Labour Conflict, Race, and Public Memory: Using Public Archaeology to Expand the Narrative on the Tennessee Convict War

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The Southern convict lease system was a system of enslavement that emerged in the decades after the U.S. Civil War. In the U.S. South, recently emancipated African American men were disproportionately affected by the system. Tennessee became one of the first states to end the convict lease system after a series of labour rebellions against the use of prison labour in competition with free labour, called the Tennessee Convict War. The public memory of these events currently focuses entirely on the white (Welsh) miners in one geographic area, completely erasing the active presence and participation of free and enslaved Black Americans as well as contributing events that took place in other parts of the state. This article documents the efforts of the Tennessee Convict Stockade Project to incorporate a broader range of participants and a wider geographic area into the public memory of the Tennessee Convict War through public archaeology and public excavations at one of the involved prisons, the Lone Rock Stockade in Grundy County, Tennessee.

Keywords: race; public archaeology; labour conflict; Tennessee; convict leasing; heritage; public memory

Introduction

Over the course of 22 months between mid 1891 and mid 1893, eight forced labor prison stockades in Tennessee were attacked, five were burned to the ground, and nearly 500 primarily African American prisoners were freed from enslavement. These events, carried out by primarily white coal miners in eastern and middle Tennessee, have collectively been called the Tennessee Convict War. The financial damage wrought by the rebellion led Tennessee to become the first Southern state to abandon the lucrative convict leasing system—a white supremacist system that sought to financially and socially exploit recently emancipated African Americans,—and the only state to do so for economic reasons. Despite being a major event in Tennessee's political, labor, and racial history, the public memory, memorialization and public interpretation of the Tennessee Convict War is patchy,

incomplete, and dominated by the perspectives of one geographic and demographic community (see Oshinsky, 1996). In this article, I examine how the current public memorialization of the Tennessee Convict War has advanced a particular view of the events—one dominated by white perspectives—and explore how archaeology at one of the burned prison stockades can contribute to a more equitable perspective on this major historical moment. The burned stockade, historically known as the Lone Rock Stockade, has been the subject of summer excavations by undergraduate students and local volunteers and other public engagement strategies since 2020 under the direction of the author.

This article explores the current public interpretation of the Tennessee Convict War to show how it systematically privileges the mostly white, largely Welsh-descended coal miners' experience of the conflict while it overlooks the experiences of the majority African American prisoners. I argue that these discrepancies are a result of uneven access to historical authority as well as documented, systemic biases in historic site interpretation. I also argue that overcoming these limitations can lead to more fruitful, accurate, and representative understandings of the past. I show that a full historical accounting of the Tennessee Convict War reveals a longer period of hostilities and a broader host of actors. Finally, I demonstrate how archaeology and public outreach can offer unique opportunities for disseminating counternarratives of the past through innovative and interdisciplinary means.

Re-grounding the experiences of the African American prisoners within the Tennessee Convict War and including their stories within current public interpretation is not simply about presenting a more holistic perspective on history: it is about representation and claims to power in the *present* (see Schramm, 2015; Schreiber, 2017). History and public memory matter because they shape and reify present day political landscapes. Nowhere is this more true than in the U.S. South, where Black history and experiences in particular continue to be systematically underrepresented at the state and federal levels (Barile, 2004;

Mekonnen, 2021; Morgan, 2021) and is increasingly under attack by groups that seek to erase Black experiences from public memory (Heyward, 2023; Nelson, 2023; Beason, 2023). The comparative lack of modern Black political power and representation in the U.S. is correlated with these historical silences, with Pierre Nora's (1989: 16) observation that 'through the past we venerate above all ourselves' revealing the deep connections between historical and modern representations. As modern claims to authority are frequently legitimized by historical presence and heritage politics (see Thompson, 2022), correcting this imbalance requires re-situating Black stories within the Southern landscape. Katherine McKittrick's work to spatialize Black history through the concept of Black Geographies reminds us that 'black lives are necessarily geographic, but also struggle with discourses that erase and de-spatialize their sense of place' (2006: xiii). These struggles include fights against discursive and material renderings of the South that have portrayed Black lives in the region as un-geographic and unknowable (Harris & Hyden, 2017). Public archaeologists working in African diasporic contexts have a long history of partnering with and/or advocating for the local and descendant communities in which they work (see LaRoche & Blakey, 1997; LaRoche, 2011; Agbe-Davies, 2010a, 2010b; Mullins, 2016; Mullins et al., 2023; McDavid, 1997, 2004, 2009; McDavid & Brock, 2014; Minkoff et al., 2022; Hartemann, 2022; Reid, 2022; Lee & Scott, 2019), demonstrating that public archaeology can advance social justice goals for *living* communities. Expanding the interpretation and public memory of the Tennessee Convict War offers one instance where Black lives can be re-spatialized and Black history can be reincorporated into our understanding of the events through public archaeology, with greater representation in the past potentially leading to greater representation in the present and future.

Public Memory, Labor Conflicts, and Representation

Public memory plays a prominent role in heritagization. Public memory 'emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions' (Bodnar 1994: 13). Oftentimes, dominant public memory narratives of historical conflicts act to support or suppress specific perspectives of a conflict. In the case of public memories of conflict, crafting carefully curated narratives around traumatic events invariably requires a balance of remembering and forgetting that enables survivors to process their grief and communities to recover (Sooka, 2016). However, this process of remembering and forgetting is politically uneven: the politics of power and the political circumstances at the time are often reflected in the resulting narratives that ultimately privilege some perspectives over others as 'official' or authorized discourses (Bodnar, 1994; Evans, 2021).

Cultural heritage scholars have repeatedly shown that official narratives of traumatic historical events are not just intended for communities; they are also part of broader efforts nations undertake to legitimize their political claims, identities, and actions (see Crooke & Maguire, 2018; Giblin, 2015). Otele et al. (2021) observe that a common narrative can be developed in order to support a specific 'political myth' of history (see Bottici, 2007). While efforts to control the narrative and to silence or hide contradictory narratives can be concerted and intentional acts, it can also simply be the outcome of 'representations and narratives [that] emerge in specific historical circumstances' (Jelin, 2010: 211). For instance, the ability of marginalized groups to participate in heritage discussions can be hindered by structural constraints that render participation difficult to impossible (Gallardo & Stein, 2007). The voices that initially hold the authority to define an event's narrative can shift and change over time as political situations evolve and/or become more democratic. Although a degree of standardization can arise around a narrative, as marginalized groups gradually gain greater ability to speak to their own experiences, incorporating their perspectives on a conflict can foster greater autonomy and empowerment (Jelin, 2010).

Democratizing control over narratives of the past is not always easy or straightforward. One example of this is visible in the U.S. South, where control over narratives of the past—particularly related to the South's legacy of chattel slavery—has become a hotly contested issue. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, white supremacist organizations erected hundreds of monuments glorifying leaders of the Confederate States of America and revived the Confederacy's battle flag in an effort to intimidate African Americans and deny them full, equal rights as citizens during the Jim Crow era (Strother, et al., 2017; Hartley, 2021). The murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers in May 2020 reignited conversations about the systemic oppression and abuse of Black Americans, both past and present, and the role of heritage in reifying and perpetuating these systems. Symbols of the South's slave-owning past, including around 170 public monuments, were peacefully and/or forcefully removed as part of a grassroots, community-based movement to realign public memorials to match predominant societal values (Thompson, 2022; Evans, 2021). Physically removing the monuments became a way to symbolically de-honor forms of heritage dedicated to promoting white supremacy, chattel slavery, and racial inequality (Evans, 2021; Roberts & Kytle, 2012).

