



PAUL A. SHACKEL  
MATTHEW M. PALUS

## The Gilded Age and Working-Class Industrial Communities

**ABSTRACT** In the United States, industrial management techniques shifted from strong paternalistic controls to absentee forms of ownership in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tracing the change of industrial management techniques in a mill community that survived through the Gilded Age shows the impact of industrialization on consumerism and health in working-class households. Initial examination of the archaeological record shows that the domestic material world of workers' households became similar to each other while consumer goods increased significantly. We suggest that with the transition of management techniques from minimal paternalism to absenteeism, a trend developed toward homogenization of some everyday material culture. However, living in a marginal geography promoted a countertrend among workers and their families, and alternatives to market-oriented consumption allowed for "insurgent" forms of citizenship. Understanding the historical consequences of industry for workers and their families is relevant for understanding the situation of marginalized labor today. [Keywords: industrialization, historical archaeology, labor, domestic life]

**B**ETWEEN THE CIVIL WAR AND WORLD WAR I, a period sometimes referred to as "the Gilded Age," industrialization shaped and significantly changed the growing U.S. economy. By the early 20th century, the United States had transformed from a mostly rural and agricultural society to a largely urban and industrial society. Unchecked industrialization led to deteriorating living conditions for urban labor and the working poor, and a change in the way the working class lived their domestic lives. As Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner (1972) wrote, the Gilded Age was anything but. It was a time in U.S. history characterized by fever and ambition, in which wealth was consolidated through the operation of new technologies and novel corporations and arrangements of capital. W. E. B. Du Bois perceived the "Gilded Age" for what it was: to people of color and the rest of the country, a time in which industrialists dominated the transportation networks, natural resources, and economic base for much of the nation, frequently through subsidy from the federal government, if not from purchased politicians (Du Bois 1935).

There has been significant scholarship tracing the development and impact of industry since the Civil War, but few studies have been premised in archaeological data or material culture. Among the exceptions, Stephen

Mrozowski and colleagues (1996) and Paul Shackel (2000) have addressed the impact of industrialization on domestic life. The implication of these studies is that one can often learn more and different things about working people and working life by looking to the places where they lived in addition to the spaces where they labored. More studies in historical archaeology would be helpful in discussions about the Gilded Age. Archaeology of domestic sites in industrial towns can provide information about the strategies used by people to negotiate their daily lives in the industrial era. It is able to record the daily life of urban laborers and their families—modern subjects whose lives were managed to create a labor force or generate power in a Foucaultian sense—and illuminate some of the roots of contemporary problems associated with unchecked capitalism. Archaeology of these sites can also find the most ephemeral stories recoverable from these everyday settings, which are the very means of survival employed at the meeting of old and new regimes of production. Such stories "embody possible alternative futures" (Holston 1998:39) and therefore become spaces of insurgency and struggle, experimentation, and agency. These futures are alternatives to those directed by the interests of capital or by the state, and living these alternatives means living as insurgents. "These insurgent forms are found both in organized grassroots mobilizations

and in everyday practices that, in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas" (Holston 1998:47). We provide a context for approaching such social forms in industrial life in the Gilded Age, and report on the results from archaeological research in an industrial community, tracking the alternatives imagined by its residents using oral history and archaeological data.

The community of Virginus Island, West Virginia, provides an example of a small industrial community that contained both industries and workers' housing. Today, only ruins exist of the mills and houses, and only a few signatures of its historical industrial importance remain. The former town is situated adjacent to Harpers Ferry and is incorporated into Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Virginus Island is linked closely with the developments unfolding in the 19th century in the industrializing Northeast and Middle-Atlantic regions during the Gilded Age. Harpers Ferry itself developed as a small settlement at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, selected in 1794 by President Washington as a suitable site for the construction of one of two national armories (Shackel 1996, 2000; Smith 1977). Although the federal government owned most of the land in the region, Virginus Island developed as a small, privately owned community. It became the center for craft, industry, and service facilities that supported the armory complex, the local community, and the surrounding region. Industrial enterprises on the island supplied processed raw materials and finished products to the U.S. armory and, over time, its industries, such as cotton and flour mills, expanded to cater to national markets (Bergstresser 1988; Johnson 1995; Johnson and Barker 1992; Smith 1977).

The National Park Service has a long tradition of developing a memory of U.S. industrial prowess at places like Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Saugus Iron Works National Historic Site, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Springfield Armory National Historic Site, and Steamtown National Historic Site. The same can be said for Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. At Harpers Ferry, the earliest archaeology at the park helped to reinforce the ideals of a mighty industrial nation. For instance, from the 1950s, immediately after the place became a national monument, and throughout the 1960s, archaeology occurred exclusively at industrial-related sites, like the arsenal square where guns from the U.S. armory were kept, the industrial sites on Virginus Island, and Hall's Island where the U.S. rifle factory once stood, searching for remnants of Harpers Ferry's industrial past (see Cotter 1959, 1960; Hannah 1969; Larrabee 1960a, 1960b, 1961, 1962). A recent ruin stabilization project on Virginus Island emphasized the importance of industrial ruins, although domestic sites are mostly ignored in the general interpretation of the community. However, the latest archaeology, cultural landscape, and history project on the island focused on several domestic sites and provided information about the impact of industrialization on everyday life in a working-class community. It has not yet been incorporated into the park's in-

terpretation of the industrial island, although it is presented below.

