



Eating in the Side Room: Food, Archaeology, and African American Identity

Mark S. Warner

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“Warner powerfully demonstrates the role of food in shaping and defining social identity as it pertains to African American life in the racialized United States. His careful analysis of archaeological materials supplemented with other sources such as quilts and blues lyrics—sources seldom used in historical archaeology—is instructive and inspiring.”—Charles E. Orser Jr., author of *The Archaeology of Race and Racialization in Historic America*

“A long-awaited and much-needed contribution to the study of urban African American identity through the zooarchaeological study of an extended African American family household in the Chesapeake. Warner makes a powerful case for the utility of faunal analysis in historical archaeology.”—Kenneth G. Kelly, coeditor of *French Colonial Archaeology in the Southeast and the Caribbean*

“Warner’s wide-ranging study significantly expands our understanding of African American foodways, highlighting the ways people used their everyday decisions about food to help counter forces of racism and economic oppression.”—David B. Landon, University of Massachusetts Boston

In *Eating in the Side Room*, Mark Warner uses the archaeological data of food remains recovered from excavations in Annapolis, Maryland, and the Chesapeake to show how African Americans established identity in the face of pervasive racism and marginalization.

By studying the meat purchasing habits of two African American families—the Maynards and the Burgesses—Warner skillfully demonstrates that while African Americans were actively participating in a growing mass consumer society, their food choices subtly yet unequivocally separated them from white society. The “side rooms” where the two families ate their meals not only satisfied their hunger but also their need to maintain autonomy from an oppressive culture. As a result, Warner claims, the independence that African Americans practiced during this time helped prepare their children and grandchildren to overcome persistent challenges of white oppression.

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