




Dress and Labor: An Intersectional Interpretation of Clothing and Adornment Artifacts Recovered from the Levi Jordan Plantation

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of clothing, adornment, and hygiene artifacts recovered from the Quarters area of the Levi Jordan Plantation, this article examines how racial, gendered, and classed operations of power and oppression shaped African American women's sartorial practices, as an aspect of identity formation, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Texas. Through a Black feminist framework, this article focuses on the ways African American women dressed their bodies for the types of labor they performed to discuss how they negotiated ideologies of race, gender, and class, that shaped hegemonic notions of femininity during the post-emancipation era.

Résumé de recherche: Par l'étude d'artefacts de vêtements, de décoration et d'hygiène collectés sur le site des quartiers d'habitation de la plantation Levi Jordan, cet article examine la manière dont les manifestations de pouvoir et d'oppression en matière raciale, de genre et de classe ont façonné les pratiques vestimentaires des femmes africaines-américaines, en tant qu'aspect d'une formation identitaire au cours de la fin du 19^{ème} et du début du 20^{ème} siècle au Texas. S'appuyant sur un cadre féministe noir, cet article s'intéresse aux manières dont les femmes africaines-américaines se sont vêtues pour les types de travaux qu'elles effectuaient, dans le but d'une discussion sur leurs modes de traitement des idéologies liées à la race, au genre et à la classe, ayant donné forme aux notions hégémoniques de féminité au cours de l'ère postérieure à l'émancipation.

RESUMEN: A través de examinar la ropa, los adornos y los artefactos de higiene recuperados del área de cuartos de la plantación Levi Jordan, este artículo examina cómo las operaciones de poder y opresión raciales, de género y de clase dieron forma a las prácticas de vestimenta de las mujeres afroamericanas, como un aspecto de la formación de la identidad., durante finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX en Texas. A través de un marco feminista negro, este artículo se centra en las formas en que las mujeres afroamericanas vestían sus cuerpos para los tipos de trabajo que realizaban para abordar cómo negociaron las ideologías de raza, género y clase, que dieron forma a las nociones hegemónicas de feminidad durante la época después de la emancipación.

KEY WORDS

African American, Black feminism, Identity, Sartorial, Dress

Introduction

Within historical archaeological scholarship on adornment, the multivalent meanings behind artifacts recovered in the archaeological record that relate to dress practices are tools for the formation of identities (Fisher & Loren, 2003; White & Beaudry, 2009; Loren, 2001; Heath, 1999, 2004; Galle, 2004; Thomas & Thomas, 2004; Heath, 1999, 2004). Identity analysis within the field of archaeology provides the foundation of adornment studies, paving an avenue for historical archaeologists to interpret past formations of identities (White & Beaudry, 2009: 209; Voss & Allen, 2008; Guy & Banim, 2000) by critically examining “small things” (White & Beaudry, 2009: 213). Beads, buttons, rivets, suspenders, bodices, hairpins, and hook-and-eyes are some of the “small things” that can serve as evidence of “iterative practices,” pulling from Lynn Meskell, that makeup sartorial practices engaged by individuals (Meskell, 2002).

Early work on identity formation within African Diaspora archaeology centered on now passé notions of Africanisms (Ascher & Fairbanks, 1971) or religious practices, with archaeologists providing interpretations of what they believed were ritualistic objects (Ferguson, 1980, 1999; Young, 1996; Russell, 1997; Fennell, 2003; Brown, 2001; Davidson, 2004, 2014). This epistemological foundation resulted in archaeological interpretations of

African Diaspora identity formations that spotlighted certain artifact classes while paying little attention to the “small things” that shaped everyday life.

Other archaeological work took up that void, interpreting clothing fasteners and objects of adornment as quotidian clothing and adornment practices engaged by African Americans from enslavement (Heath 1994, 1999, 2004; Galle, 2004, 2006, 2010; Thomas & Thomas, 2004) through Reconstruction (Fitts, 1999; Wall, 1999). Much of this work strayed away from attempts to locate ethnic markers, as their predecessors did, and instead examined adornment practices and the acquisition of pricier goods as potential acts of agency (Mullins, 1999, 2001; Heath, 1999; Galle, 2006, 2010). While this work acknowledged formations of race and gender, the focus on the acquisition of goods meant that interpretations often centered on a class-based interpretation of material culture. The centrality of class often came without acknowledging how operations of racism, classism, and sexism intersected in the past to impact African Diaspora formations of identity.

This article expands on the scholarship mentioned above, providing an intersectional interpretation of clothing and adornment artifacts that explores how racial oppression, sexual exploitation, and economic disenfranchisement intersect to shape past African American women’s sartorial choices within the realm of labor. Within this work, I posit that quotidian sartorial practices—how people dressed their bodies for their everyday lives—are practices of self-making. My use of the term “self-making” comes from the work of Hodder and Cessford, and Atalay and Hastorf, who theorize the constitution of identity through daily practices involving the body (Hodder & Cessford, 2004; Atalay & Hastorf, 2006). Hodder and Cessford’s examination of social memory through architecture, along with Atalay and Hastorf’s examination of daily foodways, together create avenues for discussions of self-making as an ongoing everyday process. In this text, I use the phrase “self-making” interchangeably with “identity formation.” It is through the repetitive daily engagement with dressing oneself that iterative practices are engaged that subsequently constitute the body and form identities.

Building off the work of Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher, I define sartorial practices as social-cultural practices, shaped by many intersecting operations of power and oppression including racism, sexism, and classism, that involve modifications of the corporal form (e.g. scarification, body piercings and hair alteration) as well as all three-dimensional supplements added to the body (e.g. clothing, hair combs, and jewelry) (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). The emphasis on intersecting operations of power and oppression including racism, sexism, and classism within my definition of dress draws on intersectionality, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which rests as the basis of Black feminist theory, can-

onized by Patricia Hill-Collins (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins, 2002, 2004). Both of these scholars have theoretically grounded this research. In order for archaeologists to interpret past African American sartorial practices—and how those practices worked as tools for identity formation—they must examine how multiple axes of power and oppression operated in the past and how those operations shaped past lived experiences.

