7 "With sundry other sorts of small ware too tedious to mention"

Petty consumerism on U.S. plantations

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> To be sold by the subscriber at his dwelling-plantation, and at his pot-house, in St. Mary's County, and at the head of the St. Mary's River, by wholesale or retail: Earthenware, of the same kind as imported from Liverpool, or made in Philadelphia, such as milk-pans, butter-pots, jugs, pitchers, quart-mugs, pint-mugs, porringers, churning-pots, painted dishes, plates, etc. with sundry other sorts of small ware too tedious to mention. . . . He will take in pay pork, tar, wheat, corn, or tobacco, at reasonable rate, for any of the above commodities.
>
> (Thomas Baker, the *Maryland Gazette*, 1756)

Introduction

Consumer culture often appears to be a side-effect of the conspicuous consumption identified by Thorstein Veblen (1899), in which the leisure class grasps at ever more expensive and esoteric goods in order to climb the social ladder – to become more like their betters and to leave those beneath them behind. Studies of consumerism within historical archaeology or modern material culture studies (Majewski and Schiffer 2009:191–192) frequently emphasize these special goods – often expensive, rare, or both – and a relatively narrow slice of society (Martin 1993; Mullins 2011:139–141). Taking *consumption* to signify "people rely[ing] increasingly upon goods that they do not produce themselves" (Miller 1995:154), there is no doubt that people also consume mundane goods. Furthermore, status-conscious elites and their imitators are not the only people to consume material goods.

What are we to do with these other things, these other people? We argue for a broader-based investigation of consumerism, understood as an ideology and a system that promotes consumption. Here, we examine the ceramics consumed by plantation residents, most of them enslaved, to understand their role in the consumer revolution. We label these processes *petty consumerism*, a phenomenon that exists side-by-side with the generic "consumerism," that is taken to be synonymous with the conspicuous rather than the quotidian. Given its broad base, petty consumerism was likely more important, financially and socially, to the ascendancy of this mode of modern life.

The term petty consumerism plays on the idea of petty capitalism. What distinguishes petty capitalism from capitalism as it is generally understood are its small-scale producers, using and generating small amounts of capital, who run their enterprises solely or primarily with the unwaged labor of their household members (Smart and Smart 2005). Note that petty capitalism is not merely an incipient stage or bastardization of "real" capitalism, but is in fact integral to its functioning. Petty capitalists fill an important niche in capitalist economies, and indeed, other economic systems as well (Gates 1996:17–20). Likewise, the people and goods entangled in petty consumerist relations are vital to the perpetuation of consumerism more generally.

The cost of consumer goods is no indicator of their analytical value, and neither is the status of the consumer, particularly in cases where status was established by the laws of chattel slavery, and later of Jim Crow. As Daniel Miller (1995:142, 150) observes, the work of Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates that the more mundane the object, the greater its potential for building ideological structures. The vanguard of consumption may be at the margins, rather than the center (Dietler 2010:219–221). Here, we investigate petty consumerism in plantation settings of the Middle Atlantic and Southeast regions of the United States, using several lines of evidence that address ceramic production, marketing, distribution, and retailing, as well as use and discard. In particular, we consider how access to and decisions about ceramics were shaped by plantation life.

Petty consumerism helps us to conceptualize and answer a series of questions. What needs, intentions, or plans did plantation residents have for ceramics? Whence came the means to fulfill these plans, and were they accomplished by different strategies for different categories of person within the plantation? What other imperatives existed alongside those for ceramics? What can we say about the moment of selection? Finally, how were these decisions manifested over the long term? To address these questions, we investigate datasets at multiple scales, from individual plantation assemblages to comparative regional data, to discuss distinct strategies as well as general patterns of petty consumerism on plantations.

We begin with needs. The analysis of trends in ceramic consumption uses the distribution of vessel forms of all ware types across 15 plantations to ascertain the various functions that ceramics may have fulfilled. We then turn to the possible sources of these vessels via a comparative study of the sources for coarse earthenware used by free and enslaved households on plantations. We conclude this analysis by revisiting the vessel form data before drilling down to a more human scale, and introducing materials from Stagville plantation. Documentary and archaeological evidence from Stagville brings purchasing behavior recorded in store accounts into dialogue with artifacts discarded by residents on that plantation. The last two sections, "Acquisition" and "Petty consumers at home," draw primarily on the Stagville data before returning to the regional assemblage of which

they are a part. With a focus throughout on what some might dismiss as "tedious" goods, these datasets offer a new perspective on consumption and the strategies of daily life that constituted petty consumerism.

Plantation economies

Consumerism in plantation contexts is fundamentally tied to the nature of plantations as production centers. Organized around the production of staple crops such as tobacco, wheat, and cotton, Southern plantations made it possible for a single individual to expropriate the productive energy of many people, allowing that individual to obtain the credit necessary to participate in the market. From the 18th into the middle of the 19th centuries, this strategy was largely accomplished through the enslaved labor of Africans and African Americans.

Given the economic regime imposed on plantation inhabitants, and the shared spatial organization, a plantation may be conceptualized as a single household, or household complex (Barile 2004). At the same time, smaller household units within plantations operated semi-independently. This model is useful, for it provides a shared language with which to compare the economic entanglements of the planter with those of the enslaved laborers and free wage earners who had their own strategies of engagement in the market system. Similar structures continued after Emancipation; whereas plantations shifted to sharecropping in many cases, the economic interdependence of landowners and laborers remained. Here, we emphasize the consumer activities of smaller household units, while acknowledging the effects of the broader plantation structure.