While significant amounts of scholarship have been dedicated to examining who, for better or worse, has been incorporated into public memory, less attention has been paid to who has been *excluded* from public memory. Critical heritage studies offer a means of identifying the beneficiaries of current heritage regimes and interrogating the selective choices behind the heritage narrative (Winter, 2012). Public archaeology has a long tradition of raising the critical perspective with members of the public in order to bridge the gap between academia and the public as a form of applied heritage (see Leone, et al., 1987; Potter, 1994). Public archaeology has been highly efficacious at using material culture to re-integrate historically forgotten and marginalized groups into public conversations about the

past and the present (see Westmont, 2022a). In the case of the Tennessee Convict War, where the stories of Black people and economically disadvantaged communities have been entirely erased from public memory and heritage narratives, public archaeology has the potential to leverage the public interest in archaeology as a means to raise awareness of the omissions and correct the public memory record.

Critical Approaches to Public Archaeology

Archaeology can offer an alternative path for expanding public memory around historical conflicts. Opening archaeological investigations to public participation presents new opportunities for meaningful and collaborative engagements as well as grassroots knowledge generation and public memory co-creation (see Moshenska, 2009). These methods can also be mobilized in service of modern grassroots labor and labor heritage movements (Nida & Adkins, 2011). In fact, public archaeology has in many cases been wielded intentionally as part of an explicitly political archaeological praxis aimed at critiquing capitalism, industrial exploitation, and the realities of labor history (see Shackel & Palus, 2006; Westmont, 2022b; Chidester, 2010; Stottman, 2010), proving that 'archaeology can be a potent medium to collaborate with public audiences and community stakeholders in a shared exploration of the history of labor in America' (Roller, 2020: 25).

This type of archaeological approach—one that aims to engage with the public while "using archaeology and archaeological findings to create social change in modern communities by exposing the ideological roots of modern inequities"—is referred to as critical public archaeology (Westmont, 2022c: 2; Lee and Scott, 2019; for a discussion of terminology, see Stottman 2022). This intention has been both an explicit and implicit aspect of African Diaspora archaeology, particularly since the 1990s. Early efforts in this direction highlighted the power dynamics within modern communities and how these shaped

interpretation efforts at and discourse around sites of enslavement (McDavid, 1997, 2002; Potter 1994); more recently, community collaboration as a means of centering Black voices and capacity-building as an avenue towards restorative justice have emerged as prominent features of ethical community engagement practices (Odewale et al., 2018; Ryzewski 2024; Agbe-Davies 2022). Particularly relevant to the field of African diaspora archaeology is the incorporation of Black Feminist Theory into archaeological contexts, which acknowledges forms of oppression as interlocking rather than discrete, discernable structures (Agbe-Davies, 2024; see Franklin, 2001; Battle-Baptiste, 2011; Burnett, 2022; Lee, 2019).

Although currently a small subset of public archaeology projects, public archaeology projects focused on labor conflicts can serve as vital conduits for critically-engaged heritagization. Some of the most notable examples of this type of work have focused on coal mining conflicts that have largely been forgotten by broader society, including conflicts at Blair Mountain, West Virginia, Lattimer, Pennsylvania, and Ludlow, Colorado (see Shackel, 2013). In each of these cases, public archaeology efforts have engaged with modern politics as a means of creating social change in communities today. In the context of African Diaspora communities, this frequently means confronting the ongoing legacies of historical race-based discrimination, oppression, and violence (i.e. Peacock 2019).

The Battle of Blair Mountain

Over the last three decades, significant attention has been paid to the public interpretation of the 19th and 20th century labor struggles in Appalachia. Museums such as the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum have helped to inform visitors and complicate hegemonic narratives around the region's coal mining labor wars. Archaeology has emerged as an important part of these efforts (see Nida, 2013). In West Virginia, Brandon Nida and Michael Jessee Adkins (2011) show how a stakeholder-engaged emancipatory archaeology of the Battle of Blair

Mountain can draw attention to the long (and ongoing) fight for basic human rights in the Appalachian coal fields. In 1921, coal miners in southern West Virginia sought to organize the mines in the region under the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) labor union. After five days of intense fighting, the U.S. Army and Air Corps were brought in and finally defeated the miners, halting unionization efforts in the region for more than a decade. This episode had largely escaped public consciousness until an effort to destroy the site through Mountain Top Removal mining led protestors to march to raise awareness and protect the site (Patel, 2012). Educating the public on the conflict's history, including through an archaeological survey that demonstrated that intact deposits from the battle were still in situ, reinvigorated efforts to save the site. Nida and Adkins' work underscores how the conflict site has become a significant labor heritage site that helps to reinforce the local grassroots environmental movement (2011: 65).

The Lattimer Massacre

Often overlooked as part of the Appalachian region, northeastern Pennsylvania's anthracite coal mining region is home to its own legacy of labor conflict. Since 2009, the Lattimer Massacre Project and the Anthracite Heritage Program have been committed to reviving both the visibility of immigrant labor in the region and knowledge about one of the bloodiest labor massacres in U.S. history, the Lattimer Massacre, during which 25 unarmed, striking immigrant men were shot and killed by a sheriff's posse near Lattimer, Pennsylvania (Shackel, 2013). Metal detecting surveys undertaken at the massacre site recovered lead fragments and other items believed to be connected to the massacre. Paul Shackel and Michael Roller (2013) used this archaeological investigation to raise awareness of the intense discrimination that immigrants to the region faced historically and that continues today (see Shackel, 2018). The massacre has emerged as a touchstone by which to discuss the legacies

and ongoing impacts of discrimination, oppression, and colonialism. Shackel and Roller's efforts to examine the history and memory of the Lattimer Massacre have not only raised public memory around the event but have been instrumental in shifting public conversations and perspectives around xenophobia in the region today (Roller, 2013; Shackel, 2016, 2023; Shackel & Westmont, 2016).

The Ludlow Massacre

While much of the focus on coal mining labor conflicts has centered Appalachia (Wheeler, 1976), impactful projects have taken place elsewhere, too. The Ludlow Collective's work in Ludlow, Colorado, represents one of the earliest public memory projects to use archaeology for preserving labor conflict history (see Ludlow Collective, 2001). In 1914, striking miners and their families were attacked by the Colorado National Guard and their employer, the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. A total of 25 people, including 11 children, died when the families' tent colony was set on fire in an episode that became known as the Ludlow Massacre. Archaeologists from institutions across the United States led a coordinated research project that intended to raise awareness about the 1913-1914 Coal Field War and the Ludlow Massacre by humanizing those involved. The project was explicit about its political goals as a means of acknowledging archaeology's political currency, of being critical of entrenched biases, and of engaging in decolonizing work by foregrounding the interests of descendant communities (Larkin, 2020: 162; Saitta, 2007). The Ludlow Collective's work continues to be identified as an example of a highly successful, collectivist approach to addressing modern issues through archaeology (see Kiddey, 2023).

