

# Rethinking the Carter's Grove Slave Quarter Reconstruction: A Proposal

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As public and scholarly interest in the histories and cultures of historically oppressed groups in this country continues to grow, those of us in the business of interpreting and presenting these pasts and lifeways must proceed with caution. Many of us now agree that history is affected to varying degrees by presentism. We must therefore be aware of our position on the issue of relativizing both the past and present, and specifically of which groups we are engaged in relativizing. This point is made by Gable, Handler, and Lawson in a recent article regarding the presentation of black and white histories at Colonial Williamsburg (Gable, Handler, and Lawson 1993). They begin by critiquing anthropology's postmodernist call for self-reflexivity and a relativistic epistemology which, they argue, mainly affects traditionally marginalized groups since anthropologists tend to study these groups. The same applies to the related field of history (1993:802–3) where, although scholars agree that presentism affects the interpretations of all pasts, it is at the margins of society where histories become blurry (1993:803). At the same time, mainstream histories are strengthened:

Lost in the deconstructive orgy is the more crucial point that majority or mainstream traditions are equally invented. Yet some inventions are easier to dismantle than others or, perhaps, easier for audiences to accept as inventions. And because no invention stands alone (Kurd makes sense only in relation to Iraqi or Turk or Irani), to relativize only one among a series of related terms is, by inattention to reify the others (1993:802).

As an example, they focus on Colonial Williamsburg, a “related institution (1993:791).”

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Gable, Handler, and Lawson charge Colonial Williamsburg of presenting two competing histories to visitors. The translation of mainstream white history emerges as factual, while that of black history unfolds as near fiction. Although social historians at Colonial Williamsburg espouse a relativistic epistemology, and interpreters understand that the public is to be told that history is a construction of the present, the reigning ideology continues to be a positivistic one which views objects and documents as facts; as evidence of a “real past” (1993:792, 795). Therefore, the heaps of museum pieces and dozens of reconstructed “original” buildings associated with eighteenth-century whites elevates their past to “historical reality,” while what is seen as the scarcity of slave-related material culture and documents

means that the past of enslaved Africans must remain in the realm of the unknown (1993:796–7).

The politics of selective deconstruction at work at Colonial Williamsburg make it blindingly apparent that changes are necessary. Colonial Williamsburg narrates its version of life in eighteenth-century Virginia to one million annual visitors, most of whom are white and upper-middle class. It is distressing to think that each of these visitors will get what will be for most their first glimpse into the lives of enslaved Africans through an unfavorably biased lens. We need to work towards the goal of doing away with the privileging of white elite history. To institute such a change, however, amounts to a near insurmountable task. Colonial Williamsburg has spun its tales of founding fathers for over fifty years. Staff, interpreters, and visitors all seem to share in a deep sense of pride of, and familiarity with, the lives of the colonial whites who lived in Williamsburg. In contrast, the inclusion of black history at Williamsburg began in the 1970s, although nearly half of the residents by the late 1700s were of African descent. Moreover, enslaved Africans represent an alien group with whom most at Colonial Williamsburg feel no connection; no sense of shared history. Pointing out to staff and interpreters that even George Wythe's (Thomas Jefferson's tutor) life story is affected by presentism, and that an equally meaningful story can be told about his enslaved cook, Lydia Broadnax, may be a hard "story" to sell.

To mend the dichotomy that exists in our interpretive programs, we need to start by reconsidering Colonial Williamsburg's black presence sites. As is expected, the current methodology used to research and furnish black sites is decisively influenced by the prevailing ideology that the black past is less knowable given the scarcity of "authentic" objects and historic documents associated with blacks.<sup>1</sup> Further below I define more clearly what specific problems this has led to. For now, I would like to make two suggestions that may help to rectify this problem. The first is that we broaden the range of the "written and the wrought" used to furnish black sites to include anthropology and folklore materials not typically consulted. I further suggest that the current goals for furnishing sites be expanded to include not simply a secondary dialog on what black culture may have been, but to add clearly defined objectives geared towards emphasizing cultural processes. Addressing questions such as how did black culture evolve, and how did blacks create a cultural identity for themselves, produces a far more meaningful interpretation of the lives of enslaved Afro-Virginians when compared to the current method of merely searching for objects that could be tied to persons of a certain age, occupation, gender, etc., of a particular time period and location. If we work towards updating the methods and goals used to furnish black presence sites, these sites could then be used as teaching tools to re-educate employees.

This paper shares with others in the volume in that it recognizes few boundaries in seeking scholarly inspiration. In this paper, the "written and the wrought" refer to a broad range of sources: the words of Archie Booker, an ex-slave interviewed in Hampton, Virginia, to Pearly Posey's "everybody" quilt, whose colors and shapes signify deeply encoded messages of identity (see in Wahlman 1993:112). These various lines of evidence are brought together here not simply to provide a list of goods to furnish interpretive sites with, but as an attempt to present life from the perspective of an enslaved Afro-Virginian.

I have chosen the Carter's Grove slave quarter reconstruction as an ideal setting to apply my above suggestions to since it epitomizes Colonial Williamsburg's well-intentioned attempt to include black history, and stands as an example of how and why the black sites need to be reassessed.