The 18th-century planters in North America participated in the global market through the transatlantic trade of staple crops, obtaining credit through English and Scottish merchant houses in lieu of currency. This credit could be used to purchase goods directly from England or to back a variety of economic ventures. By the 19th century, growing numbers of stores and domestic mercantile activities throughout the Middle Atlantic and Southeast meant that local retailers offered many of the goods desired by planters. Given the lack of currency circulating in early America, local transactions also relied upon credit. Stores often operated as banks, sites for establishing local credit and settling debts with other members of the community. Local stores offered a wide range of goods, and shopkeepers proudly advertised their selection of fashionable imported goods such as cloth and ceramics, fueling conspicuous consumption (Martin 2008). Historical newspaper advertisements of craft producers and artisans, ranging from potters and blacksmiths to watchmakers and silversmiths, routinely offered custom orders and flexible terms to local consumers (MESDA Craftsman Database).

For planters' most basic needs, household production provided an alternative to market goods. To varying degrees, planters invested in the

infrastructure necessary for activities such as dairying, weaving, and blacksmithing. These ventures increased the self-sufficiency of the plantation and at times were leveraged as part of economic diversification plans, producing surpluses for sale off the plantation.

While some degree of provisioning was practiced on most Southern plantations, in which the planter provided regular rations of basic foodstuffs and yearly allotments of items such as clothing or blankets, provisioning does not account for the quantity and variety of manufactured goods found on domestic sites occupied by enslaved individuals. Instead, enslaved Africans and African Americans availed themselves of local markets. Legislation in Virginia and elsewhere sought to limit the ability of slaves to participate in the market, as buyers or sellers, but was largely ignored. Slaves purchased consumer goods with cash earned through paid labor or the sale of items they produced or collected. Labor and goods might also be exchanged for credit. For example, in June of 1738, "Negro Harry Tinsley" purchased a length of coarse cloth at a store in Hanover County, Virginia, paying it off with chickens delivered in two installments in July and September of that year (Slatten and Bagby 1986:47). However, Ann Smart Martin (2008:179) has found that compared to white (and by definition, free) individuals, these petty consumers were less likely to carry credit, and purchased goods in smaller quantities, accruing smaller debts.

We discuss how one type of consumer good, ceramics, reflects a number of discrete strategies, desires, and economic conditions. Consumer behavior regarding ceramics varied over time and according to race and role within the plantation. We consider two main categories of ceramics at these Southern plantations. Utilitarian ceramics, most commonly made out of coarse earthenware and stoneware, were used for a variety of activities including food storage, food preparation, dairying, and hygiene. These are contrasted with tablewares, vessels typically made of materials such as refined earthenware, refined stoneware, and porcelain, that were used to serve food or beverages and provided people with individual portions. We are concerned with both vessel material – coarse and refined earthenwares, stonewares, and porcelain – and vessel form, shapes indicating use on the table or other activities.

Following Martin (1993:156) we frame the consumption of these vessels in terms of *availability* – the presence of a particular commodity on the market – and *desirability*. Rather than use Martin's *affordability*, we prefer the term *accessibility* – to account for both economic and social barriers that may have restricted consumption (Breen, this volume). Consumption was further structured by worldview. As Pierre Bourdieu (1984:241) argued, the desire or taste for particular types of goods can be tied to social class and culturally defined ideas about the suitability of certain products, bringing together people and goods through "elective affinities." A study of consumption revolves around the choices people make in the market; yet we recognize that those choices are shaped by factors within and beyond an individual's control (Wurst and McGuire 1999; Rothstein 2005).

Trends in ceramic consumption

To understand the character of ceramic assemblages in plantation contexts more generally, we used data from the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS 2016). Artifact data from 35 sites on 15 plantations totaling 95 phased assemblages dating from the 18th to the 20th centuries clarified trends in the temporal availability of different kinds of ceramics, and offered evidence for differential access and desirability among households. These assemblages represented four different spatial and social locations: (a) enslaved field laborers, (b) enslaved artisans and house servants residing in the plantation core, (c) free white workers, and (d) mixed plantation core deposits associated primarily with the planters' households (Table 7.1). We grouped ceramics into categories by vessel form: tablewares including tea wares (plates, saucers), utilitarian-food (milk pans, storage jars), and utilitarian non-food (ink bottles, drug jars). Ceramic sherds that could not be identified by form were not included.

Table 7.1 Summary of Plantation Ceramic Assemblages. Note: Data source DAACS (www.daacs.org).

Plantation	*Location*	*Total phased assemblages*	*Field worker*	*Plantation core worker*	*Free (white) worker*	*Planter (white)*
Ashcomb's Quarter	Maryland	1	1			
Chapline Place	Maryland	1	1			
Fairfield	Virginia	3		3		
The Hermitage	Tennessee	17	17			
Middleburg	South Carolina	1	1			
Monticello	Virginia	43	3	30	2	8
Mount Vernon	Virginia	4		3		1
Mattapany/ Sewall	Maryland	1	1			
Palace Lands	Virginia	1	1			
Pope	Virginia	3	3			
Poplar Forest	Virginia	7	7			
Richneck	Virginia	3	3			
Stagville	North Carolina	3		3		
Stratford Hall	Virginia	1	1			
Utopia	Virginia	6	6			
	Total	95	45	39	2	9

One of the challenges of a dataset spanning three centuries was selecting a dating strategy that adequately captured the site occupation. Mean ceramic dates (MCDs) (South 1978) are not ideal for our assemblages;[1] we use them here as a method for ordination of the assemblages, to understand the general temporal relationships among different sites. For individual assemblages, we draw upon additional lines of evidence such as documentary records and terminus post quem dates (TPQs) from non-ceramic artifacts that allow us to discuss the site occupation range more specifically.

