



# INTRODUCTION

This is not my story. Stories of resistance, perseverance, and triumph echo only in the hearts and minds of the descendants of the residents of Timbuctoo, New Jersey. My ancestors did not feel the shackles of slavery, my family did not taste the bitterness of segregation, and we do not endure the gazes of modern racism.

I am an archaeologist; I do not own the past. The fact that I know how to excavate and how to make sense out of thousands of artifacts does not give me the sole right to interpret the past. We archaeologists are not the only tellers of history. The broader community also finds meaning and significance in such sites. Timbuctoo is not my past, I am just a guy who was lucky enough to dig there.

Timbuctoo was founded in 1825, when Hezekiah Hall and brothers David, Ezekiel, and Wardell Parker purchased individual lots totaling 4.4 acres from William Hilyard, a local white Quaker. Hall and the Parkers are all believed to be runaway captives from Maryland (Weston 2018). The bold steps they and other residents took to secure their freedom and to ensure that their families would not have to endure enslavement are the core of the history of Timbuctoo. Timbuctoo means a lot to a lot of different people; to some it is home, to others it is a metaphor for America's story of race and class. For me, at first, it was just a research topic. In 2009, I was introduced to Timbuctoo by Dave Orr, an archaeologist at Temple University who had spent much of his career working for the National Park Service. In the mid-1980s, Dave was invited to visit Timbuctoo to assess its archaeological potential. He argued that the site had potential but was unable to finding funding to investigate it (figure 1.1, figure 1.2).

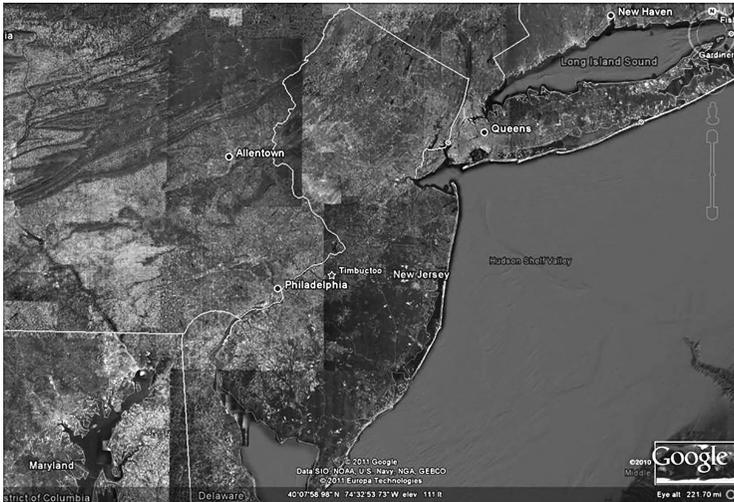


Figure 1.1. Map of New Jersey with a star indicating the location of Timbuctoo, Westampton, Burlington County. Source: Google Earth.



Figure 1.2. Historically, the core of Timbuctoo has been identified as the roughly 40 acres between Rancocas Road (north), Rancocas Creek (south), Church Street (east), and Blue Jay Hill Road (west). Source: Google Earth.

In 1999, Catherine Turton of the National Park Service began to gather historic documents related to the site, including deeds, probate records, census records, newspaper articles, and birth and death notices (Turton 1999). Turton compiled her work and gave it to Westampton Township officials, the town in which Timbuctoo is located. Then, in 2004, under the direction of Mayor Sydney Camp, Westampton Township acquired four of the roughly 60 acres of what once was Timbuctoo. Camp contacted Orr in 2007 to discuss the potential for archaeological work at the site. Orr suggested that William Chadwick and Peter Leach (2009) of John Milner Associates, Inc. be contracted to complete a noninvasive geophysical survey of the four acres that included the use of ground-penetrating radar and magnetometry (figure 1.3).

In 2009, a group of descendants, interested community members, scholars, and professionals came together to form the Timbuctoo Discovery Project, now known as the Timbuctoo Advisory Committee. The committee is chaired by Guy Weston, a descendant of John Bruuer (also spelled Brewer), who settled in Timbuctoo in 1829. The committee's purpose is to advise the township, the local land development board, and all municipal agencies on any issues related to the history and archaeology of Timbuctoo, as stated in Westampton Township Ordinance 6-2015 (Township of Westampton 2015). The committee also offers public outreach and educational programs, including Timbuctoo Day, an event that includes speakers, reenactors, and exhibits that relate to the community and to Black history.

