic interpretations offered at Gamble. A critical perspective influenced by Atalay, Epperson, and Battle-Baptiste, forces me to recognize that my own agenda is not apolitical; racial inequality is an extremely politically charged issue (Atalay et al 2014; Battle-Baptiste 2011; Epperson 2004). However, I believe that it is possible for archaeology to contribute in the fight for equality.
(Atalay et al 2014). Through this research I hope to shed light on the role of plantations in institutionalizing slavery and white supremacy, and to promote an interpretation of the past that is not exclusionary on the basis of race.

A critical theoretical position is necessary for effectively reaching the community and laying the foundation to work with any descendant and local stakeholders going forward, as future archaeologists continue to challenge the current narrative. It is vital for the public to understand these enslaved people as individuals with feelings and aspirations, who were affected by their social and political context. Humanizing the past, in a way that makes those enslaved relatable, is essential for successfully engaging the public. By involving the public, a reciprocal relationship forms between archaeologists and the communities they serve, from which both may benefit.

Scholars of heritage and tourism have begun to challenge racist and one-sided characterizations of history at plantation sites and are working towards the creation of anti-racist narratives and dialogs that focus on enslaved Africans (Alderman 2015; Jackson 2011). Plantation sites, especially with still standing mansions, have become emblematic of the South and have taken on complex and symbolic meanings. These sites have a major hand in shaping the public’s understanding Southern history (Alderman 2015). New understandings of heritage at plantation sites may be developed by focusing on the knowledge gained from discussions with descendants of enslaved Africans (Jackson 2011).

The descendant community in Ellenton and beyond have had no control over how their heritage has been characterized at the site for the past 100 years, because the narrative at the site has been in the hands of the Daughters of the Confederacy. I hope to pave the way for working with descendants moving forward at the site. My methods for this task will be outlined in the
following chapters of this thesis. Activist anthropology provides a framework for effecting change in a community. Archaeology is not unpolitical, and it has the potential to make a real difference in daily lives. To achieve this, “Archaeologists have to become activists in ways they have seldom imagined, explicitly addressing problems such as environmental degradation or structural social inequalities in a contemporary community” (Zimmerman et al. 2010:4).
CHAPTER 4:

METHODS

The methods used in this thesis include archival research, LIDAR, GIS, community engagement, and excavation. My goal in choosing each of these methods was ultimately to improve the historical narrative of Gamble Plantation offered by archaeologists, by making it inclusive of people of color. The interests and concerns of Ellenton community members were also important. During a pre-fieldwork meeting open to all interested members of the public, I learned that Ellenton community members were primarily interested in learning more about the spatial organization of the plantation.

LIDAR data analysis proved to be an excellent method for shedding light on the history hidden in the landscape. Archival research focused primarily on the enslaved and revealed the movement of the enslaved population over time and space. ArcGIS Online and ArcGIS Pro allowed for the sharing of spatially linked information between myself, future researchers, and the public. Lastly, excavation allowed for intensive community engagement and opportunities to learn more about both the spatial organization of the plantation and the day to day lives of its enslaved inhabitants.
Archival Research

Archival research was conducted in Tallahassee at the Florida State Archives as well as the Florida State Park Archives, and at the Manatee County Clerks Archives in Bradenton. The MyManatee.org Digital Heritage Collection also proved to be a valuable resource.

The journal of Robert Gamble Jr. is on file at the Florida State Archives. This document is comprised of notes and letters primarily detailing Gamble family history. A transcribed copy of notes made by Robert Jr.’s father, John G. Gamble make up the first section of the journal. John Gamble recounts the exploits of a pioneer family in early America. Gripping familial tales of Native American kidnappings and mischievous young Free Masons are scattered among recollections of long deceased family members. Also included in the journal are a number of letters from family members which provide insight into the lives of various ancestors with whom they were acquainted.

The Florida State Park Archives hold an interesting paper trail of letters and documents which showed the development of the historical narrative offered at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park. I found that there was a great deal of contention surrounding this narrative in the late 1970s. The letters from this period show that the Daughters of the Confederacy were staunch advocates for the sites continued use as a memorial honoring Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin, while State Park employees wished to primarily emphasize the historical significance of the site.

The Manatee County Clerks Archives as well as the Mymanatee.org digital library yielded census and other valuable data, such as oral histories, historic maps of the site, and newspaper articles. I utilized census data to better understand the demographics of the plantation,
including sex and age. The bill of sale between Robert Gamble Jr. and Cofield and Davis allowed me to group enslaved laborers into family groups by last name, and identify enslaved laborers that were owned by the Gamble family prior to the establishment of Gamble Plantation.

A small booklet detailing a local African American family’s history proved to be a valuable resource for connecting those enslaved at Gamble, to their living descendants. I worked with genealogist and USF librarian Drew Smith to identify the living descendants of an enslaved laborer from Gamble Plantation, who will be contacted regarding family histories, and also their perspective on the interpretation of the site. I wrote family members an overview of the archaeology conducted at the plantation thus far, as well as the family history I uncovered through archival research. In my emails to family members I encouraged their participation in future research by assuring them that their contributions would be more than welcome and very valuable to future archaeologists.