### IMPACTS ON LABOR HISTORY: A POCKET GENEALOGY OF "THE WORKING CLASS"

Although the "new labor history" was formalized in the 1970s (Brody 1979, 1980, 1989, 1993; Dubofsky 2000:21; Gutman 1976; Montgomery 1979; Wallace 1978), its foundation existed in the late 19th century. Politicians, reformers, trade unionists, and labor radicals as well as social scientists turned their attention to the "labor problem" or the "labor question" in the Progressive Era (Smith 1991:570). Scholars wrote about the struggle between labor and capital and the living and working conditions of working-class families (Fitzpatrick 1991:423), but in doing so they also inscribed the working class as an object for social movements. As in many things, writing on "the working class" became inseparable from the political dimension of the labor it described. Some early intellectuals, like Richard Ely, endorsed the labor movement and tied their mission to the progress of labor and the advancement of reform (Fitzpatrick 1991:423; Fink 1991:396-399). Such statements mapped class conflict onto labor realpolitik. In the early 20th century, others such as Edith Abbott believed that unskilled and unorganized labor should also be the focus of labor history, and that such a history should include African Americans, immigrants, children, and female workers (Fitzpatrick 1991:427).

The growth of industry after the U.S. Civil War had tremendous consequences for this group of people, including workers and their families. From the early 19th century through the early 20th century, as the inscription of the working class progressed, industrial salaries generally decreased while the geographical mobility of workers significantly increased. The development of new transportation systems lowered the cost of movement and lessened the importance of geography and economy (Hiscox 2002:404; Simpson 2005). The development of labor-saving machinery and the introduction of the production line created a demand for unskilled workers.

Children were a prime source for unskilled labor. Hugh Cunningham (2000) reviews a wide range of historical cultural attitudes toward child labor—for example, in Japan children did not work and in Belgium children were at times worked to death (Gratton and Moen 2004:364-365). The philosophy of the Progressive Era reformers in the United States dictated that children should be nurtured and protected, and they should not be earning money for the family. Instead they should be in schools to be educated and learn to be U.S. citizens (Gratton and Moen 2004:356-358). Progressive Era reformers blamed the high number of children working in factories on the "peasants" from southern Europe who did not know civilized U.S. culture. Immigrant Italian men were interviewed in the Boston harbor while waiting to enter the United States, and in a 1919 published report they were asked about their attitudes toward child

labor. The men responded that when they were young they were bonded to work for two to three years and they expected their children to do the same (Gratton and Moen 2004).

Between 1910 and 1930, there was a general increase in salaries among industrial workers and a decrease in worker mobility. Industrial jobs became increasingly skilled and industrialists encouraged workers to stay at their jobs longer with higher salaries and other benefits. This trend continued into the late 20th century (Hiscox 2002:406). In the United States, the rate of children laboring fell from what it had been at the beginning of the 20th century. The introduction of child labor laws coincides with the increase in wages and skills needed for industrial work to operate in a more complex industrial environment (Basu 1999).

Progressive Era reformers also wrote about the chaotic, unnatural, and unsanitary living conditions that severely impacted the urban industrial worker. Solutions ranged from radical socialist revolutions to more conservative approaches that slightly modified capitalism. These milder reforms, which became widely adopted, include providing more affordable services to workers, including the municipalization of electricity, sewage, and water systems. Well-planned living environments, they believed, would make better citizens and better workers, because they would feel gratitude for the patron industrialist who made for these better conditions; the corporations would provide what their workers were organizing to demand and in doing so circumvent and undercut the power of organized labor (Mosher 1995:90–91).

Some form of paternalism existed in many industries in the United States throughout the 20th century. One strategy used by industrialists was to create a family workforce. This situation meant that there was pressure to make sure that all family members worked efficiently. If they did not, there was always the threat that the jobs held by family members could be jeopardized (Collins 2002). A sense of paternalism also meant that workers often overlooked some work-related hazards. In return, they believed that they were entitled to job security and improved wages and working conditions (Collins 2002:158).