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The nature of African American culture is foreign to and/or misunderstood by many Colonial Williamsburg insiders. Although seminal works by social historians such as Mechal Sobel (1987) and Rhys Isaac (1988) have helped to demystify the lifeways of Williamsburg's enslaved Africans, their influence has had little effect on the museum settings depicting black people. Visiting the Carter's Grove slave quarter reconstruction underscores this dilemma.

Carter's Grove was once one of the great eighteenth-century tidewater plantations. Carter Burwell built his mansion in the 1750's on the property left to him by his grandfather, Robert "King" Carter, and resided there until 1792. Now under the guidance of Colonial Williamsburg, the Carter's Grove plantation has been restored to its past grandeur. Out of sight from the renovated "big house" lies the reconstructed slave quarter. It sits on the actual archaeological site interpreted to be the footprints of two duplexes (one with a fenced in garden), a corn crib, and a single room dwelling (R.N. Frank, Jr. 1977, P. Samford 1988). Colonial Williamsburg architects did a remarkable job in building the cabins, which represent eighteenth-century prototypes. Curators from the Decorative Arts department then furnished the interiors of the cabins. The area surrounding the quarter was not included in the reconstruction. While the architecture would be near impossible to improve upon, the cabin interiors and the plantation landscape need to be rethought.

The reconstructed slave quarter as a whole relays a strong and troubling visual message regarding enslaved Afro-Virginians. The message is that they possessed both a culture of poverty and a poverty of culture. Visitors are struck by the drafty cabin interiors and the meager possessions. They ogle the hard dirt floor and wonder to each other how it is that a person could have slept there. On-site interpreters, costumed as Burwell's enslaved Africans, answer questions and speak with visitors about work and living arrangements at the quarter, and cabin architecture. Yet a vital part of this educational process is still missing. Of primary importance to enslaved blacks would have been their community in the quarters. It was a place where they could be themselves and where the creolized African-American culture was created. Through object displays the economic disparity—while it certainly existed—is overtly emphasized, while the ideological power that enslaved Africans possessed is verbally and materially missing. This absence serves to underscore the prevailing and erroneous belief that enslaved Africans lived completely powerless lives, and had no culture that was not given them by whites. To exclude the landscape in this interpretation simply serves to reaffirm this.<sup>2</sup> Enslaved Africans made extensive use of their environment (Upton 1988:367), creating what Rhys Isaac calls an "alternative territorial system," in direct opposition to the planters' wishes to maintain control over their bonds peoples' actions (Isaac 1988:52–55). The entire landscape was a point of contention for blacks and whites, and as it stands at Carter's Grove, the public sees the world of enslaved Afro-Virginians as being confined to the quarter and the crops. Visitors leave only with a mental picture of the hard dirt floor and pallets, the broken dishes,

the disarray and dust. With changes and additions, it can be possible for visitors to realize that although life in the quarter was impoverished materially, it was not culturally impoverished.

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How and why the interpretation of the Carter's Grove quarter evolved into its present manifestation has to do with three key factors which became clear upon reading a report submitted by the Decorative Arts department which outlines the process for furnishing several black sites, including that at Carter's Grove (Katz-Hyman 1993). One factor is, of course, the aforementioned prevailing belief that little can be known about the black past. This led to the second factor influencing the interpretation: the erroneous view that enslaved Afro-Virginians were acculturated. The third factor had to do with the limited range of source material used in furnishing the cabins. The result was that the concept of an African-American culture and identity never had a chance to emerge. Altogether these elements worked to ensure that a culturally lacking yet poverty accentuated picture would be presented of the Carter's Grove quarter.

The report outlines a search of documents to create a list of objects used and owned by enslaved Afro-Virginians during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Almost all of the sources used were primary documents from the eighteenth century including: planter's diaries, travel journals, probates, financial records, runaway ads and shopkeepers' inventories. Not surprisingly, the items on the list, which included cloth, various household utilitarian objects, tools, clothing, and foodstuffs, did not stand out as distinctly African-American. The report concluded that there is so much that we cannot know about the black past (1993:179–180). But instead of leaving it there, it goes on to make the unsupported assumption that enslaved Africans were acculturated; a view loosely based on outdated acculturative models and erroneous information:

It was assumed that most of the people living both in Williamsburg and at Carter's Grove were at least second-generation, if not third generation inhabitants, and as such, were as far removed from life in Africa as many of their masters were from life in England. These acculturated individuals were assumed to have grown up with English as their primary language, and to be familiar with and have no difficulty using English and Virginia-made goods (1993:136).<sup>3</sup>

Acculturation models are generally based on the Eurocentric premise that oppressed groups will gradually give up their own culture in exchange for that of the politically dominant group. Not true. Frequently what happens is that people borrow material or behavioral aspects from others and transform them into a form more readily acceptable to their own culture. This is what happened throughout the New World setting when creolized African-American cultures were created in response to the degradations of slavery and the dynamic relationships formed between blacks and whites and amongst blacks of different backgrounds.