Through an examination of clothing, adornment, and hygiene artifacts recovered from the Quarters of the Levi Jordan Plantation, this article examines how race, gender, and class operations of power and oppression shaped African American women's sartorial practices, as an aspect of identity formation, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Texas. This piece will focus on the ways African American women dressed their bodies for the types of labor they performed to engender a discussion around how they negotiated ideologies of race, gender, and class that shaped hegemonic notions of femininity during the post-emancipation era in Texas.

The Imagery and Materiality of Black Women's Labor Post-Emancipation

Figure 1 is a circa 1895 Strohmeyer and Wyman Publishers photograph of African American men, women, and children picking cotton in Georgia (Figure 1). Within the captured sepia tones of the stereoscope are opera-



Figure 1. Stereoscope of African American men, women, and children picking cotton. The Caption reads Cotton is King, Plantation Scene, Georgia, U.S.A. Copyright 1895 by Strohmeyer and Wyman Publishers. Courtesy of Cornell University's Loewentheil Collection of African-American Photographs

tions of racialized oppression, sexual exploitation and predatory capitalism that laid at the foundation of antebellum and postbellum realities experienced by African American farmers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the southern USA. Women are dressed in gowns fastened with hook-and-eyes and buttons, along with gingham blouses that matched their patterned headscarves. These were coupled with coarse cotton petticoats fashioned with light tone aprons. Dried cotton bristles pricked at the flesh of these laborers, as they picked bolls of cotton that were placed into the bottom of sacks that were slung over their shoulders. The work photographed was not gendered; everyone labored in what seemed like endless fields of white cotton or green sugar cane stalks and coffee plants. Men were dressed in dark trousers, which were held up with tin and copper alloy belt-buckles as well as suspender fasteners. Trousers were coupled with light colored shirts which they then accompanied with black soft slouch hats. This labor also knew no age limit; it was learned by the young as soon as they were able to participate. Thus, the socialization of labor and dress passed from adults to children, as evidenced by the young girl in Figure 1, dressed in her gingham gown and patterned headscarf that matched the clothing of adult women picking cotton nearby. The young girl stands next to a nearly full wicker basket that reaches up to her waist, adding what she could to the collection.

The advent of stereoscopic photography in the mid nineteenth century led to the proliferation of photography companies, like Strohmeyer and Wyman Publishers, that were based in Europe and North America and specialized in the creation and dissemination of stereoscopes (Silverman, 1993; Wing, 1996). These stereoscopes were based on binocular vision technology. When seen through a stereoscope viewer, this technology would take a two-dimensional image and produce a three-dimensional image. Stereoscopes had an immersive effect, allowing the person viewing the image to experience what they saw as if they were physically present at the time and place the photograph was taken. The rise in popularity of stereoscopes during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries aligned with the popularity of the World's Fair, which brought what was imagined as "distant" and "exotic" viewed and consumed for entertainment by middle- and upper-class people (Brown, 2018). The stereoviews allowed people the ability to view the world from the comfort of their homes. Sears and Roebuck sold the viewers and stereoscopes through their mail-order catalogs providing more eased access for consumers throughout the continental USA. However, the images themselves were produced primarily by White male photographers through White male-owned publishers. As a result, the images produced an immersive technology of seeing that was steeped in Whiteness.

Contextualizing the circa 1895 Strohmeyer and Wyman Publishers image means acknowledging the framework that made its production possible. Saidiya Hartman's work reminds us as scholars of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its Afterlives that the archive is a space of contestation that must be interrogated and reimagined (1997, 2008, 2019). Hartman's work calls for scholars to engage in a methodology of reimagining the archive to provide avenues for new questions to be asked of old documents. This methodology asks us to envision new avenues of inquiry that give flesh and fullness to the experiences of past African Diasporic people. While the Strohmeyer and Wyman Publisher image was created by and produced for White consumption, I use it today as a frame of reference that captured raced, gendered and age dynamics of African American agricultural field workers. Additionally, while the dress practices captured in the image were often staged, this stereoscope, like others produced during this time, depicted ready-made clothing that African Americans had access to within the bounds of their geographic and economic realities.

Figure 1 brings into focus the complex negotiations African American women undertook between hegemonic ideologies of femininity and the practical realities of the social and economic conditions of the postbellum era through the lens of sartorial choice. This concept is further elucidated by Mariah Snyder, an ex-enclave woman who labored and lived in Texas in the late nineteenth century. Snyder stated that "We wore Lowell clothes and I never seed no other kind of dress till after surrender" (Snyder, 1936: 58). In Snyder's Works Progress Administration (WPA) ex-slave narrative, she notes the apparent differences in sartorial practices from the antebellum and postbellum eras. "Lowell clothes," as Snyder stated, were made of coarse cotton cloth that the enslaved were provided by plantation owners, and they were often cut and sewn together on site by enslaved seamstresses (Foster, 1997: 75). These pieces of clothing were plain in design, with decoration and stylization coming from the enslaved who, throughout many WPA narratives, recount the myriad ways they dyed their clothing with "sumac berries or sweet gum bark" to align with personal aesthetics (e.g., Jenny Proctor, 1930: 214). The postbellum era brought with it the rise of consumer culture and different avenues of market accessibility that contributed to opportunities for newly emancipated African Americans to engage in varied sartorial practices within the bounds of economic and geographic access while they navigated racial and gender subjugation.