Over the span of the 18th and 19th centuries, utilitarian ceramics for food use were an ever-smaller portion of our ceramic assemblages (Figure 7.1). Inversely, the proportion of tablewares steadily increased. Two temporal trends drove this patterning. First was the widening availability of tablewares, especially refined earthenwares, as the Staffordshire region of England began large-scale production and exportation of these goods to the American colonies (Miller 1984). These wares form one of the hallmarks of the consumer revolution, and 18th-century households acquired far more ceramic objects than those in earlier eras (Deetz 1973:25, 30). Second, technological advancements offered replacements for utilitarian ceramics with

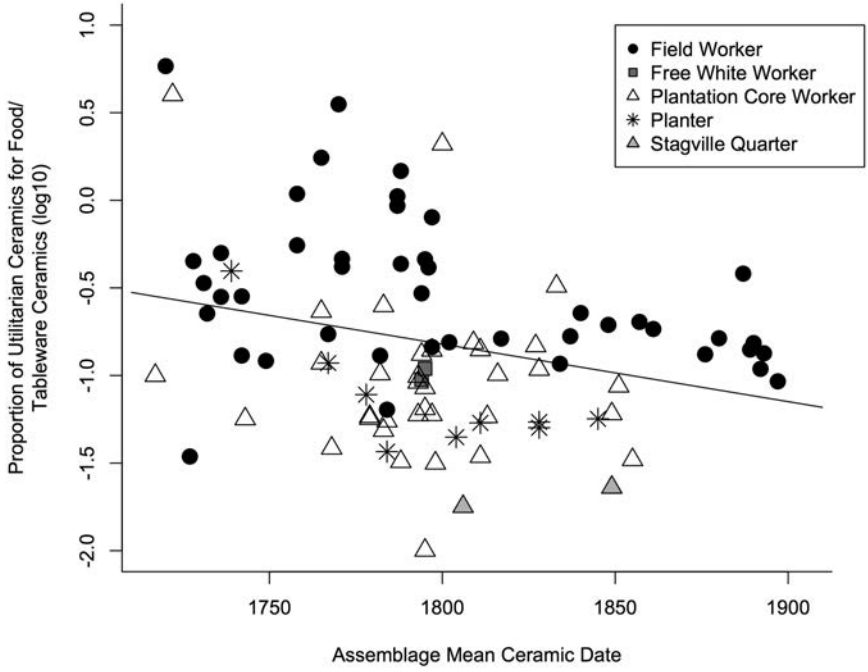

Figure 7.1 Change in the proportional discard of utilitarian ceramic forms to tableware ceramic forms in assemblages, based on sherd counts.

equally inexpensive metalwares and glass. Improvements to manufacturing technology in the early 19th century made containers of glass available in a wide range of shapes and sizes (Busch 1987:67–69; Sutton and Arkush 2009:171–173, 188–191). Households had alternatives to utilitarian ceramics at the same time that refined earthenware for the table became more popular.

However, these shifts in purchasing behavior were not evenly adopted across the plantation. In general, the domestic sites associated with enslaved field workers had a lower discard of table forms and a higher discard of utilitarian forms than sites in closer proximity to the planter's house, which were often occupied by enslaved craftsmen, house servants, or other skilled workers.

While enslaved field laborers had lower rates of discard for tablewares in general, there was no strong contrast in richness or the proportion of decorated wares in these assemblages. Assemblages left by enslaved field laborers were as likely to have a wide variety of ware types and decorated ceramics as any other group. Assemblages associated with white households were average in terms of the proportion of decorated tablewares. These superficial metrics do not take into account the cost, newness, or mode of acquisition for the wares, but suggest equivalent availability and accessibility among assemblages. Conspicuous consumption may have played a role in shaping desire, but it is not the entire story.

To the extent that there is change in the proportion of tablewares over time (Figure 7.1), it is a factor of the shift in discard rates of utilitarian ceramic forms among households of field workers. This pattern suggests that enslaved field laborers, in the 18th century in particular, were more heavily invested in ceramics for food preparation and storage than tablewares. To what extent does this trend reflect availability and accessibility rather than consumer choice? By investigating the accessibility of utilitarian ceramics, particularly coarse earthenware, we are able to tease apart general trends in market availability from specific strategies.

Sourcing earthenwares "of the same kind as imported from Liverpool, or made in Philadelphia"

While consumption frameworks emphasize the market stratification of access to luxury items (Shackel 1992), we questioned whether the same was true for inexpensive, everyday goods. Utilitarian wares, especially coarse earthenwares, tended to be among the cheapest of all ceramics, lacking decoration and meaningful change through time. Potters operating in Europe and throughout the American colonies produced them, but the visual distinctions among different production zones are often ambiguous. Due to their visual homogeneity, it has been difficult to ascertain the source of these wares, and whether enslaved consumers had the same access to coarse earthenwares as free and wealthier white consumers.

In order to address this question, elemental analysis was used to determine the origins of coarse earthenwares found in domestic plantation contexts. Bloch (2016) developed a reference collection of 400 sherds from 37 historic earthenware kiln sites from Great Britain and the Mid-Atlantic United States. Colonoware was not included, as the focus was on lead-glazed coarse earthenwares produced with European technological traditions such as wheel-throwing. Using laser ablation-inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS), Bloch analyzed the ceramic paste of the samples to identify the elemental signatures of distinct geological regions. There were 12 regions, or production zones, defined. She then analyzed coarse earthenware sherds recovered from 18 assemblages on nine 18th-century Chesapeake plantations (Table 7.1), and determined their relationships to the production zones.

Conventional wisdom has held that, across the board, local earthenware products were less desirable than imported wares (Noël Hume 1969:98–99), and thus may have been relegated to poorer members of society. However, in comparing planter and slave assemblages, Bloch found that race and wealth were not important indicators of the sources of coarse earthenwares (Table 7.2). Instead, the most significant patterns were temporal – reinforcing the findings from the examination of forms, above – or plantation-based. During the early 18th century, most households utilized an even mixture of imported wares from England or Wales and local wares produced in the Chesapeake or neighboring Pennsylvania. By mid-century, coarse earthenware assemblages were composed primarily of locally made wares. This trend was not due to a decline in British trade, as refined earthenware imports rapidly increased during this same period. Instead, it indicated the growth of craft production within the colonies and the desirability of locally made wares. The dominance of American-made products was surprising, given the paucity of documentary evidence for colonial potters. While not prohibited, colonial manufacturing was generally discouraged by Great Britain and therefore downplayed in historical accounts such as that of the "poor potter" of Yorktown (McCartney and Ayres 2004).