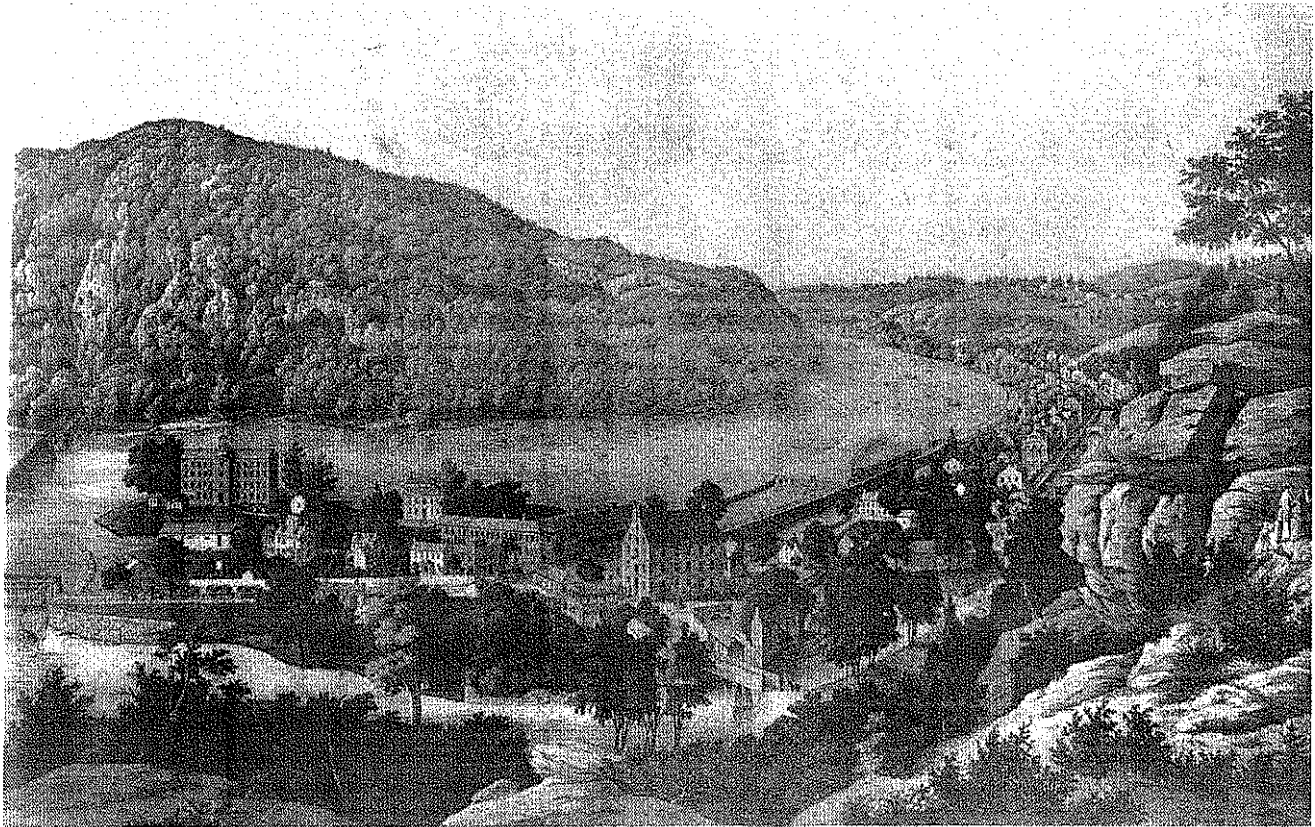
In the 1980s and 1990s working communities saw industrial jobs and jobs with benefits being replaced with part-time and contractual jobs. At the same time communities were affected by the increased mobilization of firms. Michael Burawoy suggested that the "tyranny of the overseer over individual workers has been replaced by the tyranny of capital mobility over the collective worker . . . the fear of being fired is replaced by the fear of capital flight, plant closure, transfer of operations and plant disinvestments" (Collins 2002:154). This trend meant less bargaining power for workers, including fewer pay raises, the loss of benefits, and reduced health and safety measures at work. The tie between employer and community had diminished significantly as the corporate investment in the community ceased (Collins 2002:155).

Sponsored by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the Hart Research Association conducted a 2005 survey from a sample of more than 800 workers from various industries across the United States. While newspaper headlines boast of a recovering economy, the majority of U.S. workers surveyed (54 percent) are concerned about their economic situation, whereas in 1999 70 percent of those surveyed were hopeful or confident. Although the "American dream" is that each generation does better than the last, a majority of workers (53 percent) feel that they are not as well off or about the same as their parents. They feel that their income is not keeping up with the cost of living, and the rising costs of health care and energy costs are major factors. Only three in ten workers are satisfied with the health care system and seven in ten would like to see the federal government guarantee health care coverage (Hart Research Associates 2005).

With the globalization of industrial work, many of the historical issues discussed above continue in other communities around the world: Take, for instance, the case of millions of bonded child laborers from the Indian Dalits, the so-called untouchables. In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank heavily financed silk reeling and twisting in India without monitoring or placing restrictions on the use of bonded child labor, even though the silk industry relies heavily on bonded labor (Human Rights Watch 2003:6, 21, 46). Some scholars see contemporary child labor influenced by cultural traditions. For instance, Madiha Murshed (2001) sees child labor in Pakistan today as a common cultural practice among the lower castes. They see child labor as a rite of passage into adulthood. It is a social norm that has little or no social stigma to the family (Basu 1999). Much like the Italian immigrants interviewed in the Boston harbor in 1919, these cultural activities are so ingrained that alternative behaviors are not seen as appropriate.

According to the U.S. State Department, there are 20,000 people illegally trafficked into the United States every year, and sweatshops are the main place of business for about 100,000 to 150,000 enslaved people (Story 2a n.d.). The power brokers have often rebuffed labor histories and the stories of labor and working-class families. However, in April 1998, the Smithsonian Institution took a daring step toward addressing this issue by opening a temporary exhibit titled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A History of American Sweatshops, 1820–present." The exhibit discussed how young women from Thai villages are deceived into coming to the United States to work in sweatshops by ringleaders in their native land. The exhibit faced opposition from clothing manufacturers who tried to block its opening. This reaction led museums in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York to cancel the exhibit when it was scheduled to travel later that year (Saunders 1999).

The story of laborers' struggle and its consequences for working-class families is often omitted from the national consciousness and from school curriculum (Cobble and Kessler-Harris 1993). With the weakening of the labor movement, many fear that people will forget the many



**FIGURE 1.** An 1857 Lithograph of Virginus Island. (Photo courtesy of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.)

hard-fought battles for justice in pay and working and living conditions. For instance, historian Howard Zinn (2003:54) questions why the Colorado Coal Mine Wars, which cast a dark shadow on U.S. corporate capitalism, is not part of the national memory of U.S. citizens, and meanwhile, our grade-school textbooks celebrate John D. Rockefeller's building of Standard Oil. U.S. citizens choose to remember the building of corporations rather than the impact and events associated with their failings. To emphasize class struggle is radical liberal politics, yet in fact class struggle is very much part of the world today. These difficult histories are important stories that need to be installed at national public places to make people more aware of the many inequities that still exist today.

### **VIRGINIUS ISLAND**

The archaeology on Virginus Island provides a unique picture of working families from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Material culture—such as plates and tea wares as well as bottles that contained packaged goods such as food, alcohol, medicine, and toiletries—and choices from among available wild and nationally marketed foods all helped to create a sense of this working-class community. Living in a decaying industrial town marked the marginality of Virginus Island workers and their families. Just as they continually fought for better wages and decent working condi-

tions, material culture could be manipulated and new identities forged in the freedoms that marginal spaces provide.