The aftermath of emancipating roughly four million formerly enslaved African Americans from servitude left newly freed people with new possibilities and challenges throughout the U.S. South. Racism, sexism, and classism structured the job market during the postbellum era. Shortly after emancipation, to stabilize the U.S. southern economy, which was based on agricultural production, the Union army encouraged newly emancipated

African Americans to return to their former occupations (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003: 453). In Dave Byrd's Works Progress Administration ex-enclave person's narrative, he stated that "from the day we were turned loose, we had to shoulder the whole load. Taxes to pay, groceries to buy, and what did we get? Nothing" (Sitton & Conrad, 2005: 17). Byrd's words echo that of many emancipated African Americans, who found themselves struggling financially to situate themselves in an economy built off of their free labor, while in a society structured around racism, sexism, and classism—among many "isms"—"that worked to oppress them based on their social positionality.

The jobs available for African Americans were the same jobs relegated to Black people during enslavement. After 1865, African Americans worked as agricultural labors, semi-skilled industrial workers, and domestic servants, but now they now had the burden of financially upkeep their homes and family. In addition to agricultural labor that upheld the southern economy and agricultural subsistence needs met by cultivating small crops that could be used as a means for additional income, African American women also partook in homemaking chores. Jacqueline Jones notes that "Few rural women enjoyed a respite from the inexorable demands of the day-to-day household tasks or the annual cycle of cotton cultivation" (Jones, 1985: 85). Labor for African American women included both laboring in the field and at home (Table 1).

Agricultural labor, domestic labor, and childrearing were tasks not only conducted by African American women in Texas during the late nineteenth century. White, Black and Latinx women on the Texas frontier faced the

Table 1 Outline of agricultural and homemaking/domestic tasks requiring the labor of African American women at the Levi Jordan Plantation. Based on tasks outlined in Sharpless (1999): 160; Jones (1985); Fox-Genovese (1988)

Agricultural tasks	Land preparation
	Planting seed
	Seed sowing
	Irrigation
	Fertilizing
	Harvesting
Homemaking/domestic tasks	Gathering wood
	Gathering water
	Tending to livestock
	Preparing food
	Canning produce
	Laundering and mending clothing
	Childcare

realities of labor-intensive lives that challenged the prevailing ideology of femininity that percolated out from urban centers in both the North and South (Sharpless, 1999: 160; Jones, 1985; Fox-Genovese, 1988). However, African American women engaged in more agricultural labor outside the house than their White and Latinx counterparts (Sharpless, 1999: 164). Analyzing the similarities and differences between and within groups of people illuminates “pedagogies of crossing,” where differences are experienced and highlighted to acknowledge nuanced dissimilarities that shaped people’s lived experiences (Alexander, 2005: 7–8). Elucidating the particularities of lived experiences through an intersectional analysis engenders a more holistic understanding of the different oppressions people endured and how those oppressions converged and diverged spatially and temporally. A key difference between Black, White, and Latinx women in Texas were the colonial and antebellum histories that constructed their social positionality. Black feminist archaeology calls for these nuances to be taken into consideration when interpreting archeological material that relates to the lived experiences of those women. These distinctions are something not readily captured in the archaeological record but are a necessary framework in the interpretative process that seeks to illuminate the “interior lives” (Morrison, 1992: 91) of people and the clothing that dressed those lives.

Black Feminism

The theoretical framework that guides this research is Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theorization of intersectionality, which locates the positionality of Black women at the intersections of race, gender, and class operations of power and oppression (1991). Intersectionality is the crux of Black feminist theory; as Patricia Hill-Collins writes, this theoretical framework works to treat “race, class, gender, and sexuality less as personal attributes and more as systems of domination in which individuals construct unique identities” (Hill-Collins, 1990: 127). The use of intersectionality illuminates axes of power and oppression that construct African American women’s past and present formations of identity.

Patricia Hill-Collins’s work *Black Feminist Thought* canonizes Black feminist theory and epistemology as a valid entryway for knowledge production in academia. However, Hill-Collins’s work is built atop a history of words from Black women, who for centuries have spoken about their social locations in society and have produced a wealth of knowledge, from enslaved women (Truth, 1851; Jacobs, 1861; Guy-Sheftall, 1995), to blues women (Davis, 1999), to owners of beauty shops (Gill, 2010; Jacobs-Huey, 2006). Additionally, work by renowned anthropologists Zora Neal Hurston and Katherine Dunham has centered the lived experiences of Black women

in their anthropological scholarship (Hurstun, 1928, 1933, 1935; Dunham, 1969, 1983; Harrison & Harrison, 1999). Although Black feminist scholarship has made significant inroads within anthropology over the last two decades, historical archaeology, as a sub-discipline, has not expanded to widely use this framework (McClaurin, 2001; Bolles, 2013).

Black feminist theory within archaeological research is relatively new—only a little over a decade old (Franklin, 2001; Battle-Baptiste, 2011). It is the centering of intersectionality that differentiates Black feminism, historically, from that of mainstream feminist scholarship in the sub-discipline. It is the latter that sets the foundation for most gender analyses in archaeological research. Although intersectionality has not made substantial inroads within the field of historical archaeology, a small group of archaeologists, primarily Black women, began asking how the application of Black feminist thought could aid in the interpretation of African American past lived experiences in ways that did not compartmentalize multiple facets of Black women's experiences but rather interpreted them as wholly complex (Franklin, 2001; Battle-Baptiste, 2011; Agbe-Davies, 2001, 2007; Flewellen, 2017; see also Wilkie, 2003, 2004; Sesma, 2016; González-Tennant, 2018). This call for Black feminist archaeology was a call for intersectional analysis. The possibilities that Black feminist theory affords to archaeological scholarship on identity formation is far-reaching, and the wealth of information to be gained from such an approach has hardly been explored. Black feminist archaeology illuminates how the act of historicizing the positionality of past individuals has to account for the specificities of past operations of race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981).

Additionally, the implementation of a Black feminist framework within historical archaeology creates space to de-homogenize studies of identity. The work of Beaudry and Mullins caution against archaeological scholarship on identity that, in the quest for specificity, runs the risk of essentializing human experiences (Beaudry, 1993; Mullins, 2006: 35). Black feminism revels in the complexity of human existence, demanding that “controlling images” of Black women—stereotypes attached to Black female bodies laced with socio-historical ties to racism and sexism—are questioned and complicated (Hill-Collins, 1991, 2004; West, 1995).