Regardless of status, assemblages within plantations were more similar to one another than assemblages across plantations. There was little differentiation in terms of source among the coarse earthenware assemblages of enslaved laborers and planters or free whites on a single plantation. All households seem to have used wares equally from local sources or imported sources when available. There is no documentary evidence to indicate provisioning of ceramics to slave households, so these vessels may have been left to each household to obtain independently. Coarsewares were available for sale in local stores as well as directly from potters, both venues advertising competitive pricing and generous terms, as seen in the epigraph. Baker's advertisement is evidence for the accessibility of these wares: local potters were savvy businessmen who recognized the needs of their customers, offering flexible payment options. At the same time, they marketed their wares

Table 7.2 Results of Elemental Analysis for Domestic Assemblages. Note: n = number of assemblages of each type included in the phase. Phasing developed from assemblage mean ceramic dates. Adapted from Bloch (2016:Table 2).

		Primary production origin			
Assemblage type by phase	*No. of samples*	*British*	*Philadelphia*	*Chesapeake*	*Unassigned*
Phase I (pre-1730)	*31*	*16*	*1*	*13*	*1*
Planter (n = 1)	12	8	1	2	1
Servant/Slave/Tenant (n = 2)	19	8		11	
Phase II (1731–1760)	*57*	*21*	*12*	*22*	*1*
Planter (n = 2)	21	9	1	11	
Servant/Slave/Tenant (n = 4)	36	12	11	11	2
Phase III (1761–1780)	*47*	*5*	*7*	*32*	*3*
Planter (n = 2)	13	1	0	11	1
Servant/Slave/Tenant (n = 3)	36	12	11	11	2
Phase IV (post-1780)	*49*	*6*	*5*	*37*	*1*
Planter (n = 1)	7			7	
Overseer (n = 1)	9		1	7	1
Servant/Slave/Tenant (n = 3)	33	6	4	23	
Total	*184*	*48*	*25*	*104*	*7*

as desirable, quality goods. The exchange value of "country produce" was an expected part of trade, given a general lack of circulating currency. Craftsmen and storekeepers continued to advertise non-monetary payment options well into the 19th century.

The similar access across all plantation households further supports the hypothesis that the variation in forms among ceramic assemblages represents degrees of investment in certain household strategies, rather than limited access. As expected, in the sourcing study, approximately 90% of the coarse earthenware samples represented utilitarian forms. These include vessels such as storage jars, butter pots, milk pans and other bulky hollowwares that were crucial for food storage, especially liquids and items prone to pest infestation. These wares allowed enslaved households to improve the quality of their meals throughout the year and maintain surplus stores.

We have already described how the ratio of table to utilitarian forms increases over time across all assemblage types. The trend also represents

a convergence among the assemblage types; residents of field quarters have assemblages that over time come to resemble more closely those of artisans, domestic workers, and white plantation residents. But emulation and conspicuous consumption are not the only possible explanations. The concept of petty consumerism encourages us to consider transformations that occurred *alongside* the trend of increasing social significance for aspirational goods. Material matters. Considering only the changing proportions of table and utilitarian ceramics, this shift appears to be a disruption of field laborers' domestic practices. In fact, it represents considerable continuity but with different tools. At later sites, such as Stagville or the Hermitage, container glass, including mason jars and other machine-made vessels, was recovered at rates suggesting it replaced the utilitarian ceramics and wine bottle glass that had fulfilled storage and preparation needs prior to circa 1800 at sites like Fairfield or Middleburg. At the antebellum sites (Figure 7.2), these new glasswares are evidence of a continued commitment to food storage and processing despite changes in storage options over time.

The later assemblages from the Stagville "Slave Cabin" (occupied ca. 1820s to 1930s) are instructive. Stagville was part of an immense plantation complex in Durham, North Carolina owned by members of the Bennehan and Cameron families. Richard Bennehan built his home at Stagville ca. 1787. It remained one of two adjacent farms that the families called home and from which they managed their lands through at least 1925, when scion Bennehan Cameron died intestate. Of course, the families were not alone. A tax list dating 10 years prior to the construction of the main house at Stagville lists 31 people owned by Richard Bennehan (Anderson 1985:94). His son Thomas Bennehan was listed as the owner of 201 people in 1840; 92% of the people laboring on the plantation at that time were engaged in agricultural production. The remaining individuals were engaged in manufacturing and trades (US Bureau of the Census 1840). The archaeological remnants of the dwellings occupied by those responsible for day-to-day management of Bennehan's immediate household form a row behind the main house. One of these was dubbed by its excavators the Stagville Slave Cabin site.

The Stagville Slave Cabin assemblage shows low rates of utilitarian form discard compared to contemporaneous assemblages and participates in the trend of decreasing rates of utilitarian form discard (Figure 7.3a). Unlike the majority of the sites in this late group, however, Stagville shows a radical change in the rate of discard of container glass (Figure 7.3b). This may be explained by the particular history of the Slave Cabin's occupation. After 1887, there was no resident owner in the nearby main house (Anderson 1985:135). While the dwelling remained within the plantation core spatially, it was likely occupied by agricultural rather than domestic workers. Two factors, Emancipation – with attendant changes in provisioning