LIDAR

LIDAR data from a National Ocean Service survey of the Florida coast line was used to locate potential archaeological features in the landscape surrounding Gamble Plantation. LIDAR stands for Light Detection and Ranging, it is a remote sensing method that can be used to identify archaeological features on a landscape. LIDAR uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure the distance from an airborne system to the Earth’s surface. LIDAR instruments are often flown in planes or drones, and consist of a laser, a scanner, and a GPS base. The closer this system is flown to the Earth’s surface, the more points are collected of a given area.

The number of data points collected in a specific area determines the point cloud density. The denser the point cloud, the more information can be determined about an areas ground
surface. The data collected from LIDAR surveys can be used to create multilayered maps of a landscape. Because light can permeate foliage, LIDAR allows archaeologists to create digital terrain models (DTMs) of the ground surface by triangulating the individual data points captured by the LIDAR system. DTMs are useful for locating archaeological features which can be hidden to the naked eye. When available, historic aerial photographs can help date features identified by LIDAR.

I used LAStools software to create a DTM of Gamble Plantation Historic State Park and the surrounding area (Figure 4.1). Elevation point classifications created on LAStools allowed me to eliminate buildings and foliage from the landscape, creating the DTM. Much of the landscape is cleared of dense vegetation and continues to be utilized for agricultural purposes, allowing for a detailed understanding of the ground surface. For the purposes of this project, I created a DTM that was a 2 km by 1 km rectangular area surrounding the mansion; 1,457,196 points were collected in this area with a vertical accuracy of 5.7 cm and a horizontal accuracy of 115 cm compiled to meet accuracy at a 95% confidence level. From this model, I identified potential archaeological features in a field North East of the Plantation. My LIDAR findings and maps were made public through the creation of a website. In addition to sharing information, I hoped to spark community interest and spread awareness of this contemporary archaeological method.
Figure 4.1. Digital Terrain Model of Ellenton, Fl. Created by author (LAStools)
GIS/Web Application

Using ArcGIS, I created a web mapping application for the reporting of archaeological discoveries and oral histories in Ellenton and the surrounding countryside. I created a base map of Ellenton, which I then used to create a web application using ArcGIS online templates. The application allows community members to safely and securely report their archaeological discoveries, as well as memories and oral histories. The form for reporting information allows for a description of the discovery and an option to upload photos or other documents as attachments. Users are then prompted to select the location of the find on a map or by searching for an address (Figure 4.2). The website opens the historical narrative of Ellenton to all members of the community, promoting the sharing of ideas and diverse of perspectives.

Figure 4.2. Web Application Form
(https://usflibrary.maps.arcgis.com/apps/GeoForm/index.html?appid=3faff5b5caa64241a1f21d0ad8582ead)
I also created a map in ArcGIS for compiling my work, along with future research conducted with the Digital Heritage Collections at USF. My contributions to this map include LIDAR digital terrain models, historic maps of the plantation, and census data. In order to better understand the boundaries and layout of the plantation, I overlaid historic maps on the modern landscape by georeferencing with ArcGIS software.

**Excavation/ Public Archaeology**

Excavations occurred during the 2017 and 2018 USF archaeological field schools at Gamble Plantation State Park led by Dr. Diane Wallman. Prior to any excavations, Dr. Wallman and I held a round table discussion with the Ellenton community members who attended (most appeared to be of European descent, attendees were not asked to relate their race or ethnicity). The purpose of this meeting was to gain a better understanding of what they would like to learn from our work and how they would like to participate. It was also an opportunity to learn from community members and begin a two-way flow of communication between the community and outsider archaeologists. This meeting served as an opportunity to develop research questions based on community interests and concerns. I made and distributed flyers for this meeting at neighborhoods and businesses around Ellenton (Figure 4.3.). Through my wording and graphic choice, I hoped to make it clear that the archaeological research we were about to conduct would not ignore the history of enslavement at the site. While the representation of women of color, and especially enslaved women, is entangled in issues of racism, power and racist stereotypes (Sewell 2012), the image on the flyer, Harriot Tubman, was selected because she is a well-known figure who was a champion against the institution of slavery. I hoped this imagery would convey the tone of my research, encouraging the attendance of people with an interest in a plantation history not focused solely on the accomplishments of the plantation owners, but on
those who comprised the majority of people living on the site. The flyer was created intuitively with the help of my advisor Diane Wallman. In the end, the success of the flyer was dependent upon the types of questions and interests raised by attendees of our public meeting, some of which centered on questions of the enslaved people who lived and worked at the site.

During the meeting, Ellenton community members expressed that they would like to know more about the layout of the plantation, such as where the wharf and slave quarters might have been located. They also expressed concern over the storage and analysis of artifacts after the field school and agreed that artifacts should be kept in the museum at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park.