Furthermore, in regard to the central objective to de-homogenize African American histories, the application of a Black feminist framework contributes to existing archaeological scholarship on adornment and embodiment (Meskell, 2002, 2007; Joyce, 2005; Fisher & Loren, 2003; Heath, 2004, 1999; Loren, 2001, 2010). While scholarship regarding the materiality of gender performances and embodiment center on performance theory, primarily outlined in mainstream feminist studies by Judith Butler (Butler, 1990), a few Black Studies queer theorists have criticized

mainstream feminist scholars (Allen, 2012; Tinsley, 2008) for obscuring how race shapes the social world in which women of color operate. With this in mind, Black feminist theory illuminates how the act of historicizing embodiment and gender performance has to account for the specificities of past intersecting operations of racism, sexism, and classism. Through my implementation of a Black feminist framework, I ask how race, gender, and class shaped sartorial practices of self-making among African American women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though an examination of clothing, adornment, and grooming artifacts from the Levi Jordan plantation, I demonstrate how axes of power and oppression impacted and shaped the social lives of African American women in the past.

Levi Jordan Site Background

The Levi Jordan Plantation (henceforth LJP) is located 60 miles south of Houston. By 1848, when Levi Jordan arrived to establish his plantation, Brazoria County already had a strong plantation economy based on sugar and cotton production (Kelley, 2008; Ravage, 1997; Barr, 1996). Archaeological work at the LJP encompasses over three decades of work and several people and organizations. In 2002, the ownership of the plantation was transferred from descendants of former owner, Levi Jordan, to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). The Texas Historical Commission (henceforth THC), per its role as the state of Texas State Historic Preservation Office, in 2008 began to serve as the administrative agency and steward of the site. Work continues at the site as the THC plans to develop the plantation into a premier public heritage site, disseminating knowledge regarding antebellum and postbellum Texas life.

Kenneth Brown, associate professor of anthropology at the University of Houston, conducted archaeological excavations at the Levi Jordan Plantation from 1986 to 2002, unearthing 600,000 artifacts from excavations in association with the Main House and the Quarters. Four cabin blocks were located on the site that housed the enslaved and later tenant, sharecropping and wage-labor farmers. Three of the four blocks housed six individual cabins aligned in two columns, while one block housed eight individual cabins aligned in two columns. Block two is believed to be the earliest block of cabins constructed in the Quarters area (Figure 2).

Additionally, a detached kitchen was unearthed through Brown's excavations, as well as three cabins believed to house enslaved laborers who worked in the Main House and kitchen. Several theses and publications based on this research followed (Cooper, 1998; Brown, 2001, 2004, 2018; Wright, 1994; Barnes, 1999; Garcia-Herreros, 1998; Bruner, 1996; Phaup, 2001; Brown & Cooper, 1990). Brown's work, along with the work of his

students, sought to decipher status and roles at the site. My analysis builds on their research by using an intersectional framework. This intersectional analysis asks how Black women post-emancipation dressed as they lived in a society structured by racism, sexism, and classism through the lens of labor.

Site Assemblage

This article seeks to elucidate gendered sartorial practices of self-making among African American women in Texas from 1865 through 1910. Below I discuss in detail the clothing and adornment artifacts recovered from within the LJP Quarters cabins as well as provide a brief history of each artifact group. Focusing specifically on artifacts recovered from extensively excavated cabins, I analyzed material culture recovered from the Cabin Blocks 1 and 2. Although a total of 19 cabins had at least one excavation unit placed in them, for my research I examined artifacts from the most extensively excavated cabins: II-B-2, II-B-3, II-B-1, II-A-1, I-A-2, I-A-1, I-B-3. A total of 2,759 artifacts recovered from the LJP were used in this study. The artifact groups analyzed below are comprised of clothing fasteners, combs, hairpins, and jewelry fragments.

Clothing Fasteners

There were 2,383 clothing fasteners recovered from seven cabins at the LJP. The artifact types that comprise this artifact group were shoe buckles, hook-and-eyes, suspenders, rivets, clothing buckles, and buttons. Coat, jacket, vest, and belt buckles were grouped under the classification of clothing buckles. Buttons included common sew-thru and shank style attachments, along with buttons that were attached through insertion, such as studs. Buttons comprised 93.58% of clothing fasteners unearthed from cabins at the LJP. In addition to metal, Prosser, glass, and rubber buttons recovered, there is also evidence of shoe buckles, suspender buckles, hook-and-eyes, and grommets. The acquisition of clothing fasteners by African Americans at the LJP can speak to gendered and aged sartorial practices specifically through examinations of what clothes men, women, and children were wearing.

However, archaeologists have spoken to the problematic nature of interpreting gender from clothing fasteners (Lindbergh, 1999; Beaudry et al., 1996). After all, both men, women, children, and the elderly fastened shoes and clothing with buckles and used buttons to fasten a variety of garments. Research on historic photographs (Brubacher, 2002; Hunt & Sibley, 1994;

Hunt, 1994; Foster, 1997) and mortuary archaeology case studies (Owens, 2000; Davidson & Mainfort, 2008; McCarthy, 1997; Armstrong & Fleischman, 2003; Blakey, 2001) has been able to better classify artifacts as resonating with more masculine or feminine clothing during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—a period marked by gender roles that played out directly in how people dressed (Tortora & Eubank, 2010; Brubacher, 2002; Hunt, 1994; Heath, 2004; Galle, 2004; White & White, 1995b).

