

Broken Chains and Subverted Plans: Ethnicity, Race, and Commodities. Christopher C. Fennell. University Press of Florida: Gainesville, 2017, 316 pp. \$84.95, cloth. ISBN 978-0-8130-6245-7.

Historical archaeologists have long celebrated the ways everyday people defy the ideological, economic, and social machinations of elite. Christopher C. Fennell's *Broken Chains and Subverted Plans: Ethnicity, Race, and Commodities* is squarely situated at the heart of that tradition, probing how a host of marginalized peoples have ignored, subverted, and resisted dominant material and social practices. Like most historical archaeologists in this tradition, Fennell uses rather mundane material things and a dense body of prosaic primary documents to paint a picture of creative, conscious, and defiant everyday people. Fennell's distinctive position in this scholarship is his focus on the ways ethnicity and racialized collectives shape such resistance. In opposition to studies that focus on economic inequality, racist ideology, or systemic domination, Fennell's analysis stresses the highly local cohesiveness of marginalized social collectives and their persistent, everyday subversion of domination.

Fennell's case study data focuses on two regional ethnic groups: German Americans in the 18th and 19th century Virginia backcountry and African Americans in the 19th century Illinois town of New Philadelphia. The novel juxtaposition of rural Virginia and a modest Illinois town focuses much of its analysis on the rich documentary and archaeological data from Virginia.

Nevertheless, the consistent analytic thread is the ways backcountry Virginia farmers and budding Illinois urbanizers subverted dominant marketing, economic, and social strategies. Fennell acknowledges that broad systems of economic domination and xenophobia shaped Americans' lives since the 18th century, but he persistently frames agency as an expression of local social and ethnic identity rather than a reflection of systemic domination. In Virginia, for instance, attempts to reproduce and expand elite domination came in the form of a broadly defined consumer revolution. In Fennell's hands the transformations in 18th century consumption reflected capitalists' efforts to impose mass-produced things on rural households and integrate peripheral farm communities into far-reaching social and economic networks. Fennell uses a dense primary documentary record as well as archaeological material culture to argue that many farm families rejected much of the ideology linked to mass production and consumption. Fennell suggests that the consumer revolution was "thwarted" in the Virginia backcountry, where German Americans held onto distinctive ceramic styles and architecture reflecting the sway of ethnic affiliations and community social networks. That picture of the 18th century hazards painting a rhetorical picture of the consumer revolution as mass-produced goods more-or-less blanketing colonial North America; even in urban centers scholars have documented vast diversity in American consumer patterns. The meaning of mass-produced British things is largely dissected by Fennell in terms of their quantities, which may well reflect an absence of consumer desire for those things. Nevertheless, there is not especially sustained consideration of British goods' aesthetic or physical distinctions from local goods. Despite their modest quantities, perhaps those things had elevated significance precisely because of their departure from local domestic materiality.

In the African-American community of New Philadelphia, Illinois domination came in various forms of structural and overt racism that aspired to reproduce racially based social and material inequality. The audacious ambition to found a predominately African-American town in the heart of Illinois was in itself a rejection of structural racism, but New Philadelphia declined

significantly when it was bypassed by the railroad just after the Civil War. Fennell persuasively argues that the railroad's path intentionally skirted New Philadelphia, but he cautions that scholars should not simply see the town's subsequent demise as yet another example of racism's historical determinism. Instead, Fennell suggests that African American residents' relocation to other places should be viewed as evidence of the ways people of color persevered. Fennell aspires to paint New Philadelphia's abandonment less as a "failure" dictated by racism than yet another episode of structural racism African American tactically and thoughtfully negotiated.

The central threads of *Broken Chains and Subverted Plans* defend ethnic and social collectivity, persistently championing the everyday agency of local collectives of people sharing some heritage. This perspective tends to question the limits of domination on marginalized social agents, which echoes historical archaeology's common celebration of everyday agency. Scholars focused on sober analyses of systemic domination may find Fennell's perspective somewhat optimistic, and the thoughtful agents peopling the study are perhaps like we fancy ourselves to be. Nevertheless, Fennell's study dignifies the heritage and agency of everyday people who have been otherwise rendered in shallow or distorted terms or simply ignored.

Paul R. Mullins
Department of Anthropology
Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis
Indianapolis IN 46202
317-274-9847
paulmull@iupui.edu