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Archaeology and Activism of the Past and Present

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> Their work was not for themselves alone, nor for the present generation, but for all women of all time. The hopes of posterity were in their hands and they determined to place on record for the daughters of 1976, the fact that their mothers of 1876 had asserted their equality of rights, and impeached the government of that day for its injustice toward woman. Thus, in taking a grander step toward freedom than ever before, they would leave one bright remembrance for the women of the next centennial.
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> —Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*

INTRODUCTION

Marches on Washington. Strikes. Sit-ins. While these may be the most cogent images typically conjured up by the word "activism"—including the disruption of the 1876 Centennial celebration in Philadelphia by suffragists referred to in the quote above—they are by no means the only actions that may be deemed activist. Rather, everyday action can inform on attempts to change the social order in various ways, both in the past as well as in the present. In this chapter, I will discuss what I foresee as the potential for an archaeology of activism; how this may be relevant to activists of the present; and what implications there may be—both profoundly positive and contentious—for such uses of the past within a context of activism. Research currently ongoing at the historic homesite of Matilda Joslyn Gage, a significant figure within the nineteenth-century woman's suffrage movement, provides a background for this discussion.

Since the 1990s and its twin seminal events, the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA 1990; Echo-Hawk 2000) and the African Burial Ground controversy in New York City (LaRoche and Blakey 1997; Mack and Blakey 2004), archaeologists have attempted to come to terms with our roles as interpreters of the past and our obligation to descendant and stakeholding groups who also hold a significant interest in the past. This process fits within the post-processual theoretical shift within the discipline, which has called for a move away from the search for universalizing truths of the New Archaeology and for a more active engagement with the diversity of interpretations of the past (Hodder 1985; Preucel 1995). Likewise, increasing engagement with postcolonial theory has brought attention to the colonialist legacy of the traditional archaeological enterprise and called for a fundamental restructuring of the methods and motivations behind research. It is not enough to think of relevant descendant groups as the racialized, socioeconomic, or national "other." All non-archaeologists must be seen as stakeholders: "the lessons of consultation learned elsewhere in the world have not been taken to heart in areas in which issues of identity and control *appear* unproblematical, but may not be so. It may be that postcolonial concerns need to infuse the heartlands of colonialism" (Gosden 1999:257; emphasis added). As I will discuss later, we as archaeologists would also do well to re-situate ourselves as stakeholders beyond the typical professional sense.

Resulting from these broader cultural and theoretical trends, some archaeologists have come to critically examine the purposes of our research and have decided that the best route is to partner with various communities to conduct research that the community wants or needs done (Derry and Malloy 2003). Consequently, some of us have come to conceive of ourselves as activists who utilize our skills and methods to further the goals of non-archaeologist interest groups. I believe that, in tandem with these other types of involvement, studies of historical activists can provide profound links to activists—archaeologists and others—of the present. Such partnering can be beneficial to both archaeologists and communities as the resulting research will not disappear in the annals of an archive; but rather, archaeology's real-world relevance can be shown to its full potential by building connections between past and present communities (e.g., Wilkie 2001). In entering the fray of contemporary sociopolitical debates through such research, however, we may also find, as I will discuss, our work and ourselves embroiled in contestations over the past that we may not have been aware of to begin with. Such considerations do not suggest that we not become involved in sociopolitical concerns, as I would argue that we cannot; rather, such examples remind us to choose our alliances and involvements carefully.

ACTIVIST ARCHAEOLOGY

In recent years, a fundamental shift has occurred regarding how archaeologists see archaeological practice and the question of "truth." This has been brought on in large part by increasing interaction with and powerful critique at the hands of alternate discourses such as feminist, indigenous, and postcolonial thought (Gero and Conkey 1991; Swidler et al. 1997; Smith 1999; Watkins 2001). These discourses have primarily highlighted the situated nature of knowledge and research practice and critiqued the taken-for-granted notion that archaeological research can "benefit humanity" in some abstract sense without actively engaging with the sphere of politicized practice and its consequences.

A realist approach to science is one means by which our archaeological research can be theorized as departing from a positivist framework of knowledge and at the same time avoid being lost in the murky waters of relativism (McGuire 2004; Wood 2002; Wylie 1989). The realist view of science argues for the existence of a real world independent of our senses; however, as we can only know the world through the mediation of our human mind and senses, our knowledge is neither "an honest reflection of that reality, nor is it simply fabricated" (McGuire 2004:3). Through the use of multiple, independent lines of evidence in our research, moreover, we can utilize their mutually constraining and enabling properties to evaluate possible interpretations, arriving at a mitigated objective knowledge (Wylie 1989). These concepts are significant because they recognize the situated and constructive nature of our archaeological research practice and the knowledge which results in an understanding which is crucial for partnering with non-archaeological interest groups, but they also suggest ways to avoid nihilistic conclusions which question our ability to produce anything of value.