Some aspects of the community structure and industrial organization on Virginus Island appear similar to the changes that occurred in industrial communities elsewhere in the country. However, unlike the much-studied northeastern industrial towns like Lowell, Massachusetts (Dublin 1979; Laurie 1989), and Manchester, New Hampshire (Hareven 1993), Virginus Island was not a comprehensively planned community of dwellings, factories, and public buildings constructed to serve a single industry, although adjacent Harpers Ferry did develop along these lines (Shackel 1996). Not until the 1850s did any form of paternalism guide the community's industrial development (see Figure 1). Factories were constructed on Virginus and the built environment become somewhat more orderly around that time. The industrialist and miller Abraham Herr built living quarters for his family and his employees, both adjacent to his mill. The owner and the worker housing stood across from each other separated by railroad tracks, but within close proximity of each other. Herr could keep a close eye on his employees at work and at home yet also maintain a symbolic barrier between them. The workers' housing was a series of row houses with a uniform facade, conscientious of the principles of design and uniformity found in other contemporary examples of industrial architecture in the northeast.

Other pre-Civil War manufacturing enterprises on Virginus Island recruited weavers from New England, and both men and women worked side by side along with several children (Johnson 1995). After the U.S. Civil War Virginus Island became home to a single working mill. Two entrepreneurs from Ohio, Jonathan Child and John McCreight, purchased the island, refitted and modernized the machinery in the factories, and converted a cotton mill to a flourmill operated by 30 employees. Child and McCreight's paternal role appears to have diminished somewhat from Herr's ownership. However, they continued to live in the community, and they both repaired the island's houses after the Civil War and removed flood debris after two devastating floods in 1870 and 1877 to make the place more livable (Halchin 2000; Johnson 1995; Joseph et al. 1993; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1870).

In many Gilded Age industries, paternalism in manufacturing jobs also created an exclusionary white workforce. An understanding existed whereby African Americans were excluded from manufacturing positions as long as the white workforce did not demand too much from their patron. In this way, African Americans figure importantly in the terrain of Gilded Age labor management and the era of corporate paternalism: They were used by capitalists as a check on the demands of even very organized white labor forces. This in turn heightened the racialization of organized labor until its hard-won entitlements became exclusive white privilege. Although racial segregation occurred in manufacturing on an informal basis, it was the law in South Carolina until 1964 (Collins 2002:158).

This form of corporate paternalism existed in the Virginus Island community after the Civil War. Corporate paternalism thus reproduced historical gender and racial inequalities. Even though the African American population averaged about ten percent in the Harpers Ferry community, Virginus Island in the post-Civil War era consisted of an all white community and workforce. "Paternalism operated through provision of nonwage goods and services, an ideology of beneficence, and the cultivation of deferential relations between company and its employees. ... Through such means, paternalism had the effect of transforming power relations into moral obligations—a system of mutual responsibilities, duties, and, ultimately, even rights" (Collins 2002:157).

In the late 1880s, Thomas Savery, an entrepreneur from Delaware, purchased the island community and managed the property as an absentee owner. Savery acquired the land to take advantage of the growing demand for paper-and-pulp industries in the United States. Savery's control of Virginus and the relation to pulp and paper brings the narrative of Harpers Ferry in line with the rest of West Virginia and the region, where industrial extraction of wood surged in the 1880s and continued into the 1920s (Bergstresser 1988:35; Eller 1982; Gilbert 1984:69–75; Joseph et al. 1993:3, 52; Lewis 1998; Rasmussen 1994).

About this time, industrialists were still experimenting with different forms of industrial paternalism. For in-

stance, in 1880 George Pullman created a town with gas lighting, water supply, sewage, and garbage collection for his industrial workers who made railroad cars on Chicago's South Side (Garner 1992:6–7). In the 1890s, George McMurty, a steel master from Pittsburgh, created a model town, which he called Vandergrift, about 40 miles northeast of the city. Designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted's firm, workers purchased their properties and became financially tied to the mill. It became nationally visible as an experiment in industrial reform (Mosher 1995:84–89). Savery, in contrast, was not involved in his workers' welfare to any measurable degree. He rented out the domestic structures on the island community, and when they fell into disrepair from neglect or from floods, he did little to make the structures habitable again. Although other industrial communities were modernizing, mainly from the efforts of Progressive Era reformers, Virginus Island did not benefit from any municipal conveniences, like water, sewage, and electricity.

The pulp mill built by Savery on Virginus Island in 1890 showed a profit for a short time, but by the turn of the 20th century many paper-and-pulp mills across the country began to close as their profit margins decreased substantially with foreign imports. The pulp mill on Virginus Island operated until 1935 (Shackel 1996, 2000).

An oral history (Farmer 1995) indicates that some of the men on Virginus Island only occasionally worked in the pulp mill, and for other times of the year they relied on other skills to support their family, sometimes with lapses in employment. In the early 20th century, middle-class U.S. citizens viewed underemployment as a character flaw. Underemployment meant that the head of the household was not a good worker or that they did not want to work. It was the individual's fault if they did not work or could not house themselves (Kusmer 1995:671–672). However, Daniel Rodgers (1978:163–165) points out that many industrial workers left their positions because they resisted deskilling, long hours, and the loss of control over their means of production. Mobility was a key issue in regards to the agency and liberty of working people (Simpson 2005), in addition to formal and informal work stoppages. The pulp mill employees on Virginus Island, who worked 10–12 hour shifts in noisy and hazardous conditions, did strike several times for better wages and improved working conditions. It is clear that they were not content with their treatment or position (see Figure 2).

#### AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF VIRGINUS ISLAND

Sociologist Richard Scase (1992) writes about the significance of the corporation as an abstract, impersonal entity in market capitalism. He explains, "Bureaucratic procedures evolve, so that managers and technical specialists become responsible for coordinating and controlling the work process in a manner that was previously undertaken personally by the capitalists themselves. The bureaucratization of the capitalists' control functions serves to conceal the more



**FIGURE 2.** Early-20th-century view of Virginius Island, showing former mill complex and housing in relation to Thomas Savery's pulp mill in the background. (Photo courtesy of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.)

visible features of class antagonism" (Scase 1992:9–10). In this sense, the capitalist does not appear as a responsible party in the bureaucracy, and managers act as intermediaries or buffers between the capitalist and employees. It is worth mentioning that managers, and foremen even more so, were generally given broad freedom to motivate employees, and it was not until the 1920s that industrial relations, as a science of motivating workers, came into vogue under the rubric of welfare capitalism and voluntary, corporate representation (Scase 1992). Absenteeism—where there is a complete lack of paternalism as well as a lack of interest in the region in which a particular industry develops—is one specific variation on this bureaucratic form of capitalism. This type of industrial development is the flavor of industrialization that was also seen in the timber stands and coal fields of West Virginia, as well as in other regions during this era (Eller 1982; Lewis 1998; Rasmussen 1994).

As control over Virginius Island passed to Savery and the Shenandoah Pulp Company, a suite of changes accompanied the transition from local ownership of the island, tenements, and major industries to corporate, ab-

sentee ownership and operation. First, there appears to be a homogenization of the community, which came to be made up of a mostly single social stratum of working-class families. Managers and owners no longer lived on the island with their employees. Second, there was an increased rationalization of work, including advancing development of technological solutions and deskilling of workers. Craftsmen no longer lived on the island, and workers became machine tenders in the mill. Third, there was lack of contact with owners and landowners, and therefore the community and workers were more subject to arbitrary decisions from an absentee entrepreneur (Palus and Shackel 2006). Savery lived in Delaware and made decisions about his business and the community through correspondences with a local manager. Fourth, there was a decay or lack of development in the community infrastructure (water, power, sewage, etc.), among other things. Savery made no attempt to modernize the community (see Rasmussen 1994 on the consistency of these consequences in West Virginia under absenteeism during this period). The change in management techniques impacted the living conditions of families and allowed new consumer patterns to be cultivated as

**TABLE 1.** Ceramic Vessels by Form for Occupations at West Rowhouse, Schofield House, and Wernwag House, during the Flour Mill Years, 1870–89.

Functional Category	Form	West Rowhouse (flour mill-worker household)		Schofield House (flour mill-worker household)		Wernwag House (McCreight household, owner of the mill)	
		N	Percent F	N	Percent F	N	Percent F
Tableware	Plate 10"	3	42.9	1	12.5	3	25.0
	Plate 9"	0	0.0	1	12.5	1	8.3
	Plate 8"	1	14.2	0	0.0	2	16.7
	Plate 6"	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	8.3
	Plate 3.5"	0	0.0	3	37.5	0	0.0
	Plate (unid. diam.)	3	42.9	3	37.5	5	41.7
	<i>Total Plates</i>	7	100	8	100	12	100
Teawares	Cup	5	38.5	1	25.0	6	60.0
	Saucer	8	61.5	3	75.0	4	40.0
	Subtotal	13	100.0	4	100.0	10	100.0

<sup>1</sup>Percent F = Percent of functional group.

well as new relationships with the body, as was reflected in health and hygiene conditions during the apex of industrial development and resource extraction in the later part of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

#### CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF WORKING-CLASS HOUSEHOLDS

The archaeology of domestic sites on Virginus Island dates to the flour mill years (1870–89, all sites owned by Child and McCreight) and the paper mill years (1889–1924, all sites owned by Savery; see Tables 1 and 2). The assemblages belonging to two working-class families (from the 1889–1924 period) tend to conform to expectations of Victorian refinement and proper behavior. These households resemble that of a wealthy entrepreneur family during the flour mill operations (1870–1889). For instance, plate sizes and functional categories of vessels are similar among all the households. It is difficult to consistently distinguish significant differences between the two working-class assemblages and the owner's assemblage.

The working-class assemblages, including those from the West Rowhouse and the Schofield House in Table 2, also become more alike to each other at the turn of the 20th century. However, there are some noticeable differences in later assemblage when compared to the earlier assemblage. For instance, large-diameter plates are absent from the manager's assemblage. The choice of plate size may have certain practical implications, relating to time management. Edna Farmer (1995) told interviewers that everyone on the island "worked regular," which appears to mean that they worked very long hours and returned home to eat and sleep only. It is conceivable that larger plates would allow a meal to pass more quickly, where smaller plates would require several servings from different dishes to complete the meal (Lucas 1994). The distinction between assemblages with larger plates and those featuring smaller ones might be a reflection of intensive time management, which may be the result of daily rhythms set by the mill on Virginus Island. Larger plates would allow meals to be completed in one course, resulting in time savings at the sacrifice of certain domestic ideals.

**TABLE 2.** Ceramics Vessels by Form for Occupations at West Rowhouse, Schofield House, and Wernwag House, during the Pulp Mill Years, 1889–1924<sup>1</sup>.

Functional Category	Form	West Rowhouse (working-class household)		Schofield House (working-class household)		Wernwag House (manager's household)	
		N	Percent F	N	Percent F	N	Percent F
Tableware	Plate 10"	35	56.5	23	54.7	0	0.0
	Plate 9"	5	8.0	1	2.4	3	33.3
	Plate 8"	4	6.5	1	2.4	2	22.2
	Plate 6"	2	3.2	1	2.4	0	0.0
	Plate 3.5"	1	1.6	4	9.5	0	0.0
	Plate (unid. diam.)	15	24.2	12	28.6	4	44.5
	<i>Total Plates</i>	62	100.0	42	100.0	9	100.0
Teawares	Cup	66	50.4	22	38.6	7	58.3
	Saucer	65	49.6	35	61.4	5	41.7
	Subtotal	131	100	57	100	12	100

<sup>1</sup>All sites occupied by Savory pulp mill workers and their families.