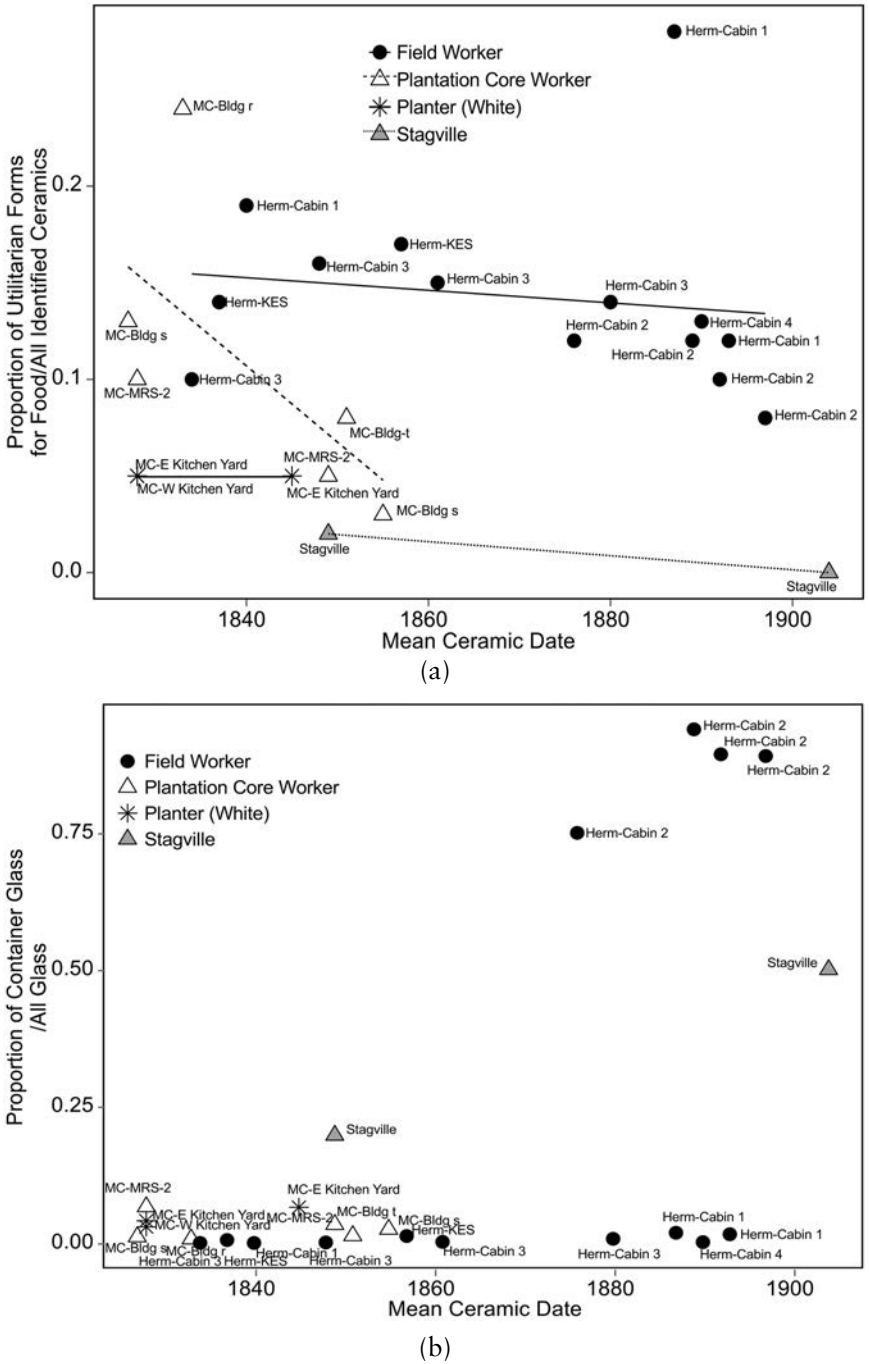

Figure 7.2a Discard of utilitarian ceramics in post-1820 assemblages (7.2a). Households of field laborers maintained a baseline discard while discard at households closer to the plantation core continued to decrease over time. Discard of container glass in post-1820 assemblages (7.2b).

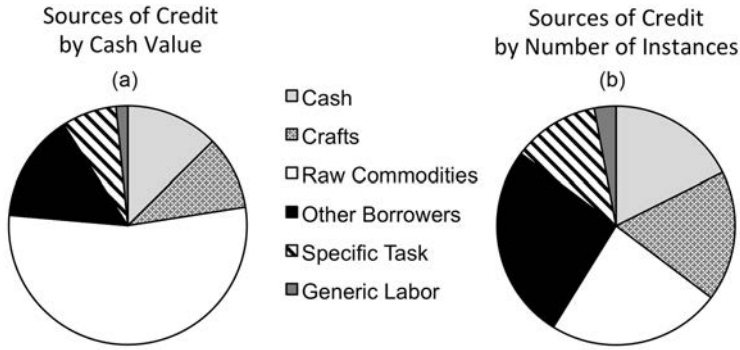

Figure 7.3 Credits to purchasers of ceramics, by source and cash value (7.3a); credits to purchasers of ceramics by source and number of transactions (7.3b).

strategies – and a different role in the plantation's operation, explain the sudden salience of container glass.

Together, the coarse earthenware study and the analysis of vessel forms suggest similar access to ceramic vessels, but differential desirability. And contrary to the logic of conspicuous consumption, there are explanations other than status-seeking that shape desire. While enslaved field hands may have had somewhat limited access to refined wares (Figure 7.1), the differences are minimal and reflect a variety of local, particularistic conditions rather than a general pattern. Certainly, access to and desire for refined ceramics was influenced by factors such as individual plantation wealth (Moore 1985), investment in costly signaling strategies (Galle 2010), and the capacity to produce marketable goods for exchange (Bates, this volume). However, regional patterns in coarse earthenware discard emphasize that enslaved consumers obtained such ceramics in proportions similar to free whites, whether those vessels were provisioned or purchased. Finally, the higher proportions of utilitarian ceramics on some sites likely represent heightened investment in tools for food storage and preparation – practices that continued through the use of glass and metalwares in the 19th and 20th centuries – rather than an inability (or disinclination) to acquire fine ceramics for the table.