**Interested in the history of your community?**

The University of South Florida Department of Anthropology, with the support of the Florida Public Archaeology Network, will be conducting archaeological excavations this summer at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park. Through the archaeological work, we will examine the daily experiences and lives of the site’s diverse historical inhabitants.

**Before we start digging, we want to hear from you!**

What would you like to learn from our work?

Do you have any knowledge that might contribute to our research?

**Meeting Time**

6:30 PM, Wednesday, May 10th

**Meeting Place**

Gamble Plantation Historic State Park Museum.

3708 Patton Ave, Ellenton, FL 34222

If you have any questions feel free to contact Matthew Litteral:

smlitteral@mail.usf.edu

Figure 4.3. Flyer for public round table meeting.
Public archaeology days were held once a week during both field seasons. These events allowed community members, young and old, to participate in the archaeological process. They also served as a great opportunity to share a new historical narrative with the public. Participants learned archaeological methods from students by excavating, washing, and sorting artifacts side by side (Figure 4.4). Field school students were also advocates for promoting a historical narrative inclusive of people of color, which was a critical achievement during our time at Gamble. We had hundreds of visitors to the site, from all backgrounds and walks of life. Our students routinely explained to visitors the need for an improved understanding of enslavement at the site.

Figure 4.4. Volunteers and students excavating during a public archaeology day. (Photo courtesy of Diane Wallman- Author centered)
I supervised the excavation of two loci (Locus 2 and Locus 3) over the course of both field seasons (Figure 4.5). We utilized the same datum and grid that were established by Henry Baker in his 1987 auger survey of the property (Figure 4.6). The first locus was in an area where a concentration of building materials and 19th-century artifacts were found during Baker’s survey. I was optimistic that this locus could potentially be the site of the overseer’s cabin. This cabin was occupied by Robert Gamble Jr. prior to the construction of his mansion, and later the home of John Cofield’s mixed-race overseer, George W. Graham. Unfortunately, this locus revealed very little in terms of diagnostic material culture, apart from a few pieces of mid 19th-century ceramics. The locus was excavated in a checkerboard fashion of three 2-x-2-m units. The units were excavated in 1-x-1-m quadrants at 5-cm increments, until sterile subsoil was reached. In addition, we initiated a small-interval shovel test survey to explore more of this area and completed 40 shovel tests at 5-cm intervals. Only one of the shovel test pits was positive and included 19th-century material.

The second locus was between the entrance to the kitchen and the cook’s quarters at the mansion. This location was chosen for potentially revealing information about the day to day activities of the enslaved cook. I hypothesized that a summer kitchen may have been located outside of the main kitchen, which is attached to the mansion by a veranda. This locus was comprised of eleven 2-x-1-m units that were excavated at 5cm increments. Six adjoining units with a concentration of material culture were excavated to sterile subsoil. The remaining units were excavated to a historic cultural level consisting primarily of a scatter of building materials such as mortar, tabby, and brick.

Lastly, we completed two transects of shovel tests near the sugar mill parcel of the site, in a section that was missed by previous testing of the area (Figure 4.7). The goal of this was to
evaluate if there was any evidence of cabins or activities associated with the enslaved laborers at the site. This was the northeastern-most quadrant of the sugar mill, and we put in two transects at 10m intervals. While several of the shovel tests contained modern material culture, there were no 19th-century materials in the pits. We maintain that the areas to the east of the mill parcel (Blackburn Elementary) and others will contain material culture and features associated with the enslaved occupants at the site.
Figure 4.5. Map of field school excavations at Gamble State Park (Baker 1987)
Figure 4.6. Map of artifact distribution from Henry Baker’s auger survey (Baker 1987).
Figure 4.7. Mill parcel shovel tests from 2017 field school (Modified from Bland and Associates 2004 Survey Report; Rolland et al. 2004).
CHAPTER 5:

RESULTS

Documentary Evidence

Archival research led to the discovery of several documents that help tell the story of those enslaved at Gamble Plantation. Robert Gamble, Jr.’s diary as well as an article he wrote for a Tallahassee newspaper, shed light on his attitude toward slavery. Historic maps of the plantation show interesting groupings of buildings and the physical extent of the property owned by Gamble, as well as its spatial organization. The 1850 federal census provides the sex, age, and race, of the 69 enslaved laborers at the plantation at that time. Additionally, a list of names included in the bill of sale to Cofield and Davis allows for the identification of potential familial units, as well as an understanding of the movement of the population between Gamble owned properties.

There are conflicting historical accounts regarding the location of the homes of those enslaved; however, the 1860 federal census records at least 50 dwellings on the property. Letters written by Ida Patten suggest that at least some of these houses survived into the reconstruction era. Family stories from descendants of Nelson Burton, shed light on the dynamics of slavery during the McNeill occupation of the site, and race relations following emancipation.

