

Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery

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Review

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Ellis, Clifton (ed.) and Rebecca Ginsburg (ed.). *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery.* Yale University Press, \$45.00 ISBN 978-0-300-12042-4

Studying Slavery Architecturally

In the study of American slavery, where does architectural history stop and historical archaeology begin? Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg—an architectural historian and landscape architect—draw no divide. Dust jacket notes describe contributors as investigating the “daily lives of enslaved workers” and the “built environments of slavery” through analyzing the material remains of buildings and landscapes. This includes archaeological features below ground as well as ruins, buildings, and alterations to the land visible on the surface. For them, the material products of human action, however slight, are valuable evidence.

The editors’ stated aim is to provide “teachers with a compact volume of essays addressing slavery and space, architecture and landscape” (9). Prefaces for each article introduce the authors and provide overviews, pointing out connections to other articles in the book. Rather than a formal organization based on chronology, geography, or topic, the editors express hope that “the information provided in the prefaces will allow readers to form the groupings that are most useful for them” (10). This is a novel approach, and one that promises to work.

The volume begins with a reprinting of “The Home of the Slave” (1901), W. E. B. Dubois classic consideration of the effects of housing on African-Americans during and following slavery. Dubois’s piece reminds readers that studies of the landscape of bondage are not new and emphasizes that “brutality and violence . . . was inherent to slavery” (17). Other republished material includes Carl Anthony’s review of African contributions to the New

World (1976), Dell Upton's exposition of differences in black and white landscapes in 18th century Virginia (1985), William Chapman's analysis of villages in the Danish West Indies (1991), and Robert Fitts' reanalysis of the relationship between slaveholders in Rhode Island and other northern colonies and those they enslaved (1996).

The six new papers include offerings by scholars specializing in archaeology, architectural history, landscape architecture, historic preservation, and American studies. With exception of studies of slave housing in Bermuda by Edward Chappell and Tennessee by Michael Strutt, the papers focus on the upper South and northern North America. Archaeologists Garrett Fesler and Barbara Heath interpret the use of *space and place*—terms with specialized meaning—in Virginia quarters. In a third Virginia offering, Clifton Ellis utilizes methods of vernacular architecture to illustrate how a planter manipulated slave housing to meet the contingencies of plantation economics. Rebecca Ginsburg describes landscape from the eyes of escapees, most intending to head north but often frustrated by the limits of their localized knowledge of geography. The volume concludes with an article by Cheryl Janifer LaRoche on slavery and the geopolitical development of the United States in which politicians accommodated slavery by balancing the number of slave and free states.

Courses using this collection for studies of slavery would benefit from adding works dealing with the landscapes of slavery in the Deep South and more on the theoretical foundations of landscape studies.

Reviewed by Leland Ferguson, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology, University of South Carolina. Ferguson is the author of *Uncommon Ground: The Archaeology of Early African-America, 1650-1800* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) and a forthcoming book from the University Press of Florida on landscape, religion, and race in the Moravian settlement of Wachovia and Salem in northwestern North Carolina.