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Diachronic Demographic Patterns of Enslaved People at Mulberry Hill

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Discipline: Anthropology & Archaeology

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Euro-American settlement of the Virginia Piedmont began at the turn of the eighteenth century as the Virginia's white population increased and cultivable land in the coastal plain grew scarce. As the focus of Virginia's settlement shifted west, so did race-based slavery. The Piedmont's enslaved laborers included a mix of people brought from existing plantations in the Tidewater in addition to newly arrived Africans forcibly imported from west and central Africa. According to Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, between 1619 and 1866, more than 12,000,000 Africans were captured and placed on slave ships sailing across the Atlantic; with more than 450,000 part of the Trans-Atlantic Trade's North American branch (*Estimates* n.d.). On plantations, the enslaved Africans from various African cultural ethnicities, nations, and linguistic groups mixed with one another to give rise to new social systems and cultural formations that were partially inspired by their various African homelands and at the same time distinct from what they had previously known (Kulikoff 1986). Furthermore, creolization models, emphasizing the hierarchical constraints and labor demands that enslaved Africans lived under, have been widely used by African diasporic scholars to examine how interethnic interactions may have stimulated cultural transformations involving creative combinations of African, European and Native American elements (Lightfoot 2015; Yelvington 2001). The resulting creolized cultures would further change over time as new people were introduced to into the community and some are removed, however, the communities themselves persisted through the end of the slavery era.

To better understand how the processes of creolization and enslaved African community formations in the Virginia Piedmont, my thesis will focus on the diachronic demographic

patterns of those enslaved at Mulberry Hill, a tobacco plantation located in Charlotte County, Virginia founded by Judge Paul Carrington and his wife Margaret in 1756 (Foley 2012). At its peak, the Carringtons enslaved roughly 100 individuals as cheap agricultural and domestic laborers at Mulberry Hill. As elsewhere in the Piedmont, Mulberry Hill's enslaved included individuals brought from plantations located in the previously settled regions of eastern Virginia, as well as recent imports directly from Africa. Archaeologists, including teams from Longwood University's Institute of Archaeology, are currently engaged in a search for the housing for these unfree men, women, and children. There is some current evidence to suggest a possible location for one of these dwellings near the main house on the property (Oordt et al., 2022). However, little else is known of the enslaved people that resided and worked at Mulberry Hill in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

A significant influence on Mulberry Hill's enslaved population was Paul Carrington's role as the plantation's owner. Carrington was aggressive in his efforts to increase Mulberry Hill's profitability through the acquisition of adjacent properties as well as the regular addition of new enslaved laborers. In fact, Carrington played a significant role in the expansion of slavery in the Piedmont by also serving as a broker that regularly bought and sold enslaved Africans. In just one of these instances, Carrington purchased 50 enslaved individuals that had arrived in Virginia on the ship *Polly*, and then resold the majority to other plantation owners in Southside Virginia (Morgan and Nichols 1997). In light of this admixture of older and more recent arrivals, a major focus of my thesis will be to try and determine which of Mulberry Hill's enslaved laborers were first-generation enslaved Africans; and which were North American-born enslaved African Americans. Among the African-born, I will also attempt to discern where in Africa were they

captured, and from which ports they embarked. The goal here is to access what were the potential cultural influences on the formation of Mulberry Hill's enslaved community. I will also compare my results against other Virginia plantations where similar demographic details are known in both the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain.

For my research methods, I will conduct primary-source archival research in combination with a review of secondary sources to construct my argument and answers to the above questions. Since few unfree persons were able to read or write, the data for this thesis will be collected from the Carrington Family Papers that are housed at the Virginia Museum of History & Culture in Richmond, Virginia. The Carrington Family papers include historical facts such as enslaved individuals' names, ages, and occupations, and in some cases, a monetary assessment of their value. It is hoped that the documents will also provide evidence to their lives before arriving at Mulberry Hill. Other information that will hopefully be included is evidence of kinship, personal relationships, and patterns of everyday life. Secondary sources will be used to show how Mulberry Hill's enslaved community compared to other Virginia plantations at the time in terms of its demographics, tasks and activities. These secondary sources will be acquired by sifting through research done by previous scholars attempting to answer similar question on plantations owned by other prominent figures such as James Monroe (Bon-Harper & Stetz 2022) and other plantation owners throughout the piedmont region of Virginia (Kulikoff 1986). Finally, I will suggest how this archival research might prove helpful in the interpretation and contextualization of the artifacts and landscapes associated with enslaved Africans at Mulberry Hill currently under investigations by Longwood's Institute of Archaeology.

Below is a tentative timeline for the research I am proposing for my Senior Honors Research Proposal:

By April 14, 2023 – Submit proposal for the senior honors thesis to the review board.

May 2023 – Travel to the Virginia Museum of History and Culture in Richmond with Dr. Kostro to do a preliminary scan of the documents in the collection.

June and July 2023 – Continue trips to the museum to go through all the documents present in the collection, identify which ones would be of use to the project, and get approval/access to copies of those documents.

August 2023 – Begin creating the literature review and introduction sections of the thesis.

September 2023 – Continue the literature review and introduction of the paper. Analyze the data in the primary sources and form arguments for the research questions.

October 2023 – Continue analyzing the documents and finish the literature review and introduction drafts. Present paper at the Archaeological Society of Virginia (ASV) Conference.

November 2023 – Finalize the data collection process and form a tentative thesis for the paper.

December 2023 – Create an outline for the rest of the paper with tentative thesis for the paper to faculty sponsor (Dr. Kostro).

January 2024 – If I have received a grade no lower than an A- in the class (ANTH 498), I will continue the research and the paper through the ANTH 499 class. Edit introduction and literature review draft into the final draft (this will take many sessions of trial and error).

February 2024 – Finish the rest of the paper (methods, results, discussion, etc.) in a preliminary draft.

March 2024 – Finish the editing of the original draft in the final paper and begin the process of preparing for the defense of the thesis.

April 2024 – Submit the final draft to the examination committee, schedule the defense of the project with the examination committee, faculty sponsor, and SHR committee liaison. After defense, make any corrections necessary to the paper and submit the paper to the Archives and Record Manager in Greenwood Library.

The three faculty members to sit on my examination committee will be Drs. Brian Bates, Douglas Dalton, and Scott Grether. All the committee members are faculty in the Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice Department at Longwood University. Dr. Bates specializes in prehistoric archaeology and shall provide a general archaeology perspective to the examination committee. Dr. Dalton is a cultural anthropologist and can offer an anthropological perspective on the process of culture change and community formation. Finally, Dr. Grether specializes in race and ethnic studies from a sociological perspective to the committee.

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