As one of the most dangerous occupations in the industrial era, it is unsurprising that coal mining experienced an abundance of labor disputes that often ended in violence. Workers'

efforts to improve working conditions and be paid a living wage for their labor experienced significant pushback from capitalists and industrialists throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Because labor conflicts were ubiquitous, particularly during the Gilded and Progressive Eras, many of these stories remain hidden, forgotten, or only remembered at the local level. One such conflict is the Tennessee Convict War, which has experienced uneven commemoration as different groups have claimed ownership of the conflict's history based on specific political situations in the present.

Historical Background: Southern Convict Leasing and the Tennessee Convict War

The Tennessee Convict War was a grassroots labor rebellion against the abuses of the Southern U.S. convict lease system that saw the destruction of private prisons in Grundy County and Marion County in middle Tennessee and Anderson County in eastern Tennessee (Figure 1). A thorough description of the conflict is beyond the scope of this paper but is available elsewhere (see Daniel, 1975; Sweet Tea, n.d.); as a result, this section will present only a brief overview of the events that contributed to the conflict.

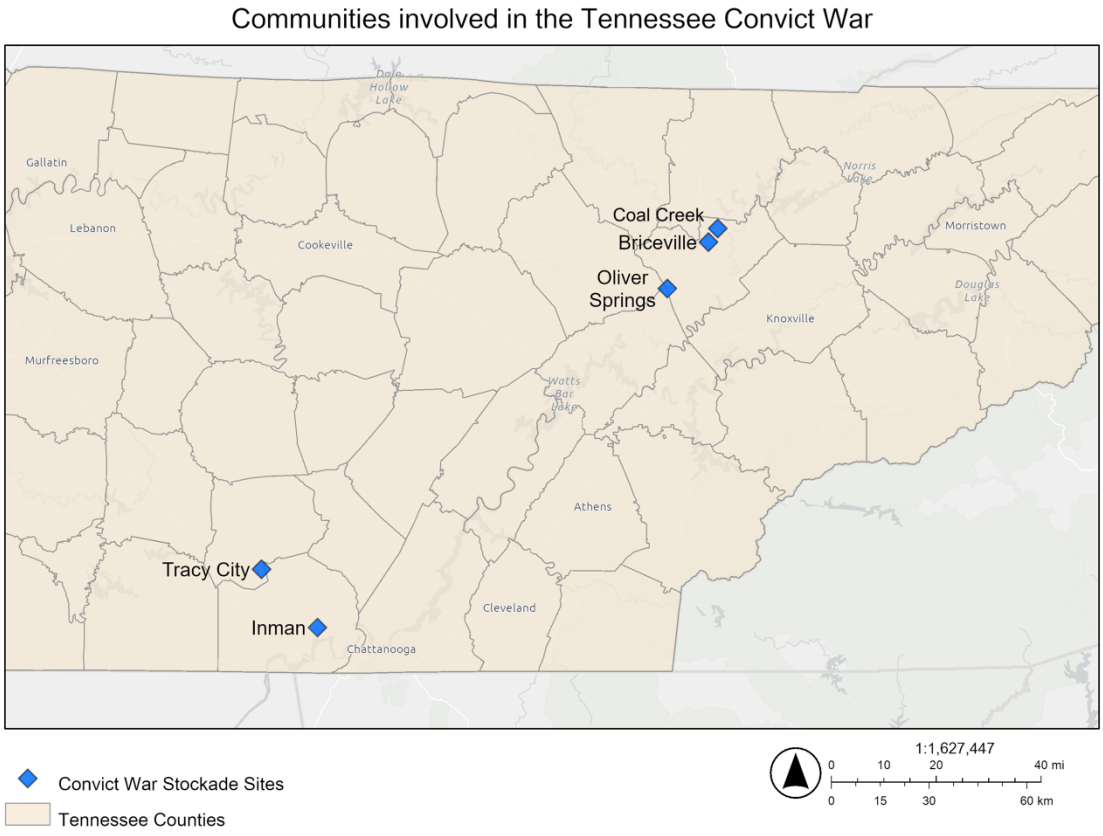

Figure 1. Map of Tennessee Showing Locations of Places involved with the 1891-1893 Tennessee Convict War

Under the convict lease system, states in the recently-defeated, formerly slave-owning 19th century U.S. South legally sold prisoners to private companies for the duration of their prison sentences (Shapiro, 1998; Blackmon, 2008). This was possible due to wording in the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that allowed slavery to be used as punishment for crime. The system generated millions of dollars for cash-strapped states and simultaneously created a new enslaved workforce to replace that lost with the end of chattel slavery (Shichor, 1995). Unsurprisingly, the convict lease system closely mirrored chattel slavery demographically, with Black Southerners consistently comprising the vast majority of prisoners sold across the South (Blackmon, 2008). Because the prisoners were leased rather than owned, companies had no financial incentive to care for prisoners or look after their

well-being. This led to thousands of extrajudicial deaths across the South as well as countless human rights abuses (Le Flouria, 2015; Mancini, 1996).

The convict lease system also had ripple effects for Southern communities who saw stable, good-paying jobs in industries including coal and iron mining, timbering, and manufacturing erode under competition from unpaid prison labor (Westmont, forthcoming). Galvanized by the increasing presence of forced prison labor in the state, communities in eastern Tennessee helped elect a pro-labor populist candidate, John Buchanan, for Tennessee governor in 1890. Buchanan took office in January 1891 but failed to take any immediate action to stem convict leasing. After eastern Tennessee mining company president B.A. Jenkins agreed to sublease prison laborers from TCIR in order to win a pay dispute with his employees, miners in Anderson County, Tennessee, revolted and attacked Jenkins' newly built prison. On July 14, 1891, 500 local miners took over the prison stockade, locked the 40 prisoners in boxcars, and left. Immediately following the event, the miners sent a telegram to Governor Buchanan stating they had acted in defense of their families and that they expected the governor to protect them against any further expansion of convict labor (Shapiro, 1998). In response, Buchanan dispatched the state militia to construct a military stockade named Fort Anderson above the prison stockade to protect the prisoners from further incursions. The miners returned, this time capturing the prisoners and the militia troops and locking both groups into boxcars. The events at Briceville showed neighboring mining communities that their elected representatives would not protect them from encroachment by prison labor. The conflict quickly escalated in size and scope as groups of armed miners across the state took inspiration from the actions at Briceville and began freeing prisoners and burning down stockades in their own communities (Table 1; Figures 2 and 3). By late 1892, prison stockades at Briceville, Coal Creek, Oliver Springs, and Tracy City had been burned down, and a stockade at Inman has been dismantled using hatchets. Throughout the period of

hostilities, national newspapers including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* wrote regular updates on the situation. Although the conflict had been winding down for several months by that point, a final failed attack occurred in early 1893 when miners in Tracy City attempted to re-take the recently rebuilt stockade there. Ultimately, the conflict did not immediately secure the miners' demand of an immediate cessation of convict labor in the state, but the rebellion did cause the withdrawal of prison labor from East Tennessee and led convict leasing to end in 1896.

Table 1. Coordinated Mob Actions Against Convict Lease Prisons in Tennessee, 1891-1893.