Finally there is the matter of why certain sources were not part of the repertoire of sources used to furnish Carter's Grove including slave testimonies and narratives, photos, folklife studies, and ethnographies. The reason cited was that they were too removed in time

and space from late eighteenth-century Virginia to be of use (Katz-Hyman 1993:50). That decision neglects to take into account that peoples of African descent today and since slavery times have continued to embrace the cultures of their African forefathers. This does not mean that we take these records and impose them unhesitatingly onto eighteenth-century lives. Culture is dynamic, changing in response to its historical context. But if the original source of inspiration came from Africa, these same cultural aspects that are evident today and recorded into the 1800's had to be present earlier on. To try and figure out what form these aspects took in those early and largely undocumented years is what this paper attempts to do. What follows is a discussion of black culture which intentionally emphasizes the African connections over the European, since the European-ness is already overwhelmingly evident at Carter's Grove in terms of architecture, clothing, and furnishings. The goal is to include these African aspects in the interpretation by adding new object displays which may be European in form, but are African or African-American in meaning (Vlach 1980:178-9).

What will largely aid this attempt to define the experiences of the enslaved Afro-Virginians who lived at Carter's Grove in the late 1700s is an understanding of what black culture is, and what it was during the historical and social context of the tidewater plantation. The guiding forces which dictate the makeup of black culture have been recorded by numerous scholars in the fields of social history, anthropology, ethnomusicology, and folklore (see Vlach 1978:1-5). What many have found amazing is that these tenets of black culture have remained pretty consistent despite changing social circumstances and regional variations. Many refer to it simply as an African-American aesthetic.

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Scholars have traced the African roots of American blacks mainly through ships' manifests. Generally, enslaved Africans came to American shores from West and Central Africa, and certain groups in particular have influenced the black aesthetic: the Mande, the Fon and Yoruba, the Ejagham, and the Kongo (Thompson 1983, Wahlman 1993:21).<sup>4</sup> I define the black aesthetic as what feels right to the sensibilities of many African-Americans, whether it be a blues lyric, movement on the dance floor, the arrangement of yard space, etc. Most often-mentioned is a tendency towards improvisation and spontaneity in form (Vlach 1978:3-4). Storytellers are admired for originality in performance and delivery of an ages old tale (Levine 1977:88-90). A skilled dancer is one who can build on the standard steps of a dance and add their own twist to it. Black women who braid hair build upon the standard three-strand braid and create their own signature forms by parting the hair differently, making the braids different sizes and lengths, and so on. It results in such stylistic variability and creative genius that hair braiding is considered an established African-American folk art form. This improvisational hallmark extends into demeanor as well, and could be called a "get-down" attitude (Grey Gundaker 1993; personal communication). As Zora Neale Hurston has said, "Every phase of Negro life is highly dramatized (Hurston 1983:49)." Tied to the material culture end of all of this is what John Vlach has termed the African-American's "dynamic resourcefulness," or the constant reinterpretation of ordinary objects (Vlach 1990:4), which has strong implications for archaeological research. Within the material culture repertoire of African-Americans are items of European manufacture which have been vested with entirely different meanings. Therefore the chrome hubcaps and various pinwheels decorating black

yards symbolize a rotating motion which is tied to the Kongo cosmogram (also known as the “four moments of the sun”) which is itself a “wheel,” rotating from birth, life, death, to afterlife (Grey Gundaker 1993; personal communication). These facets of the black aesthetic are well documented in contemporary black communities across the U.S. (see Grudin 1990, Gundaker 1993, Nichols 198, Thompson 1983, and Westmacott 1991). They are visible in the relatively well-documented nineteenth century (see Barton, et al. 1976, Killion and Waller 1973, Perdue 1976, and Rawick 1972), and in rarer earlier sources as well. I have talked at some length now about the black aesthetic but I rarely refer to it in the following discussion. It is important to keep in mind, however, that it is the driving force behind the uniqueness of black Christianity, quilts, woodcarving, burials, music and dance, all of which are referred to in varying degrees below. What follows are a string of ideas which could be incorporated into the Carter’s Grove interpretation. The theme that I have chosen to work with which ties the suggested changes together is that of “protection,” and the folk beliefs surrounding protection practices.

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What is clear from the reading of slave narratives (Barden et al. 1976, Davis and Gates 1985, Killion and Waller 1973, Perdue 1976), planters’ diaries (Ball d. 1759, Carter 1752–1778), and the slave code (Schwarz 1988), is that enslaved Afro-Virginians were under the constant threat of physical violence, and spiritual and emotional antagonism. Harm could come from white owners or patrollers, evil spirits, or other blacks. The protection of self, family, and community was a necessity compounded by the condition of enslavement. Peace of mind was ensured through mostly West African concepts of protection, mostly Kongo-derived. What went on in the quarter, however, was impacted by the social context within which whites and blacks interacted. After all, the autonomy of enslaved Africans remained contested ground. Whether a planter forbade any displays of African heritage, and how enslaved Africans would have responded in turn, needs to be factored in.