Acquisition

The archaeological evidence of petty consumerism is complemented by the archival record, which provides an opportunity to explore the decisions of laborers at the point of purchase. The keeper of the store at Stagville Plantation used a small book to create a document now called the "Slave Ledger"

(Anderson 1985:24–25; Southern Historical Collection 1792–1812). The document served as a combination daybook and ledger; in it, the storekeeper recorded the purchases and credit arrangements of as many as 51 men[2] starting in 1806 and concluding in 1812. Some of these people were enslaved by the Bennehans and Camerons who owned the store, but a good number came from plantations owned by other families. The store was also frequented extensively by free neighbors[3] from the communities of Flat River and Durham in what was then still a part of Orange County, North Carolina (Kenzer 1987:8–9, 19).

One familiar trope about conspicuous consumption that the Slave Ledger upends is the prominence of women as consumers. Stephen Mrozowski (1988:186–187) describes a humorous anecdote in the *Rhode Island Gazette* depicting the narrator's wife as an extravagant shopper. She requires, among other luxuries, "a larger fashionable [looking glass] . . . handsomer and more creditable" than a cheaper alternative. The association between women and conspicuous consumption was well enough established in 1733 to be the basis of a joke. Veblen (1899:57–61) observed at the end of the 19th century how wives facilitated and embodied conspicuous consumption on behalf of the entire household. Martin (2008), Barbara Heath (2004), and Mark Hauser (2007) have shown how active enslaved women could be in 18th- and 19th-century commercial spaces. Galle's (2010) examination of ceramics on Chesapeake plantations suggests that women's priorities structured household ceramic assemblages, specifically. Yet in the Stagville store, participation was severely curtailed by gender. No female account holders appear among the ceramic-buyers. Nor indeed, do women appear as individual active agents in the document as a whole. Women are mentioned as the anticipated recipients of men's purchases, and twice as nameless purchasers of sugar and whiskey. Compare this to the accounts examined by Heath (2004:23) in which women were approximately 25% of participants, and Martin (2008:180), with at least one female account holder among 35. A theory of conspicuous consumption does little to help us understand these patterns.

Of the goods typically examined as evidence of (conspicuous) consumerism – that is to say expensive, non-utilitarian items – most of those represented in the Slave Ledger were meant to be worn on the person. They appeared as workaday items modified by adjectives that mark them as special: "a *fine* hat," or "*G* buttons" (which cost twice as much as [unmarked] buttons). They were also textiles such as bath coating, silk, and durants that contrasted with the coarser weaves and fibers usually provisioned to enslaved people. Amusements such as marbles or exotic foods like chocolate appear only one time each over the course of six years. Ceramic purchases do not figure largely either. Only a handful of men came to the Stagville store to obtain ceramic vessels. They bought both sets of flat forms and individual hollow forms (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3 Ceramics Recorded in the "Slave Ledger." Note: Ledger is part of the Cameron Family Papers #133. Folder 3617, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Purchaser	*Date*	*Item(s)*	*Price (shillings/ pence)*	*Percent of total expenditure*
Lewis Wms	July 18, 1810	½ doz Earthen plates	6	4.9%
Jim Ray	July 20, 1810	½ doz Earthen plates	6	44.5%
	September (1810?)	½ doz plates	6/3	
Frank Kennon	October (1810?)	1 Jug 2 qts	5	6.5%
Currel	(July 29, 1811 or later)	1 bowl	3	5.8%
Nedd The Smith	(August 1811 or later)	1 Pitcher	5	4.8%
	(August 1811 or later)	1 bowl	2/6	
Webb's Moses	November 30, 1811	1 Mug	2/6	1.0%
Jim Aimy	(January 6, 1812 or later)	1 Coffee pot	7/6	4.7%
	(January 6, 1812 or later)	2(Pottery?) 1 broke	4/3	

Given the generic descriptions of their ceramic purchases, it is difficult to say whether these men were participating in the kind of conspicuous or competitive consumption frequently attributed to their free white contemporaries (Martin 1994) or to other enslaved consumers (Galle 2010). The only example of a form associated with exotic practices is the coffee pot that Jim Aimy purchased for 7 shillings, 6 pence – the most expensive ceramic purchase in the Ledger, worth more than six plates.

Ceramics were far from the most important items these men bought, whether measured by number of purchases or money spent. As Martin (2008:75–84) found with consumers in the Virginia backcountry a generation earlier, cloth and clothing, alcohol, and foodstuffs that could not be produced locally made up the bulk of purchases. Currel spent nearly half of his money on sugar – whiskey and clothing-related purchases were a distant second. The bowl he bought[4] represented less than 6% of the value of his total purchases. Nedd The Smith was more typical, being heavily invested in clothing. In the course of a little more than a year, he spent 10 times as much on items like a necklace and four pairs of shoes

as he did on sugar and whiskey combined. But for him, too, the pitcher and bowl he bought were less than 5% of his total purchases. In terms of outlays, at least, ceramics were not a conspicuous element of consumption for these men.

Jim Ray, who only came to the Stagville store on two occasions, represents something of an anomaly. He spent by far the largest proportion of his expenditures on ceramics. On his first visit, he acquired half a dozen earthen plates. One suspects there is a story behind his next purchase: another half dozen plates – and a chest lock. Nearly half of his total outlays were for ceramics to use on the table but – like others who had much smaller investments in such goods – he was reproducing patterns of ceramic use familiar from the foregoing archaeological analyses. The other vessels recorded in the ledger were also mostly forms for the table: Jim Aimy's coffee pot was by far the most expensive single vessel; Lewis Wms. was another purchaser of earthen plates; Webb's Moses bought a mug.