Date	**Stockade Name**	**Location**	**Event**
July 14, 1891	Briceville	Anderson County	Guards and 40 prisoners removed to Knoxville
July 20, 1891	Briceville	Anderson County	40 prisoners removed, 100 militia troops removed
October 31, 1891	Briceville	Anderson County	163 prisoners freed, stockade burned
October 31, 1891	Coal Creek	Anderson County	143 prisoners freed, stockade burned
November 2, 1891	Oliver Springs	Anderson County	153 prisoners freed (?), stockade burned
August 13, 1892	Lone Rock Stockade (Tracy City)	Grundy County	362 prisoners removed, stockade burned
August 14, 1892	Inman	Marion County	290 prisoners removed, stockade palisade attacked with sharp implements
August 17, 1892	Big Mount Stockade (Oliver Springs)	Anderson County	98 prisoners removed, stockade burned
April 20, 1893	Lone Rock Stockade (Tracy City)	Grundy County	Attack failed

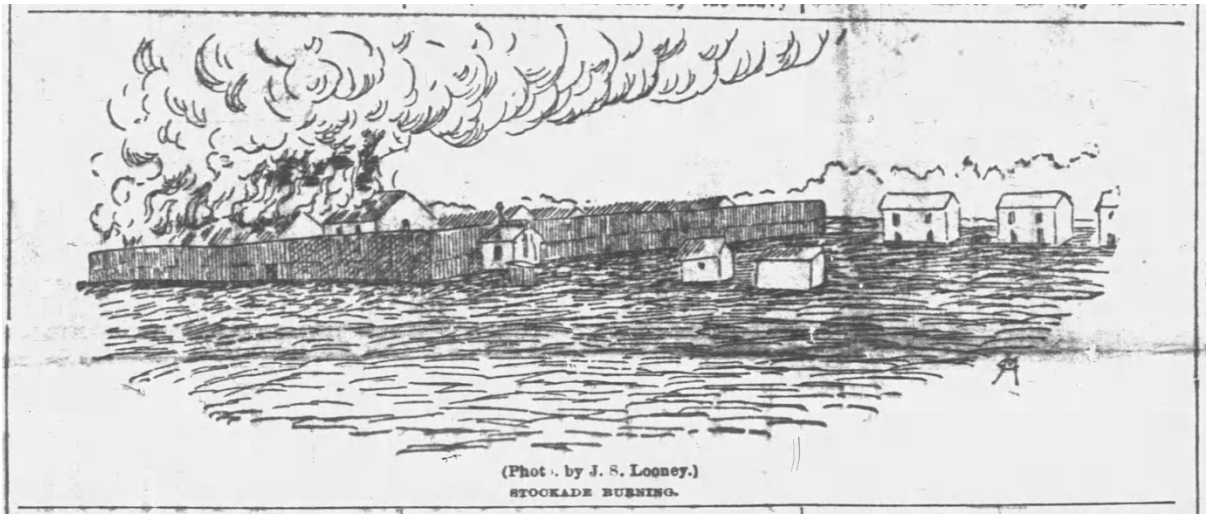

Figure 2. Drawing of Lone Rock Stockade burning [*Nashville Banner*. 1892. Tracy City: A Full Statement Concerning the Burning of the Prison Stockade. *Nashville Banner*, 15 August, pp. 1.]

Figure 3. Drawing of miner's attack on Coal Creek Stockade [*Harper's Weekly*. 1892. The Insurrection in Tennessee. *Harper's Weekly*, 27 August. Vol. 36 (No. 1862): 833.]

Although the Southern convict lease system has been thoroughly documented by historians (see Lichtenstein, 1996; Blackmon, 2008; Mancini, 1996; Shapiro, 1998), it has received little attention from archaeologists or heritage scholars (Westmont & Colclasure,

2023). The dominance of historical records in shaping the understanding of the convict lease system has perpetuated and exacerbated a bias that systematically favors wealthy white perspectives: the bulk of the information available about convict leasing comes from those who directly or indirectly benefitted from the system, including state legislators, the companies that leased the prisoners, and managers of those companies, rendering the perspectives of those most affected by the system, including the prisoners themselves, their families, and the communities in which these prisons operated, sidelined and suppressed. While the narrative of the Tennessee Convict War provides some insights into the experiences of white workers who were economically displaced by convict leasing, particularly the Welsh male miners, the perspectives of prisoners, non-white actors, and non-Welsh miners are still largely absent from the narrative of the conflict. Some have suggested that the dominance of non-prisoner perspectives in the retelling of the Tennessee Convict War is due to the difficulty of locating prisoners' perspectives (see Sweet Tea, n.d.); however, archaeology offers a means of resurrecting these experiences even without prisoners' own words. Incorporating public archaeology and archaeological knowledge into the current narrative on convict leasing offers the ability to de-center traditional modes of knowledge creation and open new means of increasing representation in the memory around this event. Achieving these ends can lead to a more decolonized understanding of the conflict and the role that race played in it.

Current Public Narrative

It is necessary to characterize the current public narrative around convict leasing before it is possible to identify and address the gaps in the narrative. The current public memory takes two forms: as official state historical markers and as a unit in the state's public school history curricula. While both of these modes of interpretation are significant steps forward in raising

public awareness around the conflict, they both feature problems stemming from positionality, accessibility, and focus.

Much of the public interpretation and heritagization of the Tennessee Convict War has been driven by grassroots organizations that have unintentionally limited the scope of their efforts. Currently, the interpretation focuses only on those actions that took place in Anderson County between July 1891 and August 1892; this narrow perspective is driven by the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation (CCWF), a non-profit organization located in Anderson County that has sponsored many of the current heritage efforts. The CCWF is the brainchild of Barry Thacker, a geotechnical engineer and Appalachia native who has helped clean the watershed's environment and created a college scholarship program for students in Briceville, Tennessee. Alongside CCWF Board Member Carol Moore, Thacker has worked to raise the profile of historical coal mining in the Coal Creek area as a means of generating tourism and greater economic opportunities locally. Thacker and Moore's interpretation of the Tennessee Convict War (referred to as the Coal Creek Saga by the CCWF) is part of their broader plan to open a coal mining museum in the area to help increase tourism (Rubin, 2013). The CCWF is responsible for the majority of the public interpretation and memorialization around the conflict, including historical markers and school curriculum.

Historical Markers

Today, historical markers are the only widely accessible form of public interpretation about the Tennessee Convict War. State historical markers are a common form of heritage in the United States. This type of commemoration became popular during the second quarter of the 20th century as statues of historical figures began to give way to concise and consistent historical markers. Cheaper and easier to commission and erect than a statue, these historical markers have proliferated across the United States as a key form of public history and public

interpretation (Bardet, 2012). However, historical markers can perpetuate the biases of those nominating the sites and those overseeing the marker placement programs and can present myopic perspectives on the past (see Jones, 1988; Wheeler, 2015; Spencer-Wood, 2022). In Tennessee, markers overwhelmingly reflected the histories of affluent white men, although efforts are being made to address the imbalance and promote the histories of communities of color and economically disadvantaged groups (Wynn, 2021), even against the wishes of some factions (see González-Tennant, 2019) .

In Tennessee, historical markers must be vetted and approved by the Tennessee Historical Commission's Historical Markers Program. Groups or individuals interested in erecting a marker are responsible for drafting the text and securing funding for the marker, which are then submitted to the state's Historical Commission for approval. Due to limited public funding, private sponsors are often required to raise the funds to pay for the markers (Tennessee Historical Commission, n.d.). These barriers are oftentimes harder for marginalized and socioeconomically-disadvantaged communities to overcome, leading to unequal historical representation on the landscape. Because of the costs, regulations, and oversight involved with erecting official markers, some groups have begun erecting their own historical markers that resemble the official markers placed by the state.