From the outset of my introduction to the committee, we established that any and all work pertaining to the archaeology—planning, doing research, excavating, processing artifacts, interpreting, and disseminating archaeological work—would operate through a fully collaborative, pragmatic framework. Degrees of community participation vary in archaeology, from projects where members of the public are mere spectators during excavation to the full incorporation of stakeholders in every phase of the archaeological process. Before I came to know Timbuctoo, I had worked at a site as a graduate student that took a very “velvet rope” approach to all archaeology, to the point where the public was escorted off the premises and kept 200 feet away from all excavation. While there are situations and sites that require such a hands-off approach, this specific case made me question my role as an archaeologist and archaeology's responsibility to the community. Thus, when I got to Timbuctoo I was determined to make all aspects of the archaeological process open to the public as collaborators (Barton and Markert 2012).

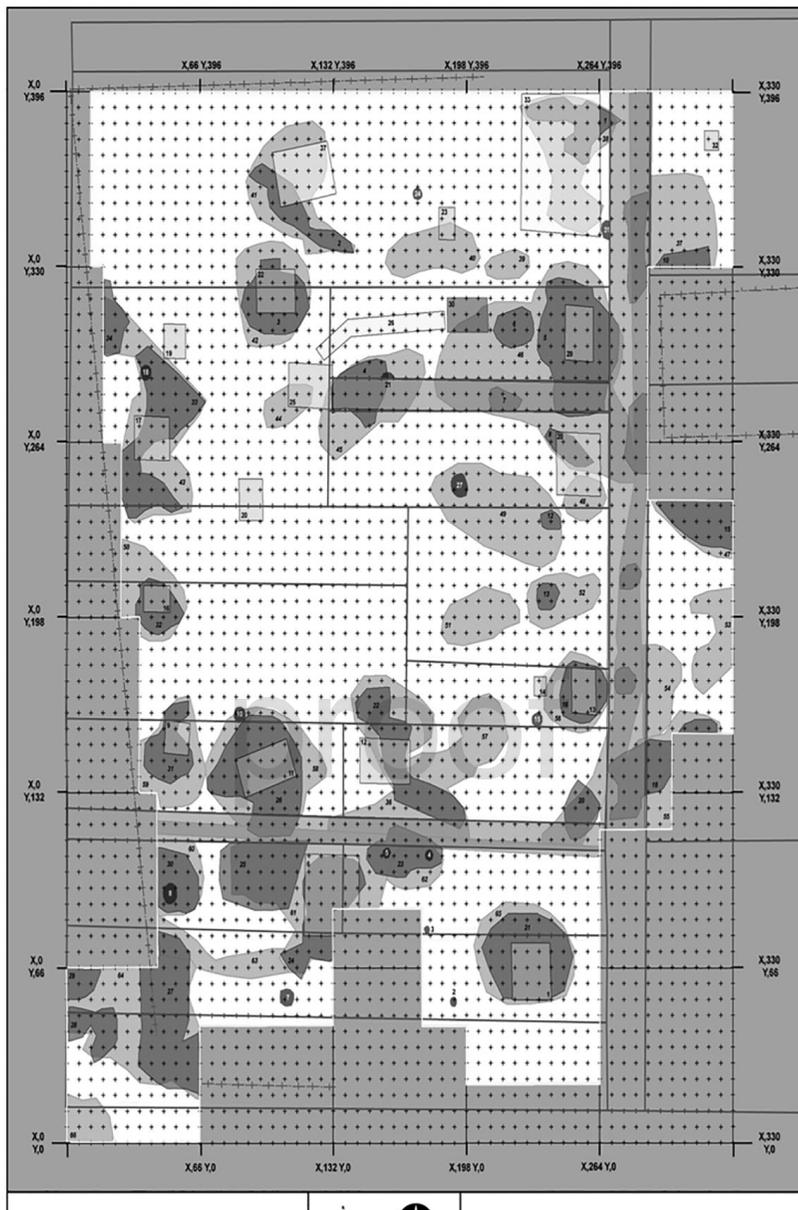


Figure 1.3. This geophysical interpretation combines historic plot maps, a magnetometer survey, and a ground-penetrating radar survey of the four acres of Timbuctoo that was held by Westampton Township during fieldwork. The seventeen shaded squares represent possible house or outbuilding foundations. The three medium-shaded rectangles represent historic pathways; including what once was Haywood Street to the east. Created by William Chadwick. Source: Chadwick and Leach 2009.