Also, all households have teawares, but the later working-class households have a higher proportion of teaware vessels when compared to the working-class households that existed during the time of paternal management. However, all households tend to have a similar variety of decorative designs on their ceramics. Diana Wall (1991, 1994) suggests that highly refined and decorative ceramics were used to self-identify for the middle and upper classes and for competition amongst these social groups. The decorated ceramics at these households were not the most fashionable or expensive wares available in terms of economic scaling, but regardless some meaning may have been applied to the ownership and use of decorated and undecorated wares. One possible alternative explanation is the "trophy set" of fine ceramics detached from actual use: These ceramics were maintained not for manipulation in elaborate displays of taste and refinement but, rather, as a symbolic aspiration to freedom and power as consumers and deriving value from nonuse (Palus and Shackel 2006).

Purchasing power of consumer goods increased in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States as a whole, and on Virginus Island the assemblage sizes also increased significantly (see Table 2). However, it is problematic to say that this is the result of an elevation of the working classes, the relative increase in socioeconomic status of working-class residents of Virginus Island, or the benefits of industrialization and principles of welfare capitalism in the early 20th century. Brian Gratton and Jon Moen (2004:363) explain that poorer families tended to have their children work in industry more often than middle-class families. This phenomenon did not occur because they needed the extra income to survive but, rather, because the extra contribution could allow for comparatively higher consumption and the generation of surplus. Extra income could allow the family to afford greater material wealth and provide better financial security. An early-20th-century study cited by Gratton and Moen (2004:363) indicates that when children reached working age, families significantly improved their economic status.

Progressive Era scholars found that many young children seemed very proud to contribute to their family's income and well-being and were drawn to a social group outside of the home. In fact, several surveys conducted around 1910 among children indicated that the majority of them would prefer to work than go to school (Gratton and Moen 2004:369). An oral history of a surviving resident indicates that many of the adolescents in the Virginus Island community went to work in the local garment factory in Harpers Ferry or elsewhere when they reached their early teens to help supplement family incomes. Other teenage girls became maids and servants. These are strategies that helped to increase the family income to buy basics, as well as consumer goods.

The ceramic vessels from the pulp mill years suggest homogenization of the community as it embraced mass consumption. Homogenization of material culture might be read as the homogenization of practices. But, in *The Prac-*

*tice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau defines the everyday as the site of resistance in today's world: "The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices" (1984:xvii). According to de Certeau, there are aspects of culture that constitute a "remainder" of variant behavior that subverts the dominant culture while remaining inside of it. He uses a metaphor to explain this more clearly. Items of material culture—for example, clothing styles—have certain ascribed uses and meanings but they can also be used in novel ways that are symbolically defiant. Material culture is "rented" by subalterns and used in ways not foreseen by dominant groups. The difference between expressly permitted or anticipated "modal" behavior and everyday deviation from modal behavior is de Certeau's "remainder" (de Certeau 1984:xviii).

Similarly, the fine sets of tableware examined here are not simply purchased in obedience to developing consumer ideologies that offer class mobility through personal discipline and correct behavior. They are assertions of consumer power (after Mullins 1996, 1999) and they are accepted with important reservations; to use de Certeau's terminology, they are figuratively "rented" rather than consumed in wholesale fashion.

In the long term, ceramic vessels reveal a progression in the households that have occupied Virginus Island toward increasing consumerism and also a certain degree of sameness among the households by the early 20th century. Some aspects of consumer ideology are visibly resisted (e.g., the necessity of the correct size of plates for a "proper" dinner service appears to have been refuted by some households occupied in the pulp mill era on Virginus Island) while the fact of consumerism and the underlying social distinction and immobility implied by mass marketing of consumer goods remains intact. Barbara Little (1994, 1997) uses ceramic assemblages to account for resistance by social actors who are subject to the overt ideological tactics of dominant groups and to explain the continued effectiveness of ideologies in neutralizing resistance and maintaining relations of power, status, and wealth. These concepts are clearly useful in discussing material culture and long-term social change on Virginus Island. Over time, working-class individuals appear to select aspects of dominant social behavior that have meaning for them and reject others; however, in embracing the ideology of consumerism, working-class households merely embed themselves in the market economy and reinforce their roles in that economy as objectified individuals who sell their labor.

Analysis of the faunal remains at Virginus Island shows a continued reliance on wild food resources at Virginus into the 20th century. Cow and pig comprise the bulk of dietary meat in all contexts, but the ratios of beef to pork changes through time. In the context of Child and McCreight's ownership of the island, beef and pork are represented more or less equally (according to estimated meat weight); in the later context, beef is twice as prevalent as pork. Head and foot elements are uncommon,



**TABLE 3.** Glass Vessels for Occupations at West Rowhouse, Schofield House, and Wernwag House during the Flour Mill Years, 1870–89.