With that said, it is important to recognize that our practice is inherently political, from our choice of sites to study (or not) and why, to our research relationships with non-archaeologists, to how and to whom we present our research findings. As Wylie (2005) has noted, archaeologists have traditionally established our professional identity as in opposition to non-archaeologists with an interest in the past and, in the process, have allied ourselves with science and its search for "significant truths." What has not always been recognized is the fact that such significant truths are themselves context-dependent and therefore not universal or objective (Wylie 2005).

Following these realizations, more and more calls for a socially relevant and politically engaged brand of archaeological practice have been advanced (Hamilakis 2007; McGuire 2004, 2008; Smith 1999; Wood 2002). As Randall

McGuire (2004) has noted, archaeology has always served particular interests, mainly those of the middle class; thus, fears regarding how our objectivity may be tainted by politics miss the point. Instead, McGuire (2003) suggests a trinity of ethical obligations that archaeologists have: to the archaeological record, to a variety of publics, and to each other as professionals. Thus, our ethical responsibilities ought to be squarely refocused on groups outside of the discipline as well as within. Keeping this in mind, I would argue that in conceptualizing our identity as activists as well as archaeologists, the use of archaeology in tandem with the push for social change can successfully challenge current socioeconomic and political conditions, denaturalize stereotypes, and re-assert the presence of active agents in the past. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) has noted, "silences" can be produced in historical accounts during the creation of sources, archives, and the historical narrative; archaeology, due to its focus on the materiality of past life, can help counter these silences. These considerations can also be brought to the fore through an archaeological study of past activists, such as the research currently being conducted at the Matilda Joslyn Gage house in Fayetteville, New York.

ARCHAEOLOGIES OF ACTIVISM

Studies of past groups and individuals who worked to effect social change can, I suggest, effectively couple with our own commitments to social and political activism in the present. Through the examination of consciously political contexts we can accomplish a number of goals. By articulating the processes by which current sociopolitical and economic conditions came to be, we can denaturalize the received historical narrative and show how current conditions were not inevitable (cf. Leone 1982). Stereotypes, such as those attending to gender roles and capabilities in the past, can be dismantled by uncovering evidence of actual practices. In so doing we may also assert the presence of active agents in the past by providing fine-grained details of everyday life, with its attendant challenges, choices, and resistances. Such studies also have the potential to shed light on the various uses of material culture to reflect and create meaning in the past, through studying the material strategies of historically known activists as recovered by excavation of associated domestic sites or other loci of organizing. Various projects in the Central New York region have to date looked at such contexts of historic activists, such as Gerrit Smith (Kruczek-Aaron 2002; Wurst 2002), Harriet Tubman (Ryan and Armstrong 2000), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Bevan 1986; Griswold and Dimmick 1999; Moyer 2005; Ping Hsu and Towle 1983), Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock (Moyer 2005; Pendery and Griswold 1996, 2000), and the Syracuse, New York,

Wesleyan Methodist Church, home to an abolitionist congregation (Armstrong and Wurst 2003).

Activist contexts can provide a window onto groups that consciously lived a critique of normative society, like intentional or utopian communities (cf. Tarlow 2002). As discussed by Sarah Tarlow (2002:318), such studies can both explode hegemonic notions of how spaces and social groupings such as households or churches functioned in the past and challenge the perceived homogeneity of the nineteenth century by focusing on known incidences of dissidence. This is evident at a site such as the Gage house, which, although a domestic context and a historic house museum in the making, is significant in that its interpretive emphasis is on its status as the home and activist base of a nineteenth-century feminist; visitors to the house are greeted by an exclamation, "Welcome to the home of a lawbreaker!" (Sally Roesch Wagner, personal communication 2005). As it can be argued that one of the more pernicious legacies of the nineteenth century has been the concept of the "separate spheres"—which defined the domestic as feminine, apolitical, and consumption oriented, in contrast to the public, which was masculine, political, and focused instead on production (Kerber 1988; Wurst 2003)—sites such as the Gage house can help challenge such thinking, which relegates the household to the backburner of social change. Indeed, even the origins of historic house museums in the United States are implicated in this restrictive and idealized notion of the household. As Jamie Brandon and Kerri Barile (2004) have noted, the first historic house museums sought to enshrine the domestic contexts of the founding fathers and, in so doing, established assumptions regarding the form and function of an idealized household. This proscriptive ordering of the past has, consequently, colored our views of what kinds of actions were possible in such contexts. By looking at contexts in which activists lived and worked, we can explore departures from the hegemonic discourses of a period like this in known, and hopefully well-documented, contexts.