Today, a total of two Tennessee Historical Commission (THC) historical markers and nine non-THC historical markers are located at sites involved in the Tennessee Convict War (Table 2; Figure 4). The majority of these markers (11) are located at the former site of Fort Anderson, in Rocky Top (formerly Coal Creek), Tennessee. Of these markers, two discuss prisoners' forced labor at Fort Anderson, two do not mention prisoners, one states that prisoners' ghosts might be responsible for later mine disasters, one discusses prisoners' lack of mining skills, and three others mention how other organizations interacted with prisoners. All of these markers have been written and erected by the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation

and have not been approved by the Tennessee Historical Commission. The two markers that have been approved by the THC are a historical marker in Briceville near the Briceville Elementary School, and a THC marker in Tracy City near the Lone Rock Stockade's coke ovens. Both of these THC markers only make passing references to the prisoners.

Figure 4. One of the Tennessee Historical Commission markers in situ in Briceville, Tennessee.

Table 2. Extant Historical Markers at Sites Connected to the Tennessee Convict War

Marker Title	Marker Location	Where Prisoners are Mentioned	Erected By

"The Coal Creek War" 1891-92	Briceville, Anderson County, Tennessee	"On Oct. 31, 1891 the convict laborers at Briceville were freed by armed miners."	Tennessee Historical Commission
Lone Rock Coke Ovens	Tracy City, Grundy County, Tennessee	"On August 13, 1892, Tracy City miners, who opposed the use of convict labor, burned the stockade and put the convicts on a train and sent them back to Nashville as had been done in Anderson County, Tennessee in 1891."	Tennessee Historical Commission
Coal Creek War	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Welsh miners from the Knoxville Iron and Coal Company began mining coal at the foot of this hill in 1867, but were replaced by convict laborers during a strike in 1877. After convicts were brought to a mine in Briceville in July 1891, miners and business leaders met to plan a response."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
American Chestnuts	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Convicts cut trees from Militia Hill and surrounding hillsides in 1892 so soldiers could spot attacking miners."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Fire on Coal Creek	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Coal Creek miners helped stop attempts to bring convicts to mines in southeast Kentucky in 1886, so Kentucky miners reciprocated in the fight against convict labor during the Coal Creek War."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Breastworks	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Convicts then dug these breastworks to provide cover from attacking miners."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Militia Hill	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Fort Anderson was built here on Militia Hill in January 1892 as a base for the Tennessee National Guard to protect convict laborers and restore order."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
State Coal Mine	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Unlike the convict lease system, the state-operated coal mine provided financial incentive for the state to sustain safe working conditions for convict miners."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Convict Lease System	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Coal companies learned that convicts lacked mining skills and were a fixed costs, whereas miners were skilled and could be laid-off during economic downturns."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Siege on Fort	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"The Tennessee Coal Mining Company in Briceville dismissed convict labor in February 1892 and sold stock in the company to miners."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Ghosts of Convict Miners	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	"Some believe the 1902 Fraterville Mine explosion was caused by ghosts of convict miners once again igniting methane gas to cook wild game."	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Why Miners Fought	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	[Prisoners not mentioned]	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation
Fort Anderson	Site of Fort Anderson, Anderson County, Tennessee	[Prisoners not mentioned]	Coal Creek Watershed Foundation

State Secondary School Curricula

These 14 markers are currently the only forms of information about the Tennessee Convict War available to the general public. However, since 2013, students in Tennessee have been required to learn about the 'Coal Creek labor saga' as part of the Tennessee history curriculum. Originally lobbied for inclusion in the state educational standards by the CCWF, the Tennessee Convict War educational standards reflect many of the same biases identified in the historical markers, including an explicit focus on the roles of Welsh white miners, a lack of historical context for the rebellion, and a lack of discussion of the (Black) prisoners' experiences and participation. The 2027 Tennessee State Educational Standards require students to be introduced to the 'Coal Creek War' twice: once in fifth grade (ages 10/11) and again in high school (ages 14-18). The state standards related to convict leasing are: '5.20. Explain how the Coal Creek War led to Tennessee's reconsideration of the convict leasing system' (Tennessee Department of Education, 2023: 72) and 'TN.42. Describe the events that led to the Coal Creek Wars [sic] in Anderson and the surrounding counties over the state of Tennessee's decision to replace coal miners with prisoners' (Tennessee Department of Education, 2023: 207).[i] Activities to fulfill this curricular requirement take several forms, include through re-enactments done by volunteers who play Welsh miners during the conflict and through a Tennessee State Library and Archive-developed activity that has students imagine themselves as rebelling miners or Tennessee National Guard soldiers who must write letters to the public justifying their actions. Again, Black participants as well as the prisoners themselves are entirely missing from these resources, further demonstrating the extent to which this demographic have been excised from public memory of the event. Additionally, the name of the conflict in the standards (Coal Creek War and Coal Creek labor saga) artificially narrows the geographic scope of the conflict and effectively erases the Lone Rock Stockade and the Inman stockade from the event. This is in direct contradiction to the plethora of primary and secondary sources on the conflict (see Hutson, 1936; Daniel, 1975;

Shapiro, 1998; Dombrowski, n.d). In controlling the narrative of the conflict, the CCWF has effectively erased middle Tennessee form the Tennessee Convict War's modern heritage narrative.

While the current scope of the Tennessee Convict War within the Tennessee State Educational Standards is problematic, the inclusion of the conflict in the standards at least provides an opening to tell a fuller story in the future. However, the most recent 2023 Tennessee State Educational Standard revision panel has recommended removing all references to the Tennessee Convict War (see Civics Alliance, 2023). If this state standard is removed, Tennesseans risk losing not just the opportunity to access a more representative history of the Tennessee Convict War, they risk losing one of the few extant forms of public memory and education on the event.

Omissions and Implications

While a significant step towards establishing the Tennessee Convict War as an important part of Tennessee history and one worthy of remembrance and heritagization, the current public memory avenues leave significant gaps in the historical knowledge of the events and fails to mention vital contextual information. Although the events of the Tennessee Convict War occurred over a century ago, these omissions have serious implications for representation and comprehension. Issues with the current public narrative include: the focus on the rebellion's white participants and silence on Black participants' roles; a lack of cultural and historical context for clarity on the miners' motivations; and the effective erasure of actions outside Anderson County, Tennessee. While seemingly disparate issues, each of these concerns is ultimately rooted in the exclusion of minority and marginalized community voices from the conflict's history. Each of these issues—and their implications for communities today—will be discussed in turn.

Black Erasure and Ethnic Politics

The most significant omission in the current public memorialization of the Tennessee Convict War is the central role that Black people, including Black prisoners, played in the rebellion and in their own liberation. The current heritage narrative focuses exclusively on the roles and responsibilities of white actors in the conflict. Historical accounts outline the myriad of contributions Black actors made to the conflict: prisoners liberated by the miners from the Briceville stockade joined forces with the miners and helped to liberate additional prisoners held at the Coal Creek stockade on Halloween, 1891 (Sweet Tea, n.d.); prisoners from the Lone Rock Stockade successfully commandeered a boxcar they had been forced into by the middle Tennessee miners and escaped. Free Black men consistently rebuffed military occupation during the conflict, even at the cost of their own lives and without support from their white neighbors.[ii] These and other stories of Black agency and resistance are conspicuously absent, with the current public interpretation only mentioning Black participants and Black prisoners in relation to the actions of the free white participants. I do not believe that these omissions are due to intentional malice; however, the resultant denial of Black participation and Black autonomy must be corrected.