In eighteenth-century Virginia, whites and blacks were more like each other than at any other time in the state’s history, and unavoidable contact was to profoundly affect the process of Americanization for each group (Sobel 1987). Within this regional phenomena of common ground, there remained the battleground, where despite cultural similarities, racial and legal status divided black and white. The planter patriarch viewed enslaved Africans as children, kept a watchful eye on their work (Oakes 1982:1–34), and punished with a stern hand. Incidents of breaking tools, slowing the work pace, and faking illness proliferate in planters’ diaries (Carter 1752–1778:366–372, 430, 628, 672, 724). Whites saw this as proof that blacks were racially inferior (Miller 1977:48), when instead these were calculated instances of resistance to enslavement. More drastic forms of criminal behavior also caught the attention of whites. The Virginia gentry right around this time had to deal with their growing anxiety about the increase in violence directed towards them by blacks, including poisonings, physical attacks, and the feared insurrection (Schwarz 1988:89–90, 95, 143, 360). Outside of subversive behavior, whites seemed to show indifference with regard to life in the quarter. Burials, music, dance, feasting, and folk healing are mentioned by planters in a tone that implies leniency towards African-Americans in practicing these aspects of their own culture. As time passed, white anxiety elevated and eventually manifested itself in the more controlled

plantation environment of the 1800s. Along the way enslaved Africans changed at their own speed, and quietly resisted the system through prayer, secrecy, and protection.

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I have roughly divided up my examples regarding protective measures by who or what one was protecting themselves from. In practice, there was undoubtedly considerable overlap.

The most obvious perpetrator of harm to an enslaved African would have been a white, in particular, one's owner. Blacks knew what they could get away with, and what they couldn't get away with went underground. A good example was black Christianity. Planter Landon Carter wrote in 1775, "I give leave to all to go to Church who are so inclined," indicating his indifference to the religion of his bondsmen (Carter 1752–1778:925). Most whites felt this way until it became apparent that the influence of the Great Revivals that hit Virginia were to have a strong emotional impact on enslaved Africans. Baptists and Methodists carried with them the message of freedom for the enslaved, many who flocked to be baptized (Raboteau 1978:128–150). Having converted God to themselves, as the saying goes, blacks believed that freedom was righteous and to be had, if not in this world, certainly in the next. Planters took notice, and the result was that enslaved blacks could listen to sermons by the planter, or at the planter's church. Where there were all-black congregations, whites were present to ensure that subversive messages would not be preached. Patrollers were hired to keep an eye out for unauthorized prayer meetings. Not surprisingly, the message went from one of freedom to one of "be kind and obedient to your master" (Raboteau 1978:152–210, Blassingame 1972:61–64).

The alternative for Afro-Virginians was to hold secret prayer meetings, a practice mentioned frequently in slave testimonies (Perdue et al. 1976:53, 94, 113, 124, 157, 185, 201, 230, 241, 290; Raboteau 1978:213–219).

To guard themselves they avoided detection within the cabin with an iron pot either turned upside down or filled with water and set in the middle of the room. It was believed that this would muffle their sounds (Perdue, et al. 1976:93, 119, 141, 161, 196, 198, 203, 214, 217, 230, 242; Raboteau 1978:215). Wet quilts and rags hung around a group also drowned out the sounds of jubilation, for black religion is anything but low-key. The use of "hush harbors" was also common (Rawick 1972:156). Stealing away at night, pine knot torches helped light the way to ravines in the woods, where blacks would praise God and pray for freedom. Religion in itself was a form of protection from the evils of slavery. As such it was a source of comfort and hope for most enslaved African-Americans. Drowning out sounds with pots and quilts, or using the dark of night and the untamed landscape to camouflage illicit meetings, were the only protective measures available to ensure that the planter or the much hated patrollers would not detect their activities.

In addition to dealing with malevolent whites there were malevolent spirits. The belief in spirits was a pan-African reality, and blacks felt that both good and evil spirits were everywhere. Many had no problem embracing Christianity with ancestor worship and animism, for what was God but a good spirit, and the devil a bad one? They were God-fearing

and spirit-fearing at the same time (Joyner 1991:76), for evil spirits could wreck your health or bring you some other misfortune. The Kongo concept of arresting or appeasing the spirit before it can do you any harm was widespread (Thompson 1983:101–160).

Arresting the spirit dealt with capturing it or confusing it, and one does this by putting up barriers both inside and outside of the home. A Frenchman noted the capturing of spirits in 1776 in the Kongo:

All, after having cultivated their field take care, in order to drive away sterility and the evil spells, to fix in the earth, in a certain manner, certain branches of certain trees, with some pieces of broken pots. They do more or less the same thing before their houses...(L'Abbe Proyart 1776:192–3, as cited in Thompson 1983:142)

In the West Indies in 1791, a traveler noted amongst blacks that:

...in the power of the dead, the sun and the moon...nay even of sticks, stones, and earth from graves hung in bottles in their gardens (Atwood 1791:265, as cited in Thompson 1983:142).