Vessel Type	West Rowhouse (working-class household)		Schofield House (working-class household)		Wernwag House (McCreight household, owner of the mill)		
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	
Container (Bottle or Jar)	Liquor/Whiskey	1	4.8	2	9.5	0	0
	Wine Bottles	8	38.1	2	9.5	13	29.5
	Other Bottles	7	33.3	9	42.9	21	47.7
	Food (Bottle or Jar)	0	0	3	14.3	1	2.3
	Medicinal	5	23.8	5	23.8	4	9.1
	Personal	0	0	0	0	1	2.3
	Other	0	0	0	0	2	4.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>	

indicating purchase of market-processed meats from distant markets. However, plant and animal species are diverse in the assemblage. Fish species identified within the archaeological record are represented by cranial elements, indicating that they were caught and cleaned locally; wild fowl and terrestrial birds are also represented, as are a variety of small mammal species (Duncan 2000). The continuing reliance on wild berry- and fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, inferred from the presence of numerous seeds, is noticeable in the archaeological record (Crites 2000). Together, these wild food and plant resources strongly suggest some opposition to increasingly rationalized, distant, and centralized networks of supply and provisioning at Virginus Island, and they might be indicative of outlooks on markets in general.

#### HEALTH AND HYGIENE OF WORKING-CLASS HOUSEHOLDS

Working-class people also faced health hazards as they moved into crowded urban places. Some classes of evidence address the prevalence of parasitic infestation and self-treatment for disease. For instance, analysis of privy soils from the Wernwag House deposited during the mid-19th century revealed eggs from both intestinal roundworm and whipworm, indicating that some or all from this household were host to these parasites (Cummings and Puseman 2000). No privy deposits from later contexts were available for this type of analysis, but there were strikingly few improvements on Virginus Island during the period treated by this study. Until recently, there was a general consensus among scholars that the mortality rate decreased significantly during the industrial age because of increased sanitation, improved diet, and advanced medicines. However, the mortality rate in the United States reached a plateau and even increased in the antebellum era until the late 19th century. In urban areas, the increased death rate is attributed to increased crowding, poor sanitation, the lagging acceptance of germ theory and inefficient medical diagnoses, and industrial work-related tragedies. In one compelling study, mortality rates among the poor were also higher when compared to the wealthy, and immigrants often faced the worst

hazards of industrialization (Hautaniemi et al. 1999:1–4). Industrial workers aged 65 and over tended to die of respiratory diseases at a rate five times greater than those from ages 15–29. No doubt the long-term exposure to chemicals, dust, and fumes in industrial complexes contributed to this rate disparity (Hautaniemi et al. 1999:23–27). “At the turn of the century, one writer dubbed the United States the ‘land of disasters’ because of the horrendous neglect of safety devices in industry, which disabled an astonishing 700,000 for one month or longer each year” (Kusmer 1995:678; also see Zinn 2003:155–156). Studies by progressives in the very early 20th century indicate that between one-fifth and one-third of homeless men were disabled from work and therefore could not make a decent wage to sustain themselves.

One avenue to explore the health and hygiene on Virginus Island is the presence and use of different medicines, drugs, and patent mixtures at households within the community. It is important to consider, however, that the use of patent medicines, rather than drugs that are prescribed by a physician, create a direct and immediate relationship between the individual consumer and societal standards of health and well-being. The proportion of medicine and personal bottles in the earlier assemblage is similar at the working-class households and a bit lower at the entrepreneur’s house (see Table 3). However, the later deposits associated with pulp mill years reveal that the occupants had a greater variety of substances such as prescription medicines, patent medicines, and also beauty products and cosmetic creams, all of which suggest an increasing amount of attention paid to details of bodily health (see Table 4). For Michel Foucault (1977), personal discipline is the “political anatomy of detail,” and it entails the medicalization of the body and concern for hygiene as controlling and correcting the operations of the body (Foucault 1977; Foucault and Rabinow 1984:170–289). The diversification of “medicinal and personal” products in later archaeological contexts on Virginus Island suggests an intensification of interest in maintaining individual health and the power of the market regarding how health and well-being are defined.

**TABLE 4.** Glass Vessels for Occupations at West Rowhouse, Schofield House, and Wernwag House during the Pulp Mill Years, 1889–1924.

Vessel Type	West Rowhouse (working-class household)		Schofield House (working-class household)		Wernwag House (manager's household)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Container (Bottle or Jar)						
Liquor/Whiskey	66	12.2	20	7.5	0	0
Beer Bottles	20	3.7	2	0.8	0	0
Wine Bottles	29	5.4	9	3.4	3	8.3
Non-Alcoholic Beverage	16	3.0	4	1.5	1	2.7
Other Bottles	141	26.1	128	48.1	22	61.1
Food (Bottle or Jar)	16	3.0	1	0.4	1	2.7
Medicinal	125	23.1	39	14.7	2	5.4
Chemical	4	0.7	0	0	0	0
Toiletry	3	0.6	2	0.8	0	0
Personal	4	0.7	4	1.6	1	2.7
Other	0	0	1	0.4	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>542</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>

### INSURGENT CITIZENSHIP AND "MAKING DO"

Archaeology helps to chart how entrepreneurs and members of the working class embraced a relatively new form of industrial capitalism during the period of rapid changes following the Civil War and continuing into the early 20th century. For instance, archaeology at sites in Lowell, Massachusetts, shows that by the end of the 19th century the paternal philosophy for operating the boardinghouses in this town had disappeared. Poor sanitation and health conditions and the degradation of the surrounding environment became the norm for northeastern industrial domestic sites. Higher uses of alcohol and high parasite counts from fecal remains also became common (Mrozowski et al. 1996). Archaeologists have also looked at how industry affects communities and individuals (Brashler 1991; Costello 1998; Shackel 1996; Trinder and Cox 2000; Van Bueren 2002; Wegars 1991; Workman et al. 1994).