Black Americans are not the only demographic group to be excised from public memory of the conflict. The current narrative focuses almost entirely on the participation of *Welsh* coal miners. Wales is the only European place listed in the historical markers, despite the fact that other ethnicities and nationalities participated, and even the leader of the rebellion in Coal Creek, Eugene Merrill, was French. This emphasis is concerning because, when compared with other 19th century migrant groups who became involved with coal mining in the U.S., the Welsh had a significantly easier time assimilating to the U.S. and were frequently treated better than other immigrant groups because of their historical cultural

ties to the English who frequently owned and operated the mining companies. Immigrants from Ireland, Eastern Europe, and Southern Europe, by contrast, were often mercilessly discriminated against and treated as subhuman (Westmont, 2019). The emphasis in the public narrative on Welsh miners not only erases Black citizens' participation, it suppresses the presence of other historically marginalized communities as well.

Lacking Historical Context

The Tennessee Convict War was a labor conflict rooted primarily in economic concerns. Although miners and residents had voiced concerns about the treatment of prisoners quartered within their communities (see Dombrowski, n.d.; Daniel, 1975), the rebellion was not instigated by a rejection of the system and its rampant human rights violations. In their formal communications, the rebelling miners in east Tennessee repeatedly framed their complaints in terms of a violation of free market capitalism, citing the convict lease system's violation of 'the virtues of competitive capitalism,' and that the miners 'accept[ed] the legitimacy of an economy founded on private property, so long as no one gain unjust advantage in the marketplace' (Shapiro, 1998: 35). The miners rejected suggestions of socialism and never voiced a desire to overthrow the legally elected government. The rebellion also failed to engage with the blatant issues of race and racism, despite the clear racial elements of the system and of the rebellion itself: Black miners were actively excluded from jobs and unions in middle Tennessee, while Black miners in east Tennessee were viewed as inherently subordinate to their white counterparts (Shapiro, 1998). Primary sources repeatedly attest to the disdain that white miners held of Black prisoners, in particular. In fact, some participants in the rebellion were themselves active participants in the dehumanization of Black prisoners.[iii] These attitudes were not unusual or uncommon for the

postbellum South, but provide important context when considering modern biases and silences in interpretation.

The current heritage narrative, with its overwhelmingly positive portrayal of the miners as heroes, can lead the public to falsely attribute the miners' actions to a sense of moral outrage over the human rights abuses occurring within their communities. This distinction is a minor but important one, as the implication is not only not supported by the historical facts, but risks denying the realities of a complicated racial situation in which free Black families were seen as 2nd class citizens in some communities and as lesser humans in others (see Shapiro, 1998). The dehumanizing treatment Black prisoners and Black community members experienced at the hands of their white neighbors is entirely absent from public memory. Miners' own racism colored their reaction to the lease system, and it can be hypothesized that any non-economic motivation to remove the prisons had as much if not more to do with racist stereotypes of Black men than with genuine concern for the well-being of the Black prisoners. The celebratory narrative around the white miners' actions must be tempered by the realities of race relations in the postbellum South, even in regions such as east Tennessee that opposed succession during the Civil War. Failing to acknowledge the underlying motivations of the miners' actions conveys a callous disregard for accuracy within African American history and labor history and assigns an altruism to the miners' action that is not borne out by facts.

Artificially-Restricted Geography

The final omission is based in geography. The public narrative of the Tennessee Convict War continues to use the misleading title 'the Coal Creek War' to describe the conflict and has consistently failed to interpret actions in middle Tennessee as part of the Tennessee Convict War. Although historical documents reveal at least nine separate incidents that comprised the

conflict, the modern interpretation has focused almost entirely on just four events at Briceville and Coal Creek that took place in 1891 (see Table 1). These four attacks occurred at the beginning of the conflict and received the majority of press and public attention due to their dramatic nature, including tense negotiations with Tennessee's populist governor, a special session of the state legislature to review the miners' demands, and the subsequent liberation of at least 300 prisoners by the miners. However spectacle-like the 1891 conflict was, however, the conflict's continuation into 1892 and 1893 and its spread to other areas of the state were equally if not more consequential for the eventual end of convict leasing in Tennessee. The current interpretive focus on the Coal Creek War obscures the broader scope, scale, and impact of the labor rebellion, and makes it appear smaller in scale and more geographically confined than history demonstrates that it was. The conflation of the Tennessee Convict War with Coal Creek, Tennessee, is a modern mistake caused by uneven interpretation that has effectively silenced the historical participation of all citizens of Grundy County, the 4th poorest county in Tennessee, and Marion County, in addition to Black participants in east Tennessee.

Implications

The current public memory and heritage narrative around the Tennessee Convict War has two major repercussions for modern audiences: it renders a major event in state history as merely a regional concern and a footnote to east TN history rather than an episode that affected the state as a whole and saw attention from a national audience, and it whitewashes the history of the event by focusing on the role of Welsh miners in the rebellion to the exclusion of everyone else.

These omissions have had a reverberating effect that impacts knowledge of the entire convict lease system. Because the Tennessee Convict War has become one of the most

remembered aspects of convict leasing in Tennessee and is often one of the only things people know about the system's 25 year history in the state, errors and omissions in the history of the event have major implications for knowledge on the convict lease system as a whole. For example, the Zinn Education Project, an online resource for teaching a more accurate and complex version of American history (available online at www.zinnedproject.org/), marks October 31 in its popular 'This Day in History' section with 'October 31, 1891: Coal Creek War'. The entry only discusses the rebellion in Coal Creek, Tennessee, and is the only reference the website makes to the convict lease system in Tennessee (Zinn Education Project, n.d.). Expanding the public memory around the convict lease system will increase the gravity of the conflict by more accurately conveying its state-wide presence and by working to undo incorrect and misleading information currently in circulation about the labor rebellion.

Further, this litany of issues does not begin to address the lack of historical context in the current heritage narrative. The current public memory of the Tennessee Convict War interprets the overthrow of a system of forced labor without ever discussing the brutalities of the system, the forced laborers within the system, or what was overthrown. It fails to address the reasons that convict leasing had been allowed to expand for over two decades before the rebellion was launched. Without this broader context, the true enormity of the war is missed. I argue that there is more that can be said about this conflict, and archaeology offers a platform for these types of discussions. Given the importance of this event for state racial and labor history, I believe that efforts must be made to make the current interpretation more representative, more accurate, and more interactive. I have been working to achieve this through a combination of material culture and place-based public archaeology work at the Lone Rock Stockade.

Addressing the Gaps in the Narrative

A review of the current public narrative around the Tennessee Convict War has revealed three primary gaps:

1) a lack of non-white and prisoner-centered perspectives on the conflict,
2) a failure to situate the conflict within its cultural and historical contexts, and
3) a lack of recognition of the full size and scale of the conflict.

To address these gaps, the Tennessee Convict Stockade Project (TCSP) is using archaeologically-based public outreach to expand the currently available information about the convict leasing system in Tennessee. Addressing these gaps dovetails with the other stated goals of the project's public engagement, including to emphasize the experiences of prisoners—particularly Black prisoners—within the system (see Westmont, forthcoming), to affirm African Americans' historical presence within the Tennessee industrial landscape (see Klehm & Westmont, forthcoming), and to draw connections between historical and modern prison conditions (see Westmont, 2022c). I have adopted a multi-pronged, interdisciplinary approach to advance public interpretation around the convict lease system and the Tennessee Convict War. These efforts include place-based outreach such as public archaeology days, site tours, new interpretive panels based on archaeology, and a museum exhibit; digital interventions including an interactive online map and 3D models of artifacts; media outreach including an upcoming documentary; and collaborations with African American historical and civil rights groups.