This movement from broken pots to the use of bottles in the New World signifies the birth of the creolized bottle tree (1983:143). Glass bottles are commonly used to capture spirits. Afro-Virginians were no doubt familiar with this practice, since most had come from Kongo influenced areas (Holloway 1990:10–11). Some were seasoned in the West Indies first (Holloway 1990:10–11), and may have been introduced to the bottle tree while there. The practice continues in parts of the rural south today.

“Barricading” the house to capture or ward off the spirit before it could enter can be seen in Figure 1, a painting attributed to an early nineteenth-century unknown artist. On the cabin door to the left hangs an anthropomorphic form, one half red, the other half blue. This is a likely reference to the Kongo red mummy. The red mummy is a charm thought to be a messenger from the dead (Wahlman 1993:105). It was inspired by the practice of wrapping the dead body of a Kongo chieftain in red cloth. It is being used here to ward off evil. The vodun doll is another African-American form of this charm. On the right cabin door sending a cautionary message is a watchful eye, which I have found a bit more difficult to interpret. Could it be a pictograph for the well-known “evil eye” for which some African groups, influenced by the Muslim religion, wear a blue bead to protect themselves from (Singleton 1991:162)? Or could it be a warning sign to that physical or spiritual intruders that they are being watched?

Arresting the spirit by delaying it is another way to protect oneself. Using textiles in the form of protective garments can be seen in the African-American quilt; a European form, created with an African informed black aesthetic (Vlach 1990:43–67, see also Benberry 1992, Fry 1990). African-American quilts stand out because of their unique off-beat and improvisational style, hallmarks of the black visual tradition. There is also a message being communicated by this break-patterning: its purpose is to delay or confuse bad spirits, since it was commonly believed that evil traveled in straight lines (Wahlman 1993:75). It's very likely that some form of protective cloths were produced as early as the eighteenth century in the quarter. Bill Kelso has pointed out that the unusually large number of buttons found on Afro-



Virginian sites may indicate the recycling of clothes, where buttons were snipped off and the material sewn into new forms, most certainly quilts (Kelso, 1984:201–202).

Another method of confusing spirits was to keep them busy before they had a chance to do damage. The Kongo-derived custom of writing protective symbols on the walls and floors of a dwelling is seen in the widespread African-American practice of plastering the walls with newsprint (Wahlman 1993:126). In addition to keeping the draft out, it kept evil spirits at bay since it was believed that they had to read every word before they could act.<sup>5</sup> Another practice was to keep an open bible by the door to deter evil (Levine 1977:79) (recall Figure 1 where the woman to the right is holding an open book). Using raffia or a broom strung from the ceiling, and sprinkling seeds at the doorstep worked using a similar principle: spirits had to stop and count each straw or seed before it could do harm (Gundaker 1993:65).

The belief that ancestors have the power to affect the lives of their descendants is found throughout Africa (Herskovits 1990:197; Vlach 1990:143). It was imperative that a deceased person be paid respects and buried properly (Herskovits 1990:197). Enslaved blacks would even risk severe punishment to sneak away to another plantation for a funeral. Many planters recognized the importance of this event, and the African heritage of black funerals is often noted. A traveler wrote:

...when a slave dies, the master gives the rest day, of their own choosing to celebrate the funeral. This perhaps a month after the corpse is interred, is a jovial day with them; they sing and dance and drink the dead to his new home, which some believe to be in old Guinea (Singleton 1824:352, as cited in Joyner 1991:77).

The African-American burial has its antecedents in the Kongo tradition to which it is connected (Vlach 1990:139). Broken pottery vessels, sea shells, and mirrors, objects associated with the watery realm of the dead, were left on the burial mound to ensure that the deceased would not walk among the living to cause misfortune (Nichols 1989:13). The appeasement of the dead also ensured that one could later call upon the spirit to aid him. One method of calling upon the spirits was to agitate them through ritual dance and music.

Protection was activated by invoking the benevolent spirits of dead ancestors, examples of which are depicted in the group dance scenes of Figures 1 and 2.<sup>6</sup> The strips of white cloth (Figures 1 and 2), and the conjure stick (Figure 2) are being used to agitate the spirits, represented by the large frog (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> One material object appears to be central to the success of the invocation. The African-American conjure stick arises from a long tradition of African woodcarving (Vlach 1978:27–43). It also has multiple functions related to protection. The conjure stick was used in healing rituals (Vlach 1978:27–43), to agitate spirits, and to control the forces of evil by a conjurer, a person believed to possess the powers to both hex and heal. This person occupied a high status in the slave hierarchy, and it was said that whites also feared and respected them. A conjure stick was found between the walls of the Bennehan main house in North Carolina (Joyner 1991:69). Its purposeful placement there strongly suggests that a slave conjurer intended to either hex his master's family, or wished to protect them.