What about utilitarian forms? From Baker's advertisement it is clear that such goods were often offered (see also Martin 2008:58). The only example in the Slave Ledger is Frank Kennon's "jug, 2 qts." This jug may have been more instrumental in its function even than its form would suggest. The men paid their debts primarily by providing commodities in exchange, most frequently cords of wood, although a notable number of credits involved craft items. Jim Aimy brought in coopered goods; Lewis Wms. made bedcords. Nedd The Smith's purchase of finery like a necklace is balanced by the wool cards he obtained on his next shopping expedition. Frank Kennon once offered gallons of (preserved?) grapes. In cases such as his, our petty consumer may also have been a classic petty capitalist, with his consumption acting to facilitate production (Rothstein 2005).

Jim Aimy illustrates another way in which petty consumerism engaged broader economic systems. While men like Webb's Moses dealt mainly in cash, Jim Aimy received a large proportion of credit from other account holders, indicating that he channeled third-party transactions through the store in order to realize their market value. Although shoppers created the most value by exchanging raw commodities with the storeowner, the greatest number of individual credits came from transactions with other account holders (Figure 7.3a and b). Credits from the storeowner for specific tasks (such as dressing stoves) or days worked were the *smallest* number of transactions and also represented the *least* amount of money. Thus, the act of consuming was frequently underwritten quite literally by social relationships, for the most part among the residents of quarters, not between owners and owned. Far from being a pale imitation of conspicuous consumption, these instances of petty consumerism were essential to the functioning of the economy. They prompted the production of essential commodities, added liquidity, acted as a social safety valve, and indeed subsidized slaveholding itself.

Petty consumers at home

Though the point of acquisition as captured in the Slave Ledger is important, we also wish to examine the long-term cumulative effect of such moments, as well as the goods that came into plantation households by diverse routes and strategies. We turn again to the archaeological record. The ceramic assemblage from the Stagville Slave Cabin takes us past the point of purchase to examine what enslaved – and later free – plantation laborers did with ceramics, integrating this class of consumer good into their lives.

The assemblage represents a long span of time: the refined earthenwares are evenly divided among creamware, pearlware, and whiteware. Excavations at the site uncovered a stone foundation, dry-laid and set on a layer of hard red clay, containing whiteware and cut nails, leading the excavation team to conclude that the structure post-dated 1820 (Garlid 1979:12–13). Artifacts such as Pepsi-Cola bottles and electrical components, as well as oral histories, indicate an occupation well into the 20th century. Do patterns of use suggest conspicuous consumption or perhaps more general participation in the "sustained reaction" that characterized 19th- and 20th-century consumerism (McCracken 1987:143)?

There is no doubt that the Slave Cabin ceramics mirror some broader consumer trends. But what do these patterns of decoration, ware, and form signify if we examine them through the lens of petty consumerism? For example, Martin (1994) observed for the 18th century that assemblages often contain porcelain intended to consume exotic beverages like tea, even as people continued to use less-expensive refined earthenwares for the table. At the Slave Cabin, too, porcelain was associated with tea forms (77% of fragments), whereas refined earthenwares were primarily table vessels (80% of fragments). More generally, ware types normally associated with table forms far outnumbered utilitarian wares in the Slave Cabin assemblage (305 sherds to 22 sherds) and these refined wares (for example, creamware, porcelain, white salt glaze stoneware) were in fact manifested predominantly as flat forms (120 sherds to 66 sherds; 99 unidentified by form). Utilitarian ware types (common coarse earthenware and American stoneware, for example) were rare and overwhelmingly associated with hollow forms.[5] And the exception proves the rule – the only table form in a typically utilitarian ware type was a locally made, slip-decorated redware *plate*. Given this overwhelming association between coarsewares and hollow forms and between refined wares and flat forms, petty considerations about vessel function are just as likely to explain the ware types in the assemblage as emulation or fashion.

There seems to have been little call for ceramic hollow forms, either for the table or for utilitarian purposes such as food storage. Most of the stoneware storage jar fragments from the Stagville Slave Cabin came from the surface collection and appear to represent a single vessel. Ceramic bowls of any ware were totally absent. Even among the refined wares, flat form

fragments were one-third again as common as hollow form fragments. This finding echoes the results from the Slave Ledger, in which plates significantly outnumbered hollow forms by a factor of three to one. While there is no information in the text about ware beyond the modifier "Earthen," the forms are named. Only one item, the jug purchased by Frank Kennon, was for storage. All other items were for the table, representing 90% of the total outlay (£2.8.0) for ceramics and 96% of the vessels described by form (N = 24).

Another parallel between the Ledger and the Cabin assemblage is the scarcity of sets. Analyses of conspicuous ceramic consumption emphasize the growing importance of matched sets (Carson 2003:357). Most Ledger purchases were of a single vessel. It would have been difficult to ensure exact matching – if in fact that were desirable.

Residents of the Slave Cabin discarded sherds from a mismatched array of vessels, as has been seen at contemporaneous sites elsewhere in North America's African diaspora. Whether taken as a whole or separated into three phased assemblages (ca.1800, 1850, 1900), the Slave Cabin ceramics are diverse. The 20 decorated whiteware sherds demonstrated the wide range of options available to the site's occupants over this span: four colors of transfer printing as well as hand-painted and sponged decoration with several different color palettes, in addition to factory-made slip decoration and decalcomania designs. Even the relatively well-circumscribed category of shell-edged pearlware encompassed considerable diversity: the 18 fragments included a minimum of nine edge and color combinations. The vessels represented by these sherds may not have been in use simultaneously – gracing a table side-by-side. However, the diversity of decorative styles within the three phases and within any given ceramic ware type suggests that more conspicuous (and costly) decorated wares were one-offs rather than elements of matched sets.