Place-Based Outreach

Among the most successful initiatives in the Tennessee Convict Stockade Project's public engagement program has been the place-based outreach. Because the stockade and its associated industrial ruins are located within a state park, they are highly accessible to the

public. Public days and tours at the site have led to the participation of more than 150 local people. The site tours sought to interpret the now-invisible historical landscape of the stockade by walking visitors through the prison's geography, including the barracks, the prison hospital, the dining hall, and the bathhouse—the places that comprised prisoners' domestic landscapes. Visitors were also able to view our open excavations and see the in situ layers of clay and macadam; visitors were then encouraged to imagine what prisoners standing in those exact spots would have seen, heard, and smelt during the convict lease era. Visitors were encouraged to handle material artifacts and form their own hypotheses about what these objects could convey about life inside a prison (Westmont, 2022b). On later tours, stories about real prisoners' experiences at the Lone Rock Stockade were shared in order to humanize this era of history (Westmont, 2022c). Several public excavation days were also hosted, and members of the public were invited to spend the day excavating alongside the undergraduate students (Figure 5). The archaeological work has spurred greater public interest in the site and its history, which led the South Cumberland State Park erect two permanent interpretive panels about convict leasing and industrial production in the park in 2022.

Figure 5. Members of the public participate in a public excavation day in 2021. Photo by author.

In February 2025 a permanent exhibit featuring artifacts from the stockade was installed at the South Cumberland State Park visitors' center. The exhibit, developed by local college students, addresses themes related to life at the stockade, including providing public interpretation about prisoners' experiences of forced labor and incarceration. The exhibit features prosaic objects from prisoners' everyday lives, such as shoe leather fragments, to help reify the humanity of the people who were imprisoned and enslaved at the Lone Rock Stockade. Part of this exhibit addresses on the Tennessee Convict War and displays objects affected by the burning of the Lone Rock Stockade, including melted, burned, and calcined artifacts left in the wake of the fire. These deformed and disfigured objects help to convey the

gravity and seriousness of the events of the Tennessee Convict War and provide a metaphor for what was at stake in the conflict.

Digital Interventions

Although archaeology is a place-based discipline, new technologies are allowing archaeologists to share archaeological information in new, digital ways. Within African diaspora archaeology, digital technologies are being utilized as a tool for social justice education (González-Tennant 2019; see Texas Freedom Colonies Project Atlas, n.d.; Rosewood Heritage and VR Project, n.d.). To overcome resource constraints related to visiting sites in person and mounting exhibits, undergraduate research assistant Sophia Higgs has created a limited number of 3D photogrammetric models of artifacts from the excavations (Figure 6). The artifact models are hosted through the website SketchFab and can be accessed through the Tennessee Convict Stockade Project website. The models can be downloaded and/or 3D printed by anyone located anywhere in the world. At this time only two artifacts directly related to the Tennessee Convict War are available, but we plan to grow this online museum as funds allow. These artifact models provide a tangible, material culture-based perspective on life in the stockade that introduces new tangible perspectives and ways of knowing to the traditional heritage remit.

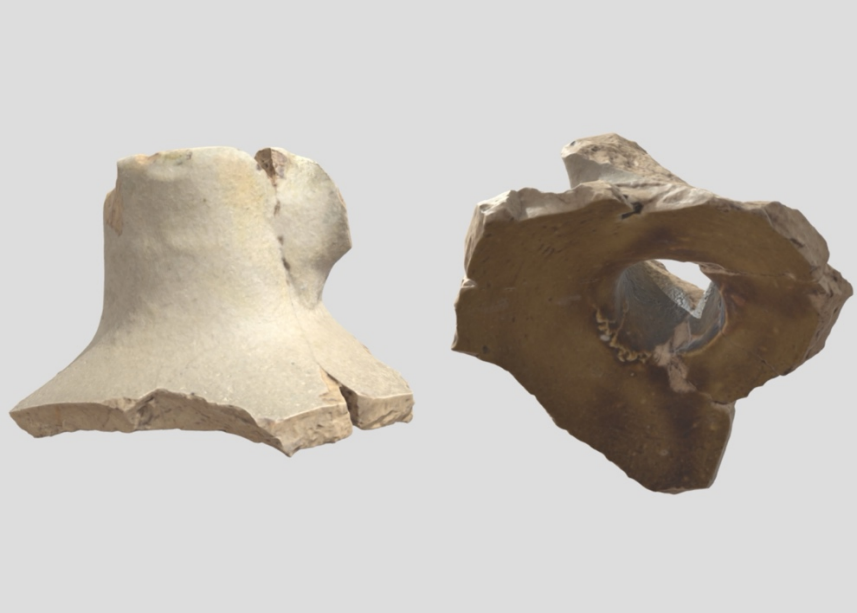

Figure 6. 3D model of mended jug finish recovered from Lone Rock Stockade. Model by Sophia Higgs.

Media Outreach

To expand the reach of the project and to appeal to a wider audience, the project is also collaborating with filmmakers on a documentary about the Lone Rock Stockade and its legacies in the present. The film uses the archaeological excavations at the stockade as a starting point for a deeper investigation into the historical and ongoing legacies of chattel slavery in the U.S. South. The burning of the Lone Rock Stockade during the Tennessee Convict War is a prominent moment in the film as it follows the prisoners' perspective of the chaos of the event. Told through animations by award-winning animator Ed Bell, the burning of the Lone Rock Stockade captures the prisoners' forced march to the train boxcars, their harrowing trip away from Tracy City as the stockade burns, the prisoners' uncoupling a train car and launching an escape attempt, and their illegal confinement in Cowan, Tennessee, at the hands of the miners (Figures 7 and 8). This sequence of events is based on contemporary newspaper accounts of the August 13, 1892, attack on the Lone Rock Stockade and represents the first time film has been used to convey the prisoners' story of forced labor in Tracy City. The animation's depictions of Black prisoners and centering of prisoners'

experiences represents a major step forward for modern depictions of convict leasing in Tennessee and adds much needed diversity to the white male perspective.

Figure 7. Still image depicting prisoners at the Lone Rock Stockade the night of the rebellion. Illustrations by Ed Bell for the documentary *Ghosts of Lone Rock* ©2023 GOLR Film LLC

Figure 8. Still image from *Ghosts of Lone Rock* depicting the Lone Rock Stockade burning and the boxcars prisoners were loaded on to. Illustrations by Ed Bell for the documentary *Ghosts of Lone Rock* ©2023 GOLR Film LLC

Collaborations

Finally, the project is collaborating with a variety of community and non-profit groups to increase knowledge about Southern convict leasing and to make resources more accessible.