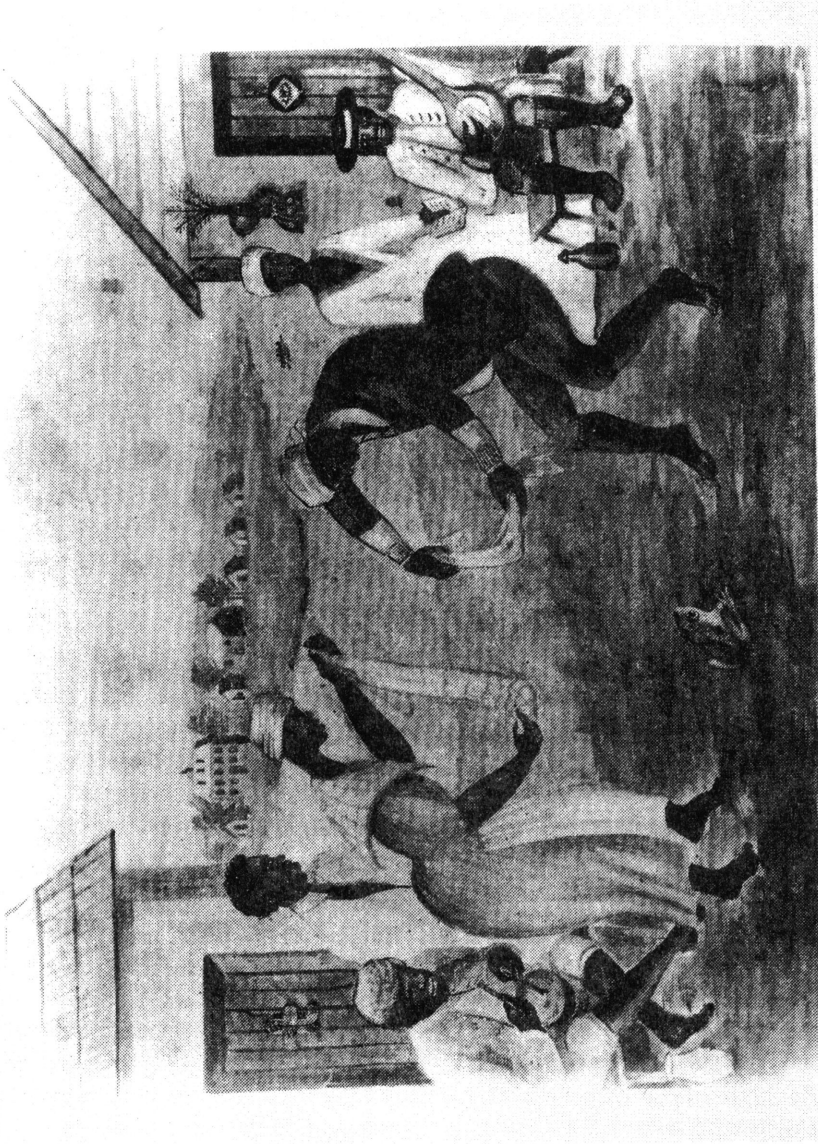


Figure 1. "Plantation Scene" by unknown American artist, 19th century. Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Upchurch.