In material terms, activist contexts give us the opportunity to examine the materiality of consciously political identities. These sites can be an ideal arena in which to examine the constitutive, rather than reflective, nature of material culture in everyday life as we can examine how activists consciously manipulated the material world to their advantage in various ways and in differing contexts. It may also help us break out of the problem of equating "mass-manufactured goods . . . [with] mass-manufactured culture" (Little 1997:225) and enable a greater recognition of variation in the use of material culture (Beaudry et al. 1991; de Certeau 1984). Patterns which may be found archaeologically include the consumption of particular products rather than others, such as ceramic table and teawares decorated with abolitionist senti-

ments (Margolin 2002) or goods produced by non-slave labor, which proponents of the Free Produce Movement supported (Faulkner 2006; Glickman 2004). Likewise, conspicuous non-consumption of fashionable goods, such as that practiced by Gerrit Smith (Kruczek-Aaron 2002), is another such tactic that may be visible in the archaeological record. Finally, given that material culture lends itself to a multiplicity of meanings through practice, we may find that common material goods acquire differing meanings within these activist contexts. Ongoing research at the Matilda Joslyn Gage house in Fayetteville, New York, provides one such example.

THE MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE HOUSE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

Matilda Joslyn Gage, Activist

My current research is centered on the house and property of Matilda Joslyn Gage, an activist involved in the abolition and woman suffrage movements of the nineteenth century. This upstate New York house was occupied by Gage, her husband, and their four children beginning in 1854 and ending with Gage's death in 1898. The house was situated among a constellation of sites associated with radical sociopolitical reform activism occurring in the "Burned-Over District" (Cross 1950) of central New York during this period, many of which have been or are currently under study by archaeologists as mentioned earlier. Like these other sites, the Gage house functioned as a public, activist locus as well as private space for the Gage family.

Gage was intimately involved in various high-profile social movements of the period, including abolition and woman suffrage, as well as those pursuing Native American sovereignty and Freethought/the separation of church and state. She was primarily known, however, for her work toward woman suffrage. Along with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gage was a founding member of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) in 1869 (Wagner 1998:8). The three women were known at the time as the "suffrage triumvirate." Gage's name has since largely been lost to history, arguably because of her radicalism in seeing the church as the basis of women's oppression; this sentiment was most notably expressed in her 1893 book entitled *Woman, Church and State* (Gage 1998 [1893]). Ultimately, Gage would part ways with Anthony, and to a lesser extent with Stanton, over the controversial 1890 merger between the NWSA and the American Woman Suffrage Association (a more conservative group), which was orchestrated by Anthony, although the three women spent a total of forty-plus years working together to achieve woman suffrage. Gage organized and led the New York State division of the NWSA during the 1870s and 1880s, while holding various high-level offices in the national organization and assisting with convention arrangements (Boland 2006:4–5). With Stanton and Anthony, Gage co-wrote the first three volumes of *The History of Woman Suffrage,* published between 1881 and 1887, which exhaustively documented the first decades of the movement. In 1872, Gage and Anthony traveled Monroe County, New York, giving speeches to publicize Anthony's arrest for voting in the federal election and with the hope of swaying potential jurors. When a venue change switched the legal proceedings to nearby Ontario County, the two gave a combined thirty-seven speeches in twenty-two days within that county before the trial's beginning; Gage's speech was entitled "The United States on Trial, not Susan B. Anthony" (Wagner 1992:20–21). Although Anthony lost the case, it was an important and highly publicized test case regarding a woman's right to vote. In 1876, Gage and Anthony, again working together, led the public protest at the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia, where, refused permission by organizers to present their Woman's Declaration of Rights during the program, they interrupted the proceedings, presented acting Vice President Thomas Ferry with the declaration, and scattered additional copies through the crowd before holding their own protest convention nearby (Stanton et al. 1877:30). The incident was immortalized by Stanton, Anthony, and Gage in the *History of Woman Suffrage* in the quote that opened this chapter. As I will discuss later, the "daughters of 1976" to whom these suffragists dedicated their civil disobedience did indeed take note of their foremothers' actions.

Although Gage is perhaps best known for these daring, public acts, many (if not most) of her activist practices took place within her Fayetteville home. In addition to the management of a household which included her husband, children, and, at various times, aging parents, domestic servant(s), and boarders (clerks who worked in husband Henry's dry goods store), Gage's political engagements integrated her home into the public sphere. Here, she penned the articles on women