The project has an on-going relationship with the Nashville chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, including a successful collaboration to transcribe the convict ledgers related to the Lone Rock Stockade and other forced labor stockades in Tennessee. The project has also collaborated with local non-profit groups, including one focused on abolishing mass incarceration, one providing assistance to impoverished communities near the stockade, and one providing free legal assistance to low-income and vulnerable people in the region. Although archaeologists do not necessarily have the skillsets to directly participate in the work of these humanitarian and rights-focused nonprofits, public archaeologists can still leverage the general public's interest in archaeology to raise awareness about the ongoing legacies of systemic forms of oppression like convict leasing and how these non-profit groups are working to address these legacies in the present. The project aims to continue cultivating collaborations and partnerships with groups focused on improving the quality of life for incarcerated and previously incarcerated people and to addressing the legacies of trauma and exploitation initiated by the convict lease system. Although these collaborations do not directly address the Tennessee Convict War, they increase interest in and knowledge about convict leasing in Tennessee, of which the Tennessee Convict War was an integral part.

Discussion

Of the issues outlined here, the most pressing within the current Tennessee Convict War narrative is its erasure of the conflict's Black participants. The public memory of the Tennessee Convict War is yet another example of the way 'public history depicting Southern landscapes subjugates Black lived experience, foregrounding Anglo settlerism and romanticizing…spaces [of enslavement]' (Roberts & Butler, 2022). Given that both labor history and Black history in the United States are currently underrepresented within the

country's official heritage narratives, it is unsurprising that the roles of African Americans within an Appalachian labor conflict has gone thus far unremarked upon. The implications of such omissions, however, should not be taken lightly. The assumed ownership of the conflict by Welsh miners in East Tennessee—as denoted and reinforced by the persistence of the inaccurate title 'Coal Creek War'—denies past and present African Americans a seat at the proverbial table. Public archaeology offers a means of re-spatializing the Black experience, raising awareness of the Tennessee Convict War and the convict lease system, and reasserting the conflict as part of Black history in the post-bellum South. This article has outlined efforts currently being undertaken at one site related to the Tennessee Convict War to achieve these goals.

Moshenska (2017:3) defines public archaeology as 'practice and scholarship where archaeology meets with world.' This expansive description enables us to see how creativity and interdisciplinary endeavors rooted in archaeological, archival, and material culture records of the past can allow archaeologists to reach more audiences in more ways, and ultimately reshape both our understandings of the past and of the present. Archaeology, with its broad cultural appeal, offers a means of capturing public attention and imagination in pursuit of these goals (see Holtorf, 2007). Public archaeology in its many forms offers a phenomenologically rich and impactful way for members of the public to connect with the past in the present, and helps make the past more accessible by breaking down the barriers between 'experts' and the public. While public memory efforts around the Lone Rock Stockade and the Tennessee Convict War are still ongoing, and different modes of public archaeology will result in different degrees of engagement and interaction, and methods outlined here provide paths forward for correcting the inaccuracies of the past.

The current narrow geographic focus of the interpretation is also a major disservice to the history, and one that highlights the importance of being aware of *who* is telling the story.

While the miners' actions and the events in the Coal Creek watershed were pivotal to unfolding of the conflict, they do not represent the entirety of the actors involved or the entirety of the conflict itself. By incorporating more place-based outreach and material culture interpretations, the project cements the role of the Lone Rock Stockade within the broader labor conflict and demonstrates other communities' efforts to end convict leasing in Tennessee. Statements in the current heritage narrative, such as 'Coal Creek miners left a legacy—they... ended the cruel convict lease system in the South' (Thacker, n.d.) are incorrect and reductionist. Speaking more openly about the conflict's motivating factors during site tours and other public events has conveyed a more nuanced, historically contextualized perspective that acknowledges the fraught racial circumstances of late 19th century labor relations. These narratives also move away from the ethnic-specific discussions about the Welsh seen in the east Tennessee interpretations. Expanding the heritage narrative is the first step in recognizing the full scale and scope of the conflict. Incorporating public archaeology into this work can help to overcome the deficiencies in the documentary record in order to build an inclusive, decolonized, anti-racist perspective on the past the de-centralizes traditional forms of and foci within knowledge production.

Finally, public archaeology at the Lone Rock Stockade is expanding upon current heritage narratives by emphasizing the humanity of the conflict. Often interpreted as a series of actions, movements, and deployments, the Tennessee Convict War public memory has largely lost sight of the *people* at the heart of the conflict. Allowing visitors to stand in the physical spaces where this history happened and to see and touch objects once owned and used by prisoners adds an emotion-laden vibrancy and relatability that is unmatched by primary sources or historical markers. Drawing on the place-based nature and materiality inherent in archaeological research provides new opportunities for empathy and connection. The public archaeological methods utilized in this project have publicly re-asserted the role

of Black men, women, and children in the Tennessee Convict War, including by highlighting their active participation in the rebellion and the impact the rebellion had upon them. These efforts have worked to make the memory of the Tennessee Convict War more multivocal and representative.

Conclusion

The Tennessee Convict War was a major state and national historical moment that suffers from a lack of public awareness and a problematic heritagization. The Tennessee Convict Stockade Project is using archaeology to address some of the deficiencies in the current heritage narrative with the ultimate goal of establishing a fuller understanding of the conflict. Such an understanding can increase historical accuracy and representation and make efforts towards democratizing heritage and confronting biases/silences in our current heritage narratives. Addressing gaps in heritage narratives has significant implications for people and communities today. The absence of Black experiences and perspectives from a conflict that directly involved thousands of Black individuals is the product of a systemic process that erases Black and minority perspectives. These omissions have major implications for Black communities' claims to historical authority and legitimacy. Through these efforts, the Tennessee Convict Stockade Project hopes to raise the profile of both the Tennessee Convict War and the convict leasing system within public memory and to more thoroughly integrate the story of the Tennessee Convict War into its historical labor and racial contexts. As a vital site of African American history and Southern labor history, the excavations at the Lone Rock Stockade mark a first step in a much broader effort to tell a more representative history of the region's past.

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[i] Interestingly, the previous set of Tennessee State Standards included a standard about "the unjust use of prison labor (e.g. Coal Creek labor saga)," but this was removed in the 2027 standards (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017: 198).

[ii] In one episode, a Black hackney driver had an altercation with General Carnes while Carnes was in east Tennessee coordinating the Tennessee National Guard troops that were stationed at Fort Anderson. Carnes tried to force the driver out of the way at a train depot, and when the driver refused to move, Carnes hit the driver's horse with the flat of Carnes' sword. The hackney driver his Carnes with his whip in retaliation, leading Carnes to hit the driver in the head with his sword repeatedly. The driver was able to flee the scene and was not recaptured, despite National Guard troops vowing to 'riddle [him] with bullets…[and] declaring they would kill him' (*Chattanooga Daily Times,* 1892). However, the brave resistance displayed by the hackney driver was not rewarded by the local white community who, despite purportedly resisting the illegal National Guard occupation in Anderson County, were upset that Carnes had been assaulted by a Black man.

The public memory also makes no mention of the free Black community who sympathized with the miners, such as John Whitson, who were murdered by National Guard troops for 'resisting' and 'giving the troops much trouble' (*Chattanooga Daily Times,* 1892a, 1892b). While Black men were killed for resisting, white miners were only imprisoned for their full-scale rebellion.

[iii] In another episode, a man from Coal Creek who was involved in efforts to prevent the importation of prison labor to Coal Creek cut off the genitals off of a deceased Black male prison, placed them in a jar of alcohol, and sent the jar to a Tennessee state representative. The man's intention was to use the genitals to shock representatives so that they would not send further Black prisoners into white communities (*Nashville Banner* 1885).