Eating in the Side Room

Food, Archaeology, and African American Identity

An archaeological study of African American foodways in nineteenth-century Annapolis 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. Publication of the paperback edition made possible by a Sustaining the Humanities through the American Rescue Plan grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.



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