For example, in the case of more masculine items of clothing, suspenders (Figure 3) and rivets were used to fasten trousers; while hook-and-eyes were often used for traditional feminine clothing, fastening bodices and petticoats. These three clothing fastener types—suspenders, rivets, and hook-and-eyes—typically do not make up a substantial number of artifacts in assemblages from historic sites. These three artifact types combined make up only 1.47% of the clothing fasteners recovered at the LJP. However, they do provide a window into the complex desires African Americans expressed through dress, which aligned and diverged with gender norms as well as religious ideology surrounding ideas of modesty at that time, while interlacing with varying forms of racial and gendered subjugation that the wearers faced. I discuss this in more detail in the discussion section below.

Hook-and-Eye Closures

James Davidson's examination of previous interpretations of decorative hook-and-eye fasteners known as "hand charms" or "fist charms" at African American sites of enslavement provides the most extensive archaeologi-



Figure 3. Floral Patterned Brass Suspender Buckle. Cabin II-A-1, Lot # 201717, Unit 990E/1080N, Level 8, Subunit 1

cal work on the manufacture and use of these fasteners (Davidson, 2014). Davidson points out that although little research has been conducted on the closures, they do have some “antiquity,” with early examples of the closures found in the Middle Ages along with examples found at early European sites in the Americas (Davidson, 2014: 44). Patents taken out in the USA and the UK in the mid-nineteenth century point to “two basic forms of hooks and eyes: round wire varieties and ‘flat’ versions, i.e., round wire that had been rolled flat by machinery” (Davidson, 2014: 44; U.S. Utility Patent No. 2,978 [Burke, 1847: 352] and U.K. Utility Patent No. 8670 [Lack, 1876: 66]).

Before 1830, hook-and-eye closures were relatively expensive; however, a series of patents made throughout the mid and late nineteenth century made improvements to the hook-and-eye design (Davidson, 2014). It was Frank E. DeLong’s 1889 patent that created a more “commercially successful” design requiring less skilled labor and greater production batches; as a result, hook-and-eye closures became more accessible to consumers (Davidson, 2014; U.S. Utility Patent No. 411,857 [DeLong, 1889]). Women—rich and poor, Black and White—fastened their garments with hook-and-eye closures. Hook-and-eyes are not typically unearthed in high quantities at historic sites due to their small size, as well as the fact that they often deteriorate or, if they survived, are missed during screening processes. This artifact type has the potential to speak to clothing trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Hook-and-eye closures are typically interpreted as fasteners for feminine clothing such as short and long gowns, bodices, petticoats, and early corset clasps (White, 2005; White & White, 1995a; Lindbergh 1999; Hunt & Sibley, 1994; Davidson 2014). Of the total clothing fasteners recovered for this research, 11 hook-and-eye closures were found in the LJP cabins. Hook-and-eye fasteners were found in only five out of the seven cabins.

Jewelry

Jewelry artifacts are often recovered in less frequency at archaeological sites (White, 2005; Blakey, 2001; Davidson, 2014). It is rare to find whole pendants, a matching set of earrings, or a complete, strung necklace. This rarity is due to a variety of reasons, including the fact that these artifacts cost a significant amount of money and were of high value to the wearer, and as such were not often discarded. What is often found at historical sites are individual beads, fragments of brooches and pendants, along with pieces of chain that may have once held a pocket watch or perfume bottle to a woman’s bodice.

Mortuary archaeology has provided a wealth of data on how African Americans and enslaved Africans of the past dressed and adorned themselves (Davidson, 2014; Blakey, 2001; Bianco et al., 2006; McCarthy, 1997; Armstrong & Fleischman, 2003; Owens, 2000). Interment photographs, as well as images captured on daguerreotypes and stereoscopes, feature both black and white and sepia tone depictions of African Americans wearing a variety of jewelry types. These included African Americans both enslaved and free during the antebellum era, landowners and tenant farmers during the postbellum era, as well as people living in both rural and urban landscapes.

The first and second industrial revolutions brought with it many new inventions that shifted the way jewelry was manufactured and allowed new avenues for a broader consumer base. In 1875 the cost of jewelry varied, from a “Gents’ 14 k. Gold Filled Case Watch” costing \$25 to a set of “Plain Jet Bracelets” costing 50 cents (Montgomery Ward and Co., 1875: 48). By the mid-nineteenth-century gemstone, glass, and paste inlets for rings, pendants, and decorative pins, as well as chains, were being produced at quicker speeds with machinery that required less skilled laborers, making them more cost-effective to make and widely accessible to consumers (Carnevali, 2011: 295–297).

Of the total artifacts analyzed for this project, 392 artifacts were classified under the artifact group “[jewelry](#).” Artifacts classified as jewelry recov-

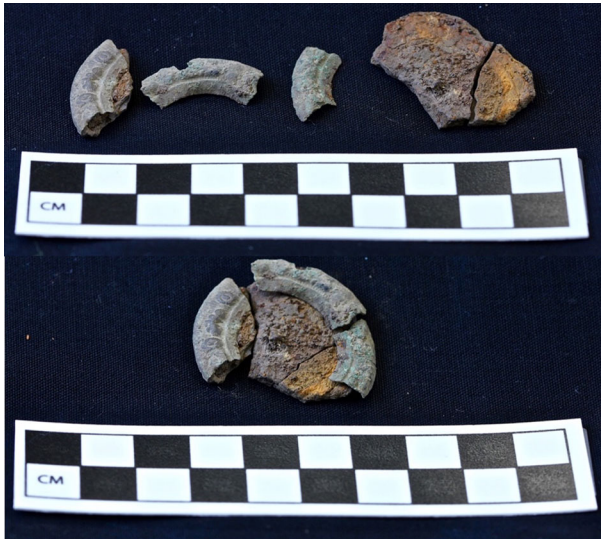


Figure 4. Five pendant fragments found in enslaved cabins at LJP. Lot 17649, Unit 915E 995N, Cabin I-A-2

ered from the LJP were wire, pendants, brooches (Figure 4), earrings, chains, watch fragments, and various bead types. This artifact group accounted for 9.91% of total artifacts related to clothing and adornment examined. Cylindrical, tubular, seed, and round beads are the most proliferated jewelry type unearthed at the LJP, making up a combined 78.32% of the total count of jewelry artifacts. Beads from the site are mainly comprised of glass or ceramic, and as such lend themselves to less deterioration once discarded than the metal artifacts such as wire, pendants, earrings, chain, rings, watch fragments, and brooches. For example, Figure 5 is a brooch unearthed in Cabin I-A-2 made of metal and found fragmented within the archeological record.