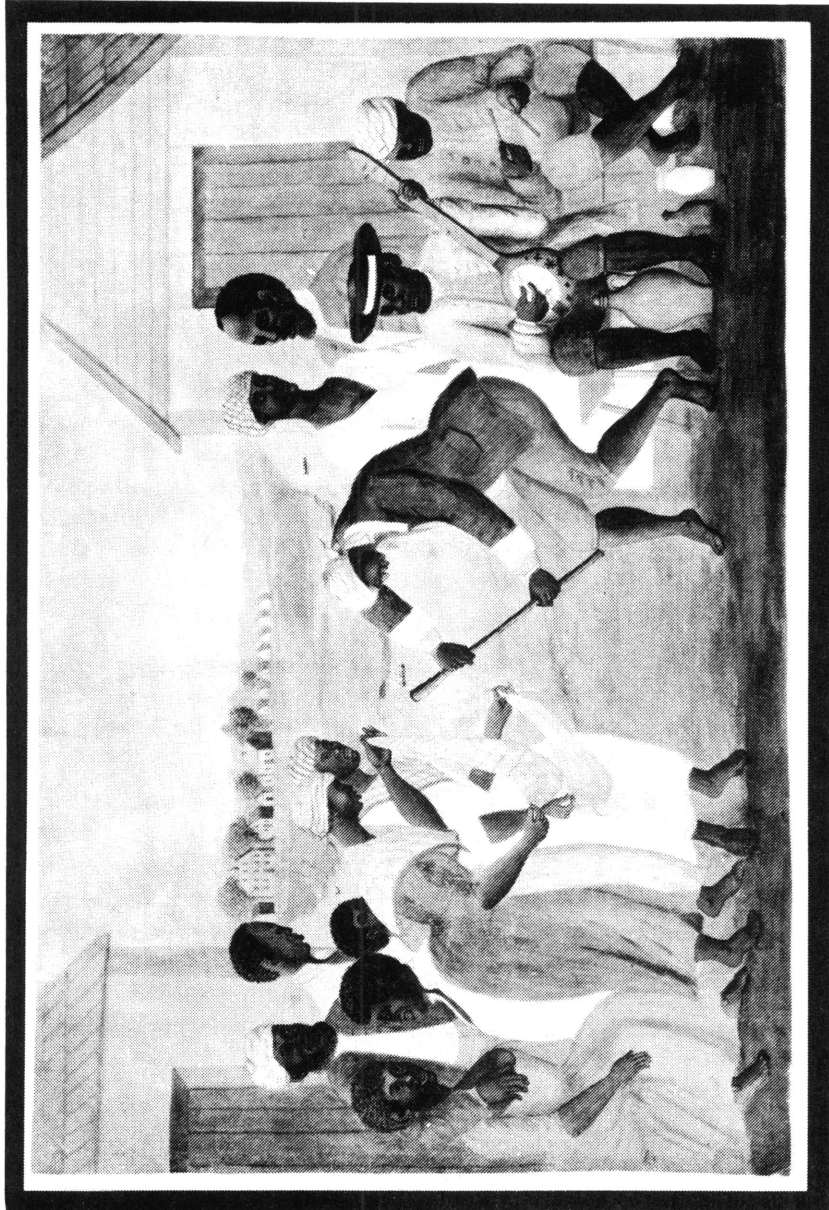


Figure 2. "Old Plantation Scene" by unknown American artist, 18th century. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Once a helpful spirit had been called upon, it was used to activate personal charms, worn to protect one from an enemy. That enemy included other blacks, for although life in bondage was eased by the dependence on and companionship of fellow enslaved Africans, conflicts did arise amongst them. Failing health was often attributed to a hex put on an individual by an enemy who had hired a conjurer to do the evil deed. Matilda Henrietta Perry told a WPA interviewer, "I was conjured once, and don wanna be conjured no mo! I was conjured and the spell brung big bumps under both my arms" (Perdue 1976:221). Mojos, or "hands," were personal charms often attached to clothing to aid in diminishing the power of a hex (Wahlman 1993:102–110). A slave testimony reads: "We all knowed about the Word and the unseen Son of God and we didn't put no stock in conjure. Course we had luck charms and good and bad signs, but everybody got dem things even nowadays" (Yetman 1970:95). A protective mojo has its antecedents in the Kongo *minkisi*, *minkisi* being the medicines of God (Thompson 1983:117–118). It was made by taking materials believed to possess spiritual powers—shells, graveyard earth, or clay—and placing them in cloth, wooden statuettes, leaves, or ceramic vessels (Thompson 1983:117–118; also see Brown and Cooper 1990:7–19; Ferguson 1992:109–117). Present-day African-American mojos are frequently wrapped in red cloth (Wahlman 1993:102–104). Several years ago my grandmother had such a mojo made for her to get rid of my cousin's boyfriend, whom she had little patience for. The root doctor chanted words over the mojo and granma was instructed to place it under my cousin's porch. No one's heard from the boyfriend ever since. Mirrors or pieces of porcelain were often attached to the outside of charms worked to arrest the help of a benevolent spirit. Enslaved Africans would also place these mojos in their pockets before being punished, with the hopes that it would soften the planter's heart.

The multiplicity of root cellars associated with antebellum slave sites may have a connection to conjuration as one of its many functions. To conjure someone, it was common to first obtain a hair or fingernail clipping, or a personal belonging. Dumping trash in root cellars, or underneath the cabin, much to the dismay of the planter who complained about the smell (McKee 1992:203), may be evidence for the fear that an enemy might obtain some personal effect (Kelso 1984:202).

While it might appear that enslaved Africans must have been a very superstitious people, who expended a lot of time and energy worrying about protection, I would say that their European counterparts were no less worried. Lucky charms such as four-leaf clovers, and actions meant to prevent misfortune, such as the avoidance of walking underneath a ladder, have their antecedents in European folk beliefs. I chose the theme of "protection" because it incorporated a wide range of practices and use of material objects, and it could easily be included in the Carter's Grove interpretation.

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I would like to summarize a few suggestions as to how we could implement African-American folk beliefs at Carter's Grove, beginning with the cabin interiors. Part of the strategy of educating visitors is to get them to ask questions. A familiar object placed out of its familiar context, or used in an unexpected fashion could prompt visitors to inquire. Turning an iron pot upside down in the middle of one of the cabins, or hanging a broom or raffia inside above the

door are simple procedures. We could show some things in the process of being made. I noticed that colono ware is present in some of the cabins.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, visitors are not aware of its significance, and most certainly identify its makers as being European, as it blends in with the other earthenware pottery. If we were to install an African-American-made quilt, the same could possibly happen. Instead, we could stage it so that it is in the process of being created. Many Americans are familiar with the tradition of quilt making, and will probably stop to ask questions. The quilt could serve as an excellent point of departure for discussing the difference between African and European visual aesthetics. The quilt could also serve as an example of creolization.

One specific role which could be tied to a person currently interpreted to have lived at Carter's Grove is that of the conjurer. The lean-to shack is where Paris, the seventy-year old griot, sleeps. As the most important person in the quarter, Paris could also be portrayed as the conjurer. Bowls of clay, earth, shell, sticks, leaves, with mirror fragments could be set up. Paris's crutch could be replaced with a walking/conjure stick.