David Harvey (1990:201–210) offers a specific way to consider the consequences of a mode of production and industry to working-class culture and perceptions of the fabric of social life. One can imagine how the principles organizing industry in a community—or in a nation—can impact the parameters that individuals apply to the world that they live. Those basic categories of human existence like perceptions of space and time, which are frequently taken for granted as permanent, are created through material practices, and each distinctive social form and mode of production will have distinct practices and ways of thinking regarding these categories. It follows that innovation, or the introduction of new social forms and economic forms, leads to conflict and crisis. This transition has already been documented at Harpers Ferry by archaeologists (Shackel 1996) and historians (Smith 1977) studying the town, as they explore the shift from craft-based production at the Federal Armory to piecework and mass production. We have tried to show that transition also produces gaps and margins—new and novel spaces that relate to these larger historical trajectories in ambiguous ways.

Resistance to industrialization has already been implied in other archeological studies. One example is the archeological excavation that occurred at the John Russell Cutlery Company in the Connecticut River Valley. This study shows how discontented workers challenged the existing power structure found in the factory. Archaeologists state that large waste piles outside of the factory is an indication of sabotaging the final product or at least carelessness in an effort to regain some autonomy in the work place (Nassaney and Abel 1993). In another study, archaeology is helping to make the Colorado Coal Mine Wars part of the national public memory. Scholars examining the Ludlow Tent Colony Site are exploring issues related to labor concerns and living conditions for workers and their families in this strike camp as well as the formation of temporary communities, protest labor movements, and government and military intervention (Ludlow Collective 2001:94–107; McGuire and Reckner 2002:44–58; Saita 2004; Walker 2000:60–75; Wood 2002).

The work on Virginus Island connects schemes of industrial management to the welfare of working-class families who were living at the transition between Harpers Ferry's economic preeminence before the Civil War and the boom of manufacturing and extractive industry in West Virginia that followed it. However, where history and sociology often describe the degradation of workers during the Gilded Age, archaeological data from Virginus Island does not describe degradation alone. To be certain, the community witnessed disinvestments, and this is consistent with findings for the communities that grew up around extractive industries in West Virginia more generally (Rasmussen 1994). For instance, Virginus Island was never connected to public services that were implemented in adjacent Harpers Ferry, such as sewers, electric power, and telephones. However, archaeology uncovered data about the momentary and ephemeral ways in which renters at Virginus Island established themselves in the spaces they occupied, which were utterly marginal, unchecked, and largely ignored.

James Holston (1998) calls these "spaces of insurgent citizenship." Two processes were at work within the Virginus Island community, and both of them went on within this "rented" space. On the one hand, workers were more able to provide consumer goods for themselves and their families during the absentee period. On the other hand, in the Savery era, the workers are the type of robust consumer that only the manager class could be during earlier periods at Virginus Island, under the ownership of Child and McCreight. Concomitantly, they are acquiring many of the same things and seem to be homogenized in terms of the material culture that surrounds them. Geographically, Virginus Island is homogenized as well, in that the community is comprised by one class of people, and the arrangement of space presents the appearance of efficiency: one factory and its labor force. This is a simple composition for the community when compared with earlier periods when there was greater diversity in terms of class, professions, wealth, and property.

At the same time, Virginus Island hosts a community that does not quite manifest all of the forms of homogenization that comes with industrial capitalism. The archaeology shows that although the material culture belonging to working-class families became more homogenized, there was also an increased use of medicine, toiletry, and personal bottles, all ways to help create a sense of self and perhaps individuality. Although they relied on the market place for manufactured goods and processed foods, working-class households also relied on fishing and gardens to supplement their nutritional needs. They did not totally buy into the market economy. These families "made do" in a completely marginal geography—hunting, drinking, and self-medicating. The suggestion of insurgent status seems to contradict the initial finding of homogenization and a firm connection to consumer markets.

Anthropologists have described communities in which insurgent status defines the relationship of working-class people not to the reality but to the dreams of modernity. For instance, James Holston identifies the ways in which the workers who built Brazil's capital city now dwell there. Holston writes that the "modernist city" inspired by Le Corbusier and his adherents was never planned to allow the kind of traditional spaces that give homes to Rio de Janeiro's underclass. And yet, the workers who built Brasília remained, living in a marginal space claimed illegally on the outskirts of the city. There they continue to produce an alternative relationship to modernity and the urban spaces that modernity defines (Holston 1989, 1998). Similarly, Kathleen Stewart (1996) describes life in West Virginia's former coal country. There communities persist and "make do" in towns abandoned by absentee industrialists.

The relationship to capital and power that these works describe is compelling. In very much the same way, the people living on Virginus Island were "making do." Communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries faced many of the difficulties presented by unchecked capitalism, such as child labor, increasing deskilling of workers, and a general

decline in income. It is not certain that the Progressive Era reformers had an impact on the Virginus Island community. Like the squatters in Brasília and the local community inhabiting abandoned coal mining towns in West Virginia, an underclass developed that provided some service to the local community. In the case of the Virginus Island community, the residents became part of what initially appears to be a culturally homogenized town.

However, the material culture of a working-class community that existed more than 100 years ago also shows us a dimension of a capitalist economy with workers who sometimes went on strike for better wages and working conditions. Virginus Island did not modernize and the lack of any form of paternalism allowed for the town to slowly decay. The erosion of basic entitlements accompanied the tendency toward homogenization, which was sometimes expressed through exertion of purchasing power. Although these people created a material world that reflected Victorian ideals, and workers obtained goods similar to what was the norm in manager's households a generation earlier, they did not conform to the fullest expectations of burgeoning U.S. consumerism or fully embrace the consumer market. Virginus Island's residents played out an important and previously untold story, attesting to the power of consumerism and the mosaic of communities that mass manufacturing and homogeneous national markets has buried.

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**PAUL A. SHACKEL** Department of Anthropology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20912

**MATTHEW M. PALUS** Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027-7003

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