Hair Combs and Hair Pins LJP

Hair combs are among the oldest artifacts unearthed from prehistoric sites around the world (Mrozowski et al., 1996; Wilkie, 1994: 2; White & White, 1995b). The design itself, a shaft with teeth that are perpendicular to the shaft, has stayed relatively the same, while the material composition of combs has shifted over time. Combs were made from a variety of materials before the invention of soft and hard plastics, such as bone, horn, wood, and tortoiseshell (Sherrow, 2006; Foster, 1997). In addition to metal, rubber, and organic material types, before emancipation enslaved African Americans were known to use “card,” which were industrial combs used to process cotton and wool, to detangle their hair (Foster, 1997).

Modern combs are made of metal or plastic. Before the invention of stainless steel in 1913, metal combs were made of silver or tin plating to prevent corrosion. However, this made them very expensive (Torota & Eubank, 2010). The invention of hard rubber by Charles Goodyear in 1841 and improvements to the manufacturing process by Nelson Goodyear in 1851 led to the creation of inexpensive rubber combs in the mid-nineteenth century. The India Hard Rubber Comb Company began operations in 1854 in Queens, New York, and was leased by Charles Goodyear to pro-



Figure 5. Image of rubber comb found at LJP. Lot 00774, unit 1020E/1100N, Level 4

duce a variety of rubber goods, including rubber combs (Sherrow, 2006). These combs, in the same design as their organically carved counterparts, typically lasted longer due to their more synthetic nature. Although, as the combs unearthed at the LJP attest, these combs that bent at the shafts and teeth were prone to breaking off. All combs recovered at the LJP were made of rubber.

Hair combs have many uses. They have been used for grooming hair through a process of detangling coarse and silky hair types, which aids in hair and scalp health. Hairstyles for African American women during the nineteenth century included parting hair down the center and pinning hair to the back of the head with combs, having the hair pulled into a bun, plaiting hair, and wearing hair curled in ringlets in the back (Brubacher, 2002; Cunnington, 1959; Foster, 1997). These hairstyles would have used combs during the styling process. Although most of the combs found at the LJP were manufactured with plain, undecorated shafts, one comb did display a twisted rope design which could have served for styling purposes, as well as being an additional decorative element to be seen by onlookers (Figure 5). In addition to using combs to style hair, combs along with hairpins, ribbons, and beads have been known to be used as decorative additions to hairstyles (Cunnington, 1959; Tortora & Eubank, 2010; Brubacher, 2002).

Moreover, grooming hair with combs was used to combat knotting and to remove macroscopic parasites such as fleas, lice, and fungus. Hair and the altering of hair was a primary way for Black women, during the antebellum and postbellum era, to express themselves (Camp, 2002; White & White, 1995a). Although hair combs and hairpins make up little more than 3% of the total artifacts examined, this artifact speaks to the daily practice of hair care and alteration of hair by black men and women of all ages at the LJP. Of the total artifacts examined for this project, 63 hair combs fragments and one hairpin were recovered.

Discussion: Gender, Labor and Dress at the Levi Jordan Plantation

It is the buttons, buckles, and hook-and-eyes, along with hair combs and jewelry that are a testament to the ways tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and wage laborers who lived and worked at the LJP during the postbellum era engaged in sartorial practices. Kenneth Brown's two decades of work at the LJP, along with the work of his students (Cooper, 1998; Brown, 2001; Wright, 1994; Barnes, 1999; Garcia-Herreros, 1998; Bruner, 1996; Phaup, 2001; Brown & Cooper, 1990; Brown, 2004), have yielded not only over 600,000 artifacts but a wealth of archival data that paints a detailed image

of the kinds of labor African Americans engaged in at the LJP following emancipation. Labor organization at the LJP shifted from a gang labor system during the antebellum era to a production system that included wage laborers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers (Brown, 2013: 46; Berlin & Morgan, 1993; Sitton & Conrad, 2005). Institutional structures of racism, classism, and sexism formed the foundation of wage, sharecropping, and tenant farming agricultural labor (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003: 447; Crouch, 2007: 69–92). These institutions were built to sustain the social and economic fabric of the antebellum south. Exploitative credit and lien-based systems were implemented, which effectively kept Black people indebted to plantation owners, reproducing conditions of enslavement.

Brown (2013) cites entries in the LJP ledger that outline the names of sharecroppers and tenant farmers, along with crop production and wages from 1874 through 1876. A shift from sugar production to cotton production took place during the 1870s at the LJP. The shift in crop production from sugar to cotton reflected a general shift in the sugar economy of Texas after the Civil War. Mid-nineteenth-century wartime conditions made marketing the crop particularly challenging, and the emancipation of all enslaved Africans interrupted the labor needed for cultivation and harvest (Watts, 1969). Unlike other sugar plantations in the area that addressed this interruption by using convict labor from prison populations predominantly consisting of African Americans, the LJP shifted to producing cotton during the late 1870s (Brown, 2004, 2013). Brown (2013:46) states:

One of these postbellum plantation ledgers notes that sharecroppers paid fifty percent of the cotton they produced from their share. Based upon the same ledger, tenants paid a rent of \$25.00 for their cabin, \$40.00 for the use of a mule, and various amounts for seed and other items owned by Jordan or, later, his executors and leased for use on the land they rented. The data gathered from these ledgers appears to demonstrate that only a few of the plantation's freedmen were sharecroppers, the majority labored as tenants and for wages.

