



Memorial: Paul R. Mullins (1962–2023)

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Paul Mullins (Fig. 1), professor of historical archaeology, passed away on 17 April 2023, after a year-long struggle with brain cancer. He was 60 years old. He served as a professor of anthropology at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), from 1999 to 2023. He is sorely missed by his wife, Marlys Pearson, and son, Aidan Mullins-Pearson, as well as by his colleagues, his students, and the residents of the Black neighborhoods adjacent to the campus with whom he worked. Paul completed his M.A. at the University of Maryland, where he was a student of Mark Leone. He then continued his Ph.D. studies at the University of Massachusetts under the guidance of Bob Paynter. Paul returned to Maryland, this time to Annapolis, to conduct his doctoral research and defended his dissertation, *The Contradictions of Consumption: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture, 1850–1930*, in 1996 (Mullins 1996). Paul joined the faculty at IUPUI in 1999, where he taught and conducted research until his premature death.

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Fig. 1 Paul and son Aidan visiting the border between Finland and Russia, 2015. (Photo by Timo Ylimaunu.)

Paul was a university teacher, but he was more than that: He shared his research with the Black neighborhood residents in Indianapolis whose histories might have been lost had not Paul done so much to document their displacement from their communities due to campus expansion, highway construction, and urban renewal. He taught people how to use the tools with which he was so expert so that they could explore their own histories. He wanted to expose and make visible the structures of racism and injustice that had shaped Indianapolis's past and that continue

to produce inequalities in the present. During the academic year 2016–2017, Paul and his colleague, Professor Susan Hyatt, were awarded a Chancellor’s Fellowship, which allowed them to carry out a joint research project entitled *Invisible Indianapolis: Race, Heritage, and Community Memory in the Circle City*. As part of this project they held several public events where they shared stories of the ways structural forces had shaped Indianapolis’s contemporary landscapes. Paul also shared this work in a series of publicly accessible blog posts (Hyatt and Mullins 2019–2020).

Paul was a dedicated historical archaeologist; he was also a humanist, a great colleague, and an inspiring teacher. Although much of his work was in his hometown of Indianapolis, he also did extensive research in Finland, and he had a deep interest in material culture on a global scale. He was enthusiastic about examining and analyzing the material culture of everyday life, from bric-a-brac to tableware, from scrapbooks to bikes, and extending to a range of built, abandoned, and razed landscapes. For Paul, historical archaeology was a methodological instrument that could be used to explore and interpret the world around us. He analyzed his research data “through interdisciplinary scientific methods, stylistic analysis, oral histories, and textual research” (Mullins 2021:6). Paul’s books, articles, and blog posts were so insightful, clever, and thoughtful that they naturally reflected an image of himself as a very warm, engaged, and respectful person. He always had time to listen to other people, and he delighted in investigating ordinary people’s stories, along with probing the not-so-ordinary materialities of the world around us.

Aside from the *Invisible Indianapolis* blog, Paul contributed to a short-lived blog on historical archaeology in Finland. Through this blog he made visible his life and that of his family during the semester they spent in Oulu on a Fulbright Scholarship in the fall of 2012. The Faculty of Humanities at the University of Oulu granted him the honorary title of docent in 2013. As he always did, Paul recorded some very interesting observations about life in a northern Finnish city and at a Finnish university, comparing them to life in the United States. What turned out to be very near and dear to Paul’s heart and stomach was Finnish candy. As he wrote on his blog: “Finnish grocery stores really shine in the candy aisle” (Mullins 2012a). When Paul and his son were leaving Oulu to return home, they almost left their clothing behind

because they needed more space in their luggage for all the different kinds of candy they wanted to bring back. Paul’s book on the significance of doughnuts in American life (Mullins 2008) clearly reflects his passion for sweets. That passion, however, did not prevent him from also being an athletic runner and cyclist. He took part in cycling and long-distance running races, and he ran his last half marathon just two months before he was diagnosed with cancer.

Paul’s main blog page was *Archaeology and Material Culture*, <<https://paulmullins.wordpress.com/>>, which he began in December 2011 and continued almost up to his death. His posts revealed him as a modern kind of classical humanist and anthropologist who was able to produce thoughtful analyses and interpretations of the material world around him, especially in the U.S., but also in many different locations in Europe.

Paul had a great sense of humor, and his laugh was great to hear. His positive attitude and curiosity about the world undoubtedly helped him examine and analyze difficult and unpleasant topics in his research. He understood the role archaeology has to play in revealing the historical realities of some sites that mark humanity’s darkest heritage. He thought archaeology on the sites of concentration camps revealed “the power of material culture to evoke the depths of terror and say something truly consequential ... the most modest material things that archaeology recovers—like shoes, keys, jewelry, combs—begin to undermine the powerless anonymity the Nazis hoped to impose on their captives long after their deaths” (Mullins 2012b).

I was lucky to travel with Paul to several dark heritage sites in Finland as well as elsewhere in Europe. In June of 2018, we drove some 5000 km around Finland, stopping to visit some of the darker sites of the Finnish 1918 Civil War. Our goal was to compare Civil War memorials in the U.S. and Finland and to evaluate the kinds of healing and reconciliation processes that had taken place in each country. While the healing process and its material implications were totally different in the U.S. than they were in Finland and post-Cold War period Eastern European countries, we also found some similarities, including the removal of Confederate memorials from public spaces in the U.S. and the removal of Soviet monuments from similar public locations in Eastern Europe (Mullins 2018).

Paul was the president of the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) from 2012 to 2013. Most recently he served on the SHA Awards Committee. He was awarded the Dorothy Riker Hoosier Historical award by the Indiana Historical Society in 2020 and, two years later, was appointed as an IUPUI chancellor's professor, the highest form of recognition in the Indiana University system. In 2022, the city/county council of Indianapolis presented him with a special resolution, recognizing him "for his contributions to IUPUI and to advancing the public's understanding of the role of the color line in shaping the history and contemporary landscape of Indianapolis."

Paul supervised doctoral students in the U.S., at the University of Oulu, and elsewhere. He was an outstanding mentor to younger scholars, and his legacy will be preserved in the field of global historical archaeology. He was a great friend and will always be remembered for his fondness for paisley shirts, his affection for Finnish candies, and his tendency to send funny messages at almost any time of the night or day. His passing leaves an enormous void in the lives of all those who loved him and whom he touched through both his research and his friendship.

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