Michael Dietler (2010:218–222) notes that consumption often takes different forms in colonial (we would add, plantation) contexts. Far from indicating the incomplete, or flawed, emulation of metropolitan standards, the difference may signal a deliberate inversion of foreign ideals or represent "selective appropriation and indigenization" of consumer goods and relations. In contexts similar to the dwelling at Stagville, deviations have been explained as adherence to an alternate aesthetic (Wilkie and Farnsworth 2010:156–159), and to processes of salvage, barter, and other means of reuse (Mullins 1999:150; Young 2004).

It is tempting to attribute these distributions – the relationship between forms and wares, and the variety of decorative genres – to taste-driven choices made by the Cabin's residents. But as Rothstein (2005:290) notes, selection among consumer goods is construed as a "choice" in no small part because those doing the choosing have so few arenas in which to exercise their agency. More than competitive, conspicuous consumption, petty consumerism explains the variety of ceramics found at the site.

Discussion

To contextualize these patterns of purchase and discard at one site within the broader trends defined at the outset of this chapter, we return to a critical consideration of the uses these ceramics served, and the way in which these functional requirements may have varied by status. Ceramics are inextricably entangled with food. Certainly, the new fashionable wares of the 18th and 19th centuries arose to accommodate and establish new foods and ways of eating. But what was the role of "small ware too tedious to mention"? In what ways did a household's position within the plantation economic structure shape the ceramic assemblage?

Bloch's study demonstrates that overall, the discard of ceramics for storage declined over time on southern plantations. However, when assemblages from the broader dataset of DAACS plantations are divided by occupation and proximity to the main house, a more complex pattern emerges, especially in the later sites (Figure 7.2a and 7.2b). Households closer to the planter's house, typically associated with domestic servants or skilled workers, show declining use of utilitarian forms over time. In contrast, households distant from the planter's house, associated more with field laborers, maintain a baseline threshold of discard over time. This result suggests a sustained investment in food storage. People living closer to the main house, and more entangled with the planter's household, may not have received bulk provisions or have been expected to generate and store their own sustenance. Food storage for these households was outsourced to the kitchen or home farm larder, or supplanted by practices like "toting" of leftovers from planters' meals. The different ratios of table to utilitarian forms or wares between house and field laborers was likely not driven by taste, or access to the market, but by rather by degree of access to centralized plantation food resources.

Food was an instrument of power on the plantation. Owners could control allotments, withhold it as punishment (or incentive), or give it as a gift. But power, meaning "the probability that an actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out [her] own will despite resistance" (Weber 1978) cuts both ways. Field laborers had greater needs for independent storage, but perversely, also greater latitude to determine what to produce and store. These people produced, prepared, and appropriated food, in addition to buying it from and selling it to plantation owners in a set of relations that paralleled, but did not always coincide with, their respective roles as makers and takers.

The increase that we see in the proportion of refined earthenwares does not necessarily represent the emulation of elite foodways, nor the decline of eating traditions often associated with the quarter. We know this because of our attention to the goods whose consumption is usually unnoticed – inconspicuous, even. For the laborers who lived on plantations after Emancipation, storing food within the individual dwelling and procuring foods

that arrived in durable containers became important strategies (Figure 7.3b). The post-Emancipation residents of the Slave Cabin at Stagville, for instance, no longer served a resident landowner. It is likely that, like the field laborers at the pre-Emancipation Poplar Forest Quarter, they used higher numbers of storage vessels. However, given shifts in manufacturing, instead of stoneware bottles and other utilitarian ceramics, we see Mason jars, pectin bottles, and fragments of unidentifiable sheet metal – the remnants of cans.

The 20th-century residents of the Slave Cabin consumed store-bought foods and controlled production for their own household in a way that their predecessors did not. Our ability to disentangle the effects of Emancipation from general trends in ceramic manufacturing and retailing depended on a large comparative dataset and an attention to the "other sorts of small ware too tedious to mention" that reveal the contours of consumption as a daily practice as well as a symbolically-charged event.

These nuances make petty consumerism important to consumption at large. More than status-seeking was at work on plantations. Understanding the full scope of consumption, and its relation to production, requires that we examine not only the assemblages of small-scale consumers, who had no hope of overcoming their legal status via sophisticated manipulation of symbolic goods, but also the wares that are by no one's estimation objects of allure. Historical archaeologists have long focused on desire for high-style ceramics and their affordability (Miller 1991). Here we have defined access as availability that takes into account not only purchasing opportunities but lifeways and power relations that prompt specific kinds of consumption. Consumption in this sense is an active process of investment focused on a range of priorities, from basic subsistence to costly signaling. By expanding the definition of what artifacts constitute consumer goods, petty consumerism not only provides evidence of people's participation in the market, but facilitates fine-grained analyses of what they purchased and why.

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Notes

1 The most prevalent ceramic types – refined earthenwares such as whiteware and ironstone/white granite and a variety of porcellaneous wares – became common after 1820 and remained fundamentally the same into the 20th century. While

certain decorative techniques or decorative genres are useful temporal markers for these ware types (for ware types and ranges used here, see DAACS 2015), artifact counts for these sherds are dwarfed by the preponderance of a few long-lived types, such as undecorated whiteware. The dominance of particular ware types compresses assemblage dates around their manufacturing midpoints. Furthermore, these plantation assemblages may contain an unusually high proportion of older ceramics. This has been found on a number of sites occupied by African Americans both enslaved and free. In such cases, the MCDs for later 19th- and 20th-century sites skew earlier than actual site occupation.

2 This figure represents a maximum number of individuals. For example, Grandsir Nedd and Nedd The Smith are likely two different people. "Ned" is also treated as a separate individual for the purposes of this analysis.

3 Their purchases are recorded in another set of books dating back as early as 1767. The archive also includes daybooks and ledgers of post-Emancipation purchases for the years 1881–1894.

4 The entry includes the annotation "for W. Fort."

5 Fisher's exact: $p = 0.00003$.

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