In addition to documenting the production and wage totals for sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and wage laborers, Brown's archival research also unearthed agricultural schedules from the 1870 and 1880 Federal Censuses, which document African American residents managing their own subsistence plots cultivating "corn, sweet potatoes, and peas" as well as raising "livestock such as beef, pigs, and chickens" (Brown, 2013: 47). These subsistence plots could have provided African Americans at the site additional income for the purchase of goods. Brown's archival research revealed that African Americans that lived at the LJP bought goods from the Jordan

store, as well as from other shops in Brazoria County, with cash and store credit.

Scholars have noted that African American women's dress practices during the post-emancipation era acted as a testament to their harsh economic situations, centering on notions of material scarcity and a lack of resources (Jones, 1985: 25). Other scholars romanticize Black women's experiences, citing resistance to hegemonic ideologies of womanhood and femininity as a principal factor in Black women's choice of dress (Camp, 2002: 7). Archaeological research at sites of African enslavement (Brown, 1994; Russell, 1997; Singleton, 2015) and post-emancipation African American sites (Bullen & Bullen, 1945:17–28; Mullins, 2001; Barnes, 2011) challenge narratives of material scarcity with the unearthing of rich collections of material culture. The representation of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black women through a framework that centers dress practices solely as acts of resistance challenges portrayals of material scarcity and economic victimhood that leave no room for the agency of African American women under the omnipotent structural oppression of capitalism. However, such romanticized notions of resistance usurp discussions regarding intersecting axes of power and oppression that shape Black life by reifying rigid conceptualizations of resistance and assimilation (EPPERSON, 1999; Mullins, 1999: 18). Black feminist Archaeological scholarship complicates these two frameworks by suggesting that Black women were neither unconditionally liberated nor pure victims within the “matrix of domination” (Hill-Collins 2002:18) that shaped their daily lives and, as a result, shaped their sartorial practices.

This article asks, through the lens of labor, how race, gender, and class operations of power and oppression shaped African American women's identity formation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Texas. Through an examination of the labor practices of African American women and the clothing worn while carrying out that labor, I argue that quotidian sartorial practices of self-making act as integral to formations of Black womanhood post-emancipation. It is through the repetition of daily practices that identities are formed and reshaped, and dressing one's body for the day is one such example of repetition of daily practice.

Returning to the 1895 image (Figure 1), all tasks both agricultural and domestic were conducted in clothing that aligned with traditional masculine and feminine gender roles regardless of the labor in which people were involved (Sharpless, 1999:160–161; Hunt & Sibley, 1994: 20–26; Brubacher, 2002: 29–43). Men wore trousers, often fastened with rivets and metal or rubber buttons that were then held up with belts and suspenders. Meanwhile, women wore muslins, bodices, and petticoats fastened at the waist with buttons or hook-and-eyes. In general, the clothing fasteners at the LJP exhibit characteristics of standard utilitarian sartorial practices, with an

emphasis on ordinary plain dish ceramic buttons, metal and rubber buttons, rivets, clothing buckles, suspenders, and hook-and-eyes for fastening underclothing, work shirts, blouses, trousers, and petticoats.

Hook-and-eye fasteners recovered at the LJP may speak to these dynamics, as hook-and-eye fasteners provide an avenue to discuss shifts in clothing trends over time. The late nineteenth century marked the “Bustle Period,” named after the device that shaped skirt silhouettes and was worn, in addition to corsets and stays, to restrict the waist in order to provide a more hourglass figure (Tortora & Eubank, 2010; Steele, 2003). The high fashion of the time, wildly popular among the upper class, pushed for corseted style feminine clothing at the risk of disfigurement of the body, as internal organs shifted to create the desired physical form (Steele, 2003: 67–86). This trend made its way out of upper-class households and down to rural areas of the country, as African American women in the rural South engaged in these dress practices. Tight corsets, bustles, and bodices would have prohibited the movement necessary for daily tasks as tenant farmers as well as arduous domestic tasks. However, the fastening of petticoats with hook-and-eyes, coupled with aprons and gathered bodices at the waist, achieved a similar desired feminine form.

Hook-and-eye fasteners recovered at the LJP can be evidence of fastened petticoats, aprons and bodices worn by African American women who, in the rural South, were negotiating performances of gender with the needed functionality of clothing for the labor they performed. African American women navigated the pull of social designations of femininity and the history of enslavement that demarcated them outside the bounds of femininity, along with the labor necessary for survival that wore on their clothing and their bodies. The clothing African American women wore was incredibly restrictive for the kinds of labor they had to perform. Constricting clothing that went down to the ankles was worn, as the socialization of what constituted a woman—through gender presentation—permeated the social milieu, even as the social subjection that Black women endured positioned them outside the realm of traditional conceptualizations of femininity. African American women were “outsiders within” (Hill-Collins, 2002; Harrison, 2008), adhering to traditional feminine dress practices while simultaneously being positioned outside the range of femininity and womanhood in larger society.

African American women who worked as domestic servants in White households in the rural South may have had additional considerations when dressing themselves, including gender presentation and the functionality of the clothing they wore. Sartorial practices were situationally complex negotiations, at times shaped by the labor African American women conducted during the late nineteenth century in the fields as agricultural labors or as domestic servants. This labor was structured by race, gender,

class, and age (Sharpless, 1999: 159–188; Jones, 1985: 25; Berry, 2007; Davis, 1981: 7; Glenn, 1985: 87–88). For example, over 1,200 Prosser buttons were recovered from the Quarters, and it is possible that some were used by black women who served as domestics for the Jordan family or other families in the area. The whiteness of these fasteners, when coupled with white garments, would have emphasized an image of sanitation, cleanliness, and trustworthiness. This interpretation is evidenced by Hester Holmes (Figure 6), who labored at the LJP in the main house during the antebellum era and remained as a house servant after emancipation. Figure 6 is an image of Ms. Holmes wearing a short gown fastened with buttons, along with a dark-colored petticoat likely tied with ribbon or fastened with hook-and-eyes around her waist. Her hair is pulled back and covered with a headscarf. Her hands are interlaced as she stares at the camera. This image depicts the attire Ms. Holmes wore as she completed her daily tasks as a domestic servant, which included cooking, cleaning, laundering, and mending clothing for the Jordan family. After, she likely returned to her cabin to do home-keeping work while perhaps even main-



Figure 6. An early twentieth-century photograph of Hester Holmes, a domestic servant at the Levi Jordan Plantation

taining her garden for subsistence needs. What stands out about this image is the cleanliness it portrays through the adornment of white on Hester's head, her blouse, and her apron. The buttons used on Hester's white blouse were likely plain Prosser buttons, which both align with the attire and are a testament to the labor Hester put into maintaining the Jordan House—modest and clean.