State park archival evidence illustrates the contentious development of the narrative currently offered at Gamble Plantation. In the 1970s scientists and historians faced an unsettling
power dynamic perpetuated by money, status, and politics, which led to one group's authoritative influence over the interpretation of history at the site. Tour guides play an important role in the creation of empathy at plantation house museums, but more often than not, enslavement is discussed in terms of passing factual references, while emotionally evocative narratives are given about the planter class (Modlin et. al. 2011). This format has been systematically perpetuated at Gamble by the Daughters of the Confederacy.

In the last few pages of his journal, Gamble reflects upon “manifestations of divine providence” in his life. He had a number of close calls during the Seminole Wars, in one instance he witnessed a party of Native Americans kidnap an enslaved woman while riding between his father’s plantation and his uncle’s home. Gamble wrote “If I had less than one minute later in reaching this gap I should have inevitably perished”. Unfortunately, it was more than a close call for the captured woman, who narrowly escaped with her life. He also mentions in passing that he went to “Nehamathla to spend a few days with the family…” (Gamble Diary, State Archives, Tallahassee). Nehamathla Plantation was a primary residence of the Gamble family in addition to being the plantation from which 40 individuals were sold to Cofield and Davis. An investigation of historical maps and census data has failed to yield the exact location of Nehamathla Plantation, but it was likely somewhere within modern Tallahassee city limits.

The letter from Dr. Charles Hentz suggests that the homes of many enslaved laborers lay between the river and the mansion, placing any archaeological remnants under the modern-day neighborhoods and streets of Ellenton. George Patten’s recollections, however, suggest that there were enslaved homes in the vicinity of the destroyed sugar mill. In an advertisement for a local newspaper, George Patten describes the property at the time of his purchase (1888 Letter and Advertisement, George Patten File, Clerk of Court, Manatee County Courthouse). He believed
that the homes of enslaved laborers were destroyed in the same fire that destroyed the sugar mill, this suggests that the archaeological remains of these dwellings may be accessible under the open grazing land surrounding the mill site. The location indicated by George Patten is corroborated by the spatial organization of the plantation detailed in Robert Gamble, Jr.’s hand drawn map of his holdings, placing the homes of enslaved persons closer to the cane fields and sugar works. A map on display in the mansion also shows enslaved housing in this vicinity; museum guides claim that this map was based upon a map that was hand drawn by Gamble and given to George Patten upon his purchase of the estate (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Map of Robert Gamble’s Manatee Plantation
Photograph by Author, Map is displayed inside Gamble Mansion
Ida Mel Patton, George Patton’s granddaughter, wrote that her grandfather paid to relocate several of his former enslaved laborers to the newly acquired Gamble Plantation. According to Ida, these newly freed people moved into houses on the property previously used by the plantations enslaved laborers (Patten-Weasner 1980). This suggests that at least some of the homes survived the fire and continued to be lived in through the reconstruction era.

In 1844 Robert Gamble, Jr. settled on the Manatee with 10 enslaved laborers, and by the time of the 1850 federal census, 69 enslaved people were held at Gamble Plantation. In 1858 he sold 185 individuals along with his sugar plantation to Cofield and Davis of New Orleans. Forty-one of the 185 enslaved laborers were being held at Nehamathla Plantation prior to the sale of the property. Demographic information about the enslaved population can be ascertained from the 1850 federal census slave schedule, which lists each person’s age, sex, and race (Table 5.1) (Appendix A). The average age of all individuals was 23 years old. This was the average age for both males and females. Most children were male; there were 10 male children (under the age of 10) and only 3 female children. Individuals between the ages of 11 and 20 made up 38% of the total population, 12 females and 14 males. Gamble held only 2 females that were over the age of 35.

According to the 1860 federal census, 21 children were born between the sale of the plantation to Cofield and Davis in 1858 and the time the census was recorded (Table 5.2) (Appendix B). The total number of enslaved people increased from 69 in 1850 to 190 in 1860. By comparing these data sets, specific enslaved individuals who were brought to or removed from the plantation can be identified. The four men who were identified as “mulato” on the 1850s census were not present on the 1860 census; they may have stayed with Robert Gamble, Jr. after the sale of the plantation, assuming the 1860 census is accurate. One woman on the 1860
The census is recorded as being 105 years old. The oldest woman on the 1850 census was only 50 years old, so this enslaved woman was likely among those who were moved to the plantation from Nehamathla Plantation.

The largest age groups in 1860 were 16 to 20 year olds and 21 to 25 year olds, showing a general population that aged 10 years between 1850 and 1860. The average age of males increased from 23 to 28. However, the average age of females dropped from 23 to 22, largely due to the high volume of female children that were born between the censuses. The overall average age increased from 23 to 25 between 1850 and 1860. Interestingly, the number of males over the age of 50 increased significantly between censuses, suggesting that many of the men who were sold to Cofield and Davis from Nehamathla were getting on in years, and may have struggled with more arduous physical labor.

Table 5.1. Demographic information of enslaved individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1850 Slave Schedual Demographics</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 5 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 35 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 40 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 45 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 to 50 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The population of Gamble Plantation generally seems to have been comprised predominantly of many young families. The list of enslaved laborers in the 1858 bill of sale includes the surnames of 103 individuals (Appendix C). Eighty-two people were listed without a surname. These individuals may have used the name Gamble, which was common under enslavement, but this is not specified in the document. The list of names shows that many individuals that shared a surname were separated from each other between plantations owned by the Gamble family. Many enslaved people held at Nehamathla shared a last name with those living at Gamble prior to the estate’s sale. For example, nine enslaved laborers shared the surname Tyler, 5 of which were at Gamble Plantation at the time of the sale, while 4 were being held at Nehamathla. If not related by blood, the Tyler’s were likely procured from the same
planter and shared a significant bond. All the individuals with recorded last names from Nehamathla Plantation shared last names with people already being held at Gamble Plantation.

I worked with USF librarian and genealogist Drew Smith to identify the living descendants of Nelson Burton, an enslaved laborer at Gamble Plantation. I contacted these individuals to share what I have learned about their family through archaeological and archival research, and to offer them the opportunity to contribute in future investigations which will occur at the sugar mill site. So far, I have heard back from one descendant who has expressed interest in learning more about the daily life of her ancestors.

The story of Nelson Burton’s wife, Maria Washington Burton and his adopted daughter Brilla Burton, can be found at the Manatee County Archives in Bradenton. According to the 1880 census of Manatee County, Mariah was born in Georgia in 1836, while Nelson was born in 1822 in Virginia. Nelson was likely among the enslaved who were initially relocated to the Tallahassee area by the Gamble family in the mid-1820s.

Mariah had four children prior to marrying Nelson, Melissa Harrison, Charles Harrison, Sarah Brown, and Brilla Burton. Nelson and Mariah were married in 1872 when Brilla was two years old. Family members recalled that Brilla “was a very fair skinned mulatto”. On June 4, 1876, Mariah bought half an acre of land from Archibald (“Archie”, as the family calls him) McNeill for $20. The same day she purchased this land, she deeded the property to Brilla. Included in this deed was a statement in which Nelson was made trustee and caretaker of the land until Brilla came of age or was married. Descendants who contributed to the booklet believe that Mariah was instructed to take this unusual course of action, because she could not read or write. Archibald McNeill’s concern for the welfare of a young mulatto girl may point to the identity of Brilla’s birth father, be it Archibald himself, or someone close to him.
Through her archival research, Saidiya Hartman, examined how the sexual and reproductive labor was exploited from enslaved women like Mariah;

They were forced to perform the affective and communicative labor necessary for the sustenance of white families at the expense of their own; as surrogates they were required to mother and comfort children who held their children in contempt: to cook, clean, and comfort white men, enabling them to go out into the world as productive laborers; and submit to intimate relations with husbands and sons and brothers or be raped by them— you cannot choose what you cannot refuse. (Hartman 2016:171)

Burton family members were never explicitly told the identity of Brilla’s biological father, only that he was someone very close to the McNeill family. Money was always made available by the McNeill’s to ensure Brilla was properly taken care of, she was even sent away to boarding school for a formal education. Descendants of Maria and Brilla had this to say about Achibald McNeill;

From all indications, Archie McNeill was a very close friend of the family and exerted a great deal of influence upon them. Since Brilla was a half-white child, we believe that Nelson was hand picked by Brilla’s father to marry Mariah. Therefore, after the marriage they were allowed to purchase a tremendous amount of property (Burton Family History, Nelson Burton File, Clerk of Court, Manatee County Courthouse).

Mariah purchased two more half acres of land from the McNeill family in 1882 and 1889. In the 1916 edition of the Bradentown Directory Mariah is listed as the owner of a rooming house on Midway Avenue. Nelson died in 1895, Mariah survived her husband by over a decade and was laid to rest in the Fogartyville Cemetery in Bradenton, Florida.
With the assistance of Drew Smith, I have identified and contacted several of Mariah’s descendants. Thus far, one descendant has responded with interest in learning more about the daily lives of their ancestors.

**LIDAR/GIS**

Analysis of LIDAR data revealed an area of interest east of the sugar mill, in an empty field used for cattle grazing. I created a digital terrain model which showed a cluster of circular features, represented by subtle changes in the ground surface elevation (Figure 5.2). In order to gain a better understanding of the time depth of these features I examined historic aerial photographs of the site (Figure 5.3). I hoped to identify any modern construction or ground disturbances which may have created these features. The photographs suggest that the features predate the 1940s. Lastly, I ground-truthed the features by viewing them from the adjacent property, Blackburn Elementary School. The features were observable to the naked eye as small mounds.

Robert Gamble, Jr. made a hand drawn map of his holdings along the Manatee River, which provides insight into the spatial organization of the plantation. While the map does not show where the slave cabins were, there are areas marked as “uncleared hammock,” which indicate areas not cleared for cane. These areas were not cleared for agricultural production and may have been of less perceived value to the planter. For this reason, these hammocks may have been selected for the construction of enslaved laborer housing. However, Gamble may have preferred locations that allowed for easier surveillance of the enslaved. By georeferencing the sugar mill in his map with the modern-day sugar mill ruins, I was able to overlay this historic map on the modern landscape using ArcGIS (Figure 5.4). Comparing the georeferenced historic map to my digital terrain model allowed me to better understand the spatial relationship of the
features I identified, to the greater plantation organization (Figure 5.5). These features would have been within the plantation boundaries near areas used for both growing and processing sugar cane. Interestingly, two small dots appear on Gamble’s map in the approximate vicinity of the features. They are not labeled and could possibly be accidental.

Figure 5.2. DTM of Ellenton highlighting mound features.
Figure 5.3. Historic aerial photographs of feature area.
Figure 5.4. Georeferenced overlay of historic map by Robert Gamble. Courtesy of Manatee County Public Library Historical Digital Collections.

Figure 5.5. Georeferenced LIDAR DTM. Created by Author
Archaeological Record

Archaeological survey and excavations at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park indicated that the homes of enslaved laborers were likely not located on the grounds of the state park. No clear evidence of structures or ante-bellum occupations (other than the mansion) were identified in the previous surveys or in the surveys conducted in 2017 or 2018. However, there is an enslaved living space hidden in plain sight at the mansion. The kitchen and adjacent “work room” would have been the crowded home of the cook, her family, and other domestic enslaved laborers. The enslaved women who would have occupied these spaces were tasked with domestic chores as well as housewifery. Domestic chores were tasks that required personal services for the plantation owners, while housewifery involved the production of goods for the planters own consumption or for sale (Shammas 1985). Close contact with the planter and his family may have afforded these women social capitol on the plantation (Harper 1985). However, enslaved people working in the main house were expected to carry out daily chores in silence and reverence. This expectation was utilized to legitimize the violence they were subjected to (Glymph 2008). In order to legitimize the institution of slavery, women working in the main house were often reduced to dehumanizing stereotypes by the white planter class (White 1999). The kitchen and work room areas would have been an important space to the enslaved on the plantation landscape (Upton 1984). Enslaved laborers would only have been permitted to enter the home from these humble backrooms, a stark juxtaposition to the grand façade at the front of the house.

Excavations outside of this residential and work space revealed no diagnostic artifacts relating to the daily life of enslaved laborers. Late Victorian era medicine and liquor bottles, ceramics, and material culture were scattered across the upper cultural levels. Lower cultural
levels contained faunal remains which are markedly different from higher levels, but analysis of this is ongoing. The majority of artifacts recovered from this locus and all other loci can be dated to the Patten family occupation of the mansion, however there were some earlier material remains that likely date to the ante-bellum and circum-bellum period. One such item was a transfer print whiteware sherd from a Saffordshire-produced nursery plate dating to approximately 1850 (Figure 5.6). The rims of similar plates were often adorned with letters of the alphabet and were used to encourage young people to learn their ABCs. This specific plate depicts a darkly imperialist scene, with the crudely stylized image of a Chinese man. Letters below the rim of the plate read “The frolics of youth” “The downfall of China”. The depiction of a vase being knocked to ground by the imperialist antics of the painted children gives the plate dual meaning. The imagery symbolizes both the rambunctious destruction of ceramics and the downfall of the Chinese empire. The irony that this plate was broken likely due to “the frolics of youth” was not lost on the archaeologists who discovered it. This plate may have belonged to children of the McNeill family, or was possibly a handed down through the Patten family or enslaved laborers. In addition to excavations in the vicinity of the mansion, a surface survey of the sugar mill site yielded a number of corroded metal artifacts which likely made up the 19th-century sugar processing machinery. Sub-surface testing of the northeast area of the sugar mill parcel not covered by previous survey also turned up no remains from the 19th-century.
Figure 5.6. Side by side comparison of complete plate and ceramic sherds (plate found on ebay.com/personal photograph).
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings outlined in the previous chapter allow for a better understanding of the daily lives of enslaved people at Gamble Plantation. This will allow the ongoing project a more nuanced perspective of the history of those who were enslaved at the site and offer several paths moving forward to connect with descendant and community stakeholders. Excluding the family history of Nelson Burton’s descendants, most of what I learned about the enslaved came from interpreting plantation owner records and information. There remains much work to do before a critical historical narrative of the site centered on the enslaved Africans will be complete. My work will potentially bring attention to the gaps in the story and provide a new focus for future work at the site.

Documentary evidence illuminates the perspectives and attitudes of the plantation owners, regarding their enslaved laborers. Robert Gamble, Jr. was likely familiar, if not well acquainted, with many of the enslaved people he brought with him to his Manatee River Plantation. Many of the enslaved people at Gamble Plantation appear to have familial links to those at Nehamathla Plantation. In the sale of his property, Gamble may have reunited individuals from Nehamathla Plantation with their relatives at his Manatee River Plantation. All individuals (with recorded last names) sold to Cofield and Davis from Nehamathla Plantation, shared a last name with those already in bondage at Gamble Plantation.
From letters and journal entries written by Robert Gamble, Jr. we can get a better understanding of the conditions he imposed upon his enslaved laborers. Enslaved laborers that Gamble trusted and believed to be more intelligent were given special roles on the plantation such as brick laying and masonry. The 1860 census tells us that Cofield and Davis employed George W. Graham, a mixed-race man, to oversee the enslaved labor on the plantation. This illustrates the complicated nature of race relations and power dynamics at Gamble and throughout the Southeast.

The McNeill’s involvement in the lives of the Burton family, provide insight into their treatment of the enslaved during their time at the plantation. They provided Brilla Burton with property and an education, because her father was a “friend of the family” or possibly Archibald McNeill himself. The McNeill family’s influence over Mariah Burton and her family after emancipation, illustrates the unsettling power dynamic between whites and blacks in the South at this time. Though Mariah’s descendants remember “Archie” McNeill as a friend of the family, many choices appear to have been made for Mariah by the McNeills.

Demographics from the 1850 Federal Census tell us that 11 to 20 year-olds made up the largest age group on the plantation. These were individuals in the prime of life and fertility. They would have been chosen by Gamble for their ability to do arduous manual labor and ability to produce more laborers. There were only 2 women over 35, which illustrates Gamble’s preference for enslaved women in their early child-bearing years. There were over twice as many male children over under the age of 10, which may suggest a preference for young male laborers in the future.

A great deal of children appear to have been born at the plantation between 1850 and 1860. Children under the age of ten made up the largest age group in the 1860 census. There
were 64 children 10 years old and younger in 1860, compared to 13 in 1850. Planters often considered enslaved people to be adults at age 16 or younger, but there was a great deal of flexibility in defining adulthood. Wilma King argues that enslaved children had no childhood, because they started working and were subjected to oppression, punishment, and separation at a very young age (King 2011). Most of the accounts of enslavement recorded by the WPA in the 1930s were from individuals who had been children during the time of enslavement, their chilling stories shed light on the traumatic hardships enslaved children faced. Though the census data should not be discounted, it is important to note that most enslaved laborers did not know their exact age. Enslaved people often estimated their age based on their size or memorable events (King 2011). This may account for the woman who reported being over 100 years old on the 1860 census.

Analysis of the recorded surnames of enslaved laborers allows for the identification of possible familial groups (Appendix C) indicates that families were likely divided between Gamble-owned plantations. Those who were sold to Cofield and Davis from Nehamathla Planation may have been reunited with loved ones that were relocated to Gamble Plantation years prior. The definition of family for the enslaved was inherently flexible. Although a co-residential two parent household was the ideal, it was not at all common or easily realized, so enslaved people adapted their family lives accordingly (Paragas 2008). Enslaved familial structures were shaped by both external forces (imposed by the planter class) and individual agency (Paragas et.al. 2011). Family life also varied greatly by geography across the South, as a result it is impossible to create a generalized conclusion from localized research.

The Gamble family was likely involved in a form of slave trade, unique from the commercial operations in which professional slave traders would buy and sell large numbers of
people between states. Instead, the planter himself would take trips to the Upper South in order to stock his own plantation. John G. Gamble used his banking connections to find information on the prices of enslaved people in Virginia for his political ally and neighbor Archille Murat, and he likely procured his own enslaved laborers in a similar fashion (Baptist 2002).

The conflicting historical accounts of the slave quarter location, coupled with archival, LIDAR, and archaeological data, points to the possibility that more than one area was used for enslaved housing. There were at least 50 houses at the plantation in 1860, they may have been placed according to the tasks their inhabitants were charged with. Many houses were likely located close to the mill and cane fields designated in Gamble’s hand drawn map, however some dwellings, as Dr. Hentz reported, may have been located between the river and the mansion. There is no evidence from either LIDAR or excavation that suggest enslaved housing was on the grounds of the current state park.

**Project Summary**

My investigations have centered around the enslaved community at Gamble Plantation. I narrowed my interpretive lens to focus on those who were held in bondage at Gamble Plantation. I gleaned details about the enslaved from the archival and archaeological record, as well as the landscape, in order to provide a better understanding of their daily lives. I hope that the information I have compiled will be used to improve the historical narrative of enslavement at the site. In every level of my research and writing I sought to humanize those who were enslaved. I wished to bring enslaved Africans at Gamble to life as individuals, who used their personal agency and strength to negotiate the institution of slavery. As Battle-Baptiste (2010: 81) suggests, historians and archaeologists should aim to highlight the power and agency in those who “transformed the plantation from a ‘natural landscape’ to a ‘cultural landscape’ as the
central component in understanding black cultural production in the 19th century.” Those who were enslaved at Gamble should be represented by more than a list of names scribbled on a bill of sale and tucked away behind glass. The plantation was built upon their blood, sweat, and tears, and their story deserves to be told.

**Future Directions**

Though high probability areas for the archaeological remains of enslaved houses were identified, no excavations were conducted at these sites due to a lack of landowner interest and skepticism from Ellenton townfolk. It is my hope that the absentee landowner will grant permission for excavation in the field adjacent to Blackburn Elementary, as LIDAR data and historical maps identify it as an area of high probability.

It is also my hope that the descendants of those enslaved may become involved in any future archaeological endeavors at the site. With the help of Drew Smith, I have contacted the descendants of Nelson Burton, and have encouraged their participation in upcoming archaeological research at the ruins of the sugar mill. In my research I initially hoped to be guided by the concerns and interests of a descendant community, but this is something that I found much more easily said than done. Building a community and establishing communication takes time and a lot of work, but I hope that it may be achieved moving forward.

For future research I offer the following recommendations:

1.) Changes in site interpretation
   - Create a new script for the tour guides at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park, that will be inclusive of emotionally evocative narratives about enslaved people, which should be humanizing and engaging for the public.
• Create signage and interpretation for the site of the ruined sugar mill focusing on the tasks of enslaved laborers and the conditions in which they worked.

• Work in collaboration with descendants identified through this thesis research, to create both the new script and signage for the mill.

2.) Inclusion of a broader range of stakeholders

• Hold a new round table community meeting, including descendants of the enslaved, to discuss goals moving forward.

3.) Future excavations

• Future excavations should target high probability areas surrounding the sugar mill parcel in empty fields used for grazing or on the grounds of Blackburn Elementary.

• The georeferenced historic map of Robert Gamble Jr.’s holdings along the Manatee should be utilized, as well as the various historical accounts, in order to identify areas of high probability.

• Further investigation is needed of features identified through LIDAR data analysis in this thesis. This will require the cooperation of the absentee landowner.

4.) Informed by research that emphasizes the inclusion of descendant voices in the interpretation of plantation heritage sites (Jackson 2011:450; McDavid 2002), I suggest the following in regards descendant outreach:

• Contact should be established with as many descendants as possible.

• When first establishing contact with the descendants the offer of collaboration should be extended.
• Offer findings about the daily lives of enslaved ancestors only with descendant permission. Because this is a sensitive history, the information we provide should be at the descendant’s discretion and individual comfort level. The institution of slavery has left deep scars which persist, it is not a history which should be discussed lightly.

• Do not pressure or bombard descendants with questions, rather “put the ball in their court” so to speak. Instead of questioning, start a conversation which may work at varying comfort levels. Descendants should be allowed to share as much or as little as they please.
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Baram, U.


Battle-Baptiste, W.


Blakey, Michael L.


Bonasera, M. C., & Raymer, L.


Brighton, S. A.


Chodoronek, M.


Community Archaeology at Gamble Plantation State Park


Courtenay, P.P.


Covington, James


Davidson, J.M.

Deagan, K. and Landers, J.  

Deetz, James  

Deetz, K.F., Chapman, E., Edwards, A. and Wilayto, P.  

Degler, Carl  

Delle, J.A.  

Epperson, T.W.  

Fairbanks, C.H.  

Fitts, R. K.  

Ferguson, L.  

Gamble, Robert Jr.  
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Genovese, E.D.  
Glissant, E.


Glymph, T.


Harper, C.W.


Hartman, S.


Hirth, K.G.


Hoffman, K.


Jackson, Antoinette


Kendi, I. X.


King, W.


Landers, J.


Leone, Mark P. et al.

Matthews, Janet B.

McDavid, C.

McDuffee, Lillie

McGuire, R. H.

Minkoff, Mary F.

Mintz, S.W.

Mintzs, I. and Price, R.


Moses, S.K.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association
Odewale, A.


Orser, C. E.


Orser, C. E., Fagan, B. M.


Pargas, D.A.


Pargas, D.A. and Cimprich, J.


Patten-Weesner, Ida Mel


Portrait of Robert Gamble Jr.


Rivers, Larry


Roediger, David R. (Editor)

Roland, Vicki, et. al.


Russell, A. E.


Schene, Michael


Sewell, Christopher


Shackel, P.A.


Shammas, C.


Silpa, Felicia Bianca


Singleton, T. A.


Smith, Julia H.


Stowe, Stephen


Upton, D.


Vlach, John Michael


Voss, B. L.


Wall, D. D.


Williams, B., & Voss, B. L.


Weik, L. A.


Weik, T.


White, D.G.

Wiggins, Jim


Wilkie, L. A.


Zimmerman, Larry J., Courtney Singleton, and Jessica Welch

APPENDIX A

Demographic Information from 1850 Slave Schedule

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APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

Enslaved Laborers Grouped by Surname

*G= Gamble Plantataion / N= Nehamathla Plantation

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97
Littleton Tazewell

THORNTON
Edmond Thornton

TYLER
William Tyler
Cyrus Tyler
Justina Tyler
Charlotte Tyler
Cynthia Tyler
Jim Tyler
Polly Tyler
Louisa Tyler
Dennis Tyler

WASHINGTON
James Washington

WILLIAMS
Isaac Williams
Maria Williams

WINGFIELD
Billy Wingfield