Edward González-Tennant (2014) identifies two frameworks for community-engaged archaeology. First is participatory archaeology, which he defines as the production of knowledge by archaeologists with limited involvement of community members and other stakeholders. In participatory archaeology, stakeholders participate only in the laborious aspects of fieldwork—for example in excavation and/or laboratory work—but are not involved in the other processes of archaeology, such as interpreting artifacts and disseminating knowledge. This framework is widely used in archaeology and many continue to see it as the definition of public archaeology. But González-Tennant offers a second framework—collaborative archaeology. Here, a group of co-collaborators that includes archaeologists and stakeholders develop an environment for exploring the past through equal partnerships. Archaeologists have rarely been willing to fully integrate community members as co-collaborators because they have balked at giving up or sharing power. The collaboration continuum spans from simple outreach programs that seek to educate the public about archaeological projects to complex projects in which various stakeholders are equal partners in the planning, excavation, interpretation, and dissemination of archaeology. Numerous programs operate along this continuum, but here I will focus on three projects that to me represent the great potential of collaborative historical archaeology.

First is Mark Leone's work in Annapolis, Maryland. Leone was interested in the role ideologies played in the interpretation of Annapolis. He noted that despite the city's racial diversity, little information was presented to the public regarding Black history. Drawing from Marxist theorist Louis Althusser, Leone argued that ideologies such as those about race were social constructions that people use to mask the real social and economic similarities between marginalized communities. Contemporary racist beliefs are rooted in these social constructions. Leone contended that if archaeologists interacted with the public, we could assess what people's beliefs were and challenge them through education. This critical theory approach involved limited collaboration between archaeologists, the public, and stakeholders and much of the power to interpret the past rested with the archaeologists. Leone feared that the knowledge generated could be hijacked to promote a whitewashed narrative of historical progress and deliberately withheld power. He and other critical theorists (Wurst and Fitts 1999; McGuire 2009) operated as the vanguards between the archaeology they uncovered and the information they presented to the public. This means that in nearly every step of the archaeological process, a select few professionals plan,

analyze, and interpret for the broader community. While Leone did consult with stakeholders, especially Black community members of Annapolis, he used a top-down approach for all of the planning, excavation, interpretation, and dissemination of the work.

In truth, in the early stages of our work at Timbuctoo, our project followed a similar model. Some members of the committee did not see the value of partnering with people who were not scholars and did not believe that knowledge produced by stakeholders was equal to the knowledge of professionals. Discussions and disagreements are part of every archaeological process, but when committee members do not value the unique experiences, meanings, and insights of others, collaboration fails. Every archaeological project has shortcomings or things that in hindsight we wish that we had done differently. I regret that I did not fight hard enough to incorporate a truly collaborative framework in the early years at Timbuctoo because I was a young archaeologist who was too intimidated by some members of the committee and by the process of collaboration itself.

The second project that operated along this continuum of collaboration and has been influential in the field of African Diaspora archaeology is the African Burial Ground in New York City. In 1991, crews working on the construction of a 34-story office building for the United States General Services Administration (GSA) uncovered the first remains of what would be over 400 individuals. The property was referred to as the Negroes Burying Ground on historical maps and was used from circa 1712 to 1794. Similar to many other Black cemeteries (Davidson 2007; Barton 2021; LaRoche 2014), the African Burial Ground was largely forgotten and over time the property was redeveloped and partially used as a landfill. Fearing rising development costs, the GSA sought to continue construction and exhume remains. This created a controversy in the Black communities of New York, as the GSA had not consulted them in the planning of the site. After much debate and protests, the GSA brought in Michael Blakely of Howard University. Given the sensitive issues associated with excavating and analyzing human remains, the Black communities of New York were not able to collaborate, but they did become partners in determining the future of the African Burial Ground as a National Historic Landmark and National Monument. However, as LaRoche and Blakey (1997, 97) state, “The struggle for control of the African Burial Ground site was a struggle to have the voice of the community heeded. Exclusion of the direct community involvement as the project progresses removes ethical, moral, spiritual, and social issues and obligations from community control.” Despite the critical missteps the