Directly adjacent to the cabins, some manifestation of a bottle tree could be installed, like lining the outside of one of the cabins with glass bottles. Or pieces of broken glass or pottery could be used as chinking material in the cabin walls, another form of arresting the spirits. Further out from the cabins, a sign could designate certain areas as hush harbors, and explain their purpose to visitors. In one of the unused spaces surrounding the quarter a mock cemetery could be implemented. Again, various European items covering "burials" could be displayed, while the message interpreted to the visitor is that their functions and meanings were now African-American.

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The suggested changes will not by themselves stamp out the "white history=fact vs. black history=conjecture" mindset that is common amongst Colonial Williamsburg staff and interpreters. This bias will remain without a push to re-educate employees by emphasizing the point that while all history is affected by presentism, we tend only to relativize the histories of people outside of the mainstream (Gable, Handler, and Lawson 1993). In addition, black history will continually be viewed as a fable, unless staff are taught the more effective ways to think about and approach the black past. Unconventional sources such as ethnographies, slave narratives and testimonies, folklife studies, social histories, and increasingly, archaeology, need to be included in the interpretation of all black presence sites. Instead of an acculturated black past, we need to realize that it is a creolized black past, where both European and African cultures played major roles in the creation of an African-American identity.

In the meantime, Carter's Grove stands as an example in my mind of the possibilities of how the "written and the wrought" could effectively be used to get at and present in a meaningful way the African American heritage. The goal should be that the one million annual visitors who come through Carter's Grove leave with the understanding that enslaved African-Americans possessed a culture as fulfilling as that of the elite founding fathers.

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## Notes

1. Gable, Handler, and Lawson make the convincing argument that the legal ownership of property is conflated with "use", and therefore an object handled by enslaved blacks in the manor house is nonetheless attributed to the material culture assemblage of the white owner. The result is that the material lives of enslaved blacks consists solely of the remains from the slave cabin and other outbuildings (1993:797).
2. Terrence W. Epperson points out that the Carter's Grove complex is an example of how planter hegemony was attempted through spatial control with regards to plantation layout (1990). The quarter is placed at a distance from the big house, and hidden from its view, but at the same time is aligned with it. Epperson contends that this alignment was intentional, and meant to include the enslaved blacks in the planter's "disciplinary grid" (Epperson 1990:34). I agree with Epperson on this point and others he makes regarding the struggle for dominance through spatial control, but disagree with him when he suggests that visitors are aware of all this (Epperson 1990:34). The slave quarter is at such a distance from the main house, and so well hidden, that one would have to be in a helicopter to discover the alignment. In fact, the quarter and the manor house seem to be two different worlds, and the distance between the two, along with their extreme socio-economic contrast, are what creates this sense of separateness in the visitor's mind. Epperson makes some provocative statements regarding the hegemonic struggle between blacks and whites which are presently not, but should be, included in the Carter's Grove interpretation.
3. As Larry McKee has suggested, given that they were *only* removed from Africa by two or three generations, the likelihood that there was a strong African identity should be high (1994; personal communication). The notion that blacks were acculturated because they spoke English and used English-made goods is incorrect. They were forced into doing both, and while behavior can be coerced, culture cannot (Howson 1990:82). Blacks converted English into a dialect different from their white counterparts (Dillard 1972; Sobel 1987:137-138), and we are now just beginning to understand how African and African-American meanings and usages were applied to many European-made objects.
4. Melville J. Herskovits cites "the Akan-Ashanti folk of the Gold Coast, the Dahomeans, the Yoruba of western Nigeria, and the Bini of eastern Nigeria (Herskovits 1990:61)," as the most influential groups of black culture. Though scholars may cite slightly different

tribal groups than those mentioned here, it is generally agreed upon that there is such a thing as a pan-West African world view, and that it had a big impact on the formation of African-American cultures in the New World.

5. Several colleagues have contested this interpretation, citing that poor whites are also known to have used newspaper to plaster their walls with as a form of decoration, and also to keep out the draft. I counter-argue that an object or practice can look the same, but have been vested with different meanings depending on what group we find them associated with and what context we find them in. This has been the problem with interpreting early black material culture in archaeology, as the majority of artifacts uncovered from slave sites were European-made, and could also be found on contemporary Anglo-American sites. However, as archaeologists are learning to set aside their ethnocentric assumptions regarding the uses and meanings of these artifacts, we are beginning to discover that some of these "European" objects were incorporated into African American cultural systems (for example see Brown and Cooper 1990; Samford 1994; Singleton 1990:75, 1991:162; Yentsch 1994:190–195).
6. It is obvious that these two paintings are somehow connected, given their remarkable similarities. Both are attributed to anonymous artists and different dates. Nothing else is known outside of this scant information. That the scenes depict an attempt to communicate with spirits became clearer after conversations with Ywone Edwards and Grey Gundaker.
7. The frog as an amphibious creature symbolizes an earthly link to the watery world of ancestral spirits.
8. Colono-ware, depending on who one might ask, was made by enslaved Africans, Native Americans, or both (Ferguson 1992). It is an unglazed earthenware pottery commonly found on antebellum African-American sites.

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