The quest for, and the imposition of, modesty is tied to race, gender, and class operations of power and oppression that shaped the lives of African American women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The notion that African American women should dress modestly and cleanly in White spaces may have attempted to counter “controlling images” (Hill-Collins, 2002) of African American women which depicted them in the larger society as “jezebels”—hyper-sexed beings. Controlling images are “powerful ideologies” that support the subjugation of African American women and are rooted in intersecting operations of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Hill-Collins, 2002: 69). The desire to dress in particular ways while laboring in White spaces was in part a response to the threat of racialized and sexual violence Black women faced from their White employers as Black women pushed against controlling images of the hyper-sexualized Black feminine body through modesty. What is important to note is that White homes were dangerous spaces for Black women, who were forced to meet the expectations of their White employers in terms of their appearance, including their dress, in order to hold onto their jobs and to de-escalate their visibility from White people.

The ideology of the time that dictated traditional feminine labor was interwoven with Protestant values of modesty demonstrated through dress practices designed to cover the body (White & White, 1995a: 180, 1995b: 72). However, Black women's bodies were layered with a palimpsest of histories shaped by the matrix of domination that left them outside the bounds of hegemonic conceptualizations of femininity and womanhood (Gordon, 1997). Sartorial practices that African American women engaged are an aspect of self-making that inscribed on the body ideologies that spoke to and pushed against histories of oppression that positioned Black women outside the realm of hegemonic femininity and womanhood. This process of self-making is the creation and reification of a palimpsest. This palimpsest is a result of the racial and gender subjection African American women endured. Davis writes that, for Black women, “the alleged benefits of the ideology of femininity did not accrue to her. She was not sheltered or protected; she would not remain oblivious to the desperate struggle for existence unfolding outside the ‘home’” (Davis, 1981: 7).

African Americans of all genders worked as wage laborers, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers at the LJP during the post-emancipation era. African Americans toiled in agriculture fields at the LJP cultivating sugar and

cotton crops while also maintaining their subsistence plots growing “corn, sweet potatoes, and peas” as well as raising “livestock such as beef, pigs, and chickens” (Brown, 2013: 47). Labor for African American women living in rural Texas during the antebellum era and into the postbellum era was shaped by arduous agricultural and domestic labor (Sharpless, 1999: 159–188; Jones, 1985: 25; Berry, 2007). Furthermore, the clothing African American women wore while doing agricultural labor was tied to negotiations of femininity, the realities of racial, gender, and class subjection, and the necessity for functional clothing needed for rural southern agricultural labor (e.g., place).

Conclusion

In Zora Neal Hurston’s *Mules and Men*, she wrote about the treatment of women in the U.S. south during the early to mid-twentieth century. Hurston stated that.

Back in the quarters, the sun was setting. Plenty women over the cookpot scorching up supper. Lots of them were already thru cooking, with the pots shoved to the back of the stove while they put on fresh things and went out in front of the house to see and be seen—(Hurston, 1935: 138)

Hurston’s auto-ethnography, one of the first anthropological texts to examine the lifeways of African Americans written from the viewpoint of a Black woman, paints a vivid image of the ways racism and sexism worked to commodify and dehumanize Black women. While Black men and women performed the same agricultural labor, sexism, and racism intersected in particular ways at micro and macro levels (both inside of homes and outside of them); these “isms” worked to sustain ideologies that underlay Hurston’s metaphor of African American women being “mules”—seen as merely valued for the labor they do. Hurston’s words demonstrate an aspect within the everyday lives of African American women who, after completing their daily tasks, be it agricultural labor, working as a domestic servant, or a combination of the two, went back to their homes to prepare dinner for themselves and their families, working “over the cookpot scorching up supper.”

However, as Hurston states, even though African American women in society were valued based on their physical and reproductive labor, they still “put on fresh things and went out in front of the house to see and be seen.” In this article, I argue that constructions of identity—one aspect of which was shaped by daily sartorial practices of self-making—illuminate the realities of racialized oppression, gender-based exploitation, and eco-

conomic disenfranchisement that Black women face in their everyday lives. Through a combination of material culture and documentary and oral history data, I emphasize the multitude of uses particular artifacts could have had in the past, behaviors that could have accompanied their use, and the connection operations of power and oppression had to African American experiences that structured said behaviors through the lens of labor.

Moreover, relatively little archaeological work has focused specifically on African American lived experiences during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Texas, with a few exceptions (Glasrud & Pitre, 2008; Winegarten, 2010). Although there have been historical studies centered on how African American women have constructed their identities during enslavement and the post-emancipation era (Hosbey, 2011; Jones, 1985; Riley, 1988; Taylor & Moore, 2003), there are no archaeological projects that have conducted a gendered analysis of African American sites in Texas. Whitney Battle-Baptiste writes: “When addressing the lives of African descendant people, a gendered approach can mean capturing often neglected details and ignored elements of women, men, and children of the past” (Battle-Baptiste, 2011: 29). By this, she means that a Black feminist critical lens allows for innovative methodological and theoretical approaches within archaeological investigations that can capture the multiplicity of African American experiences by centering the intersections of race, gender, and class to illuminate complexities within constructions of African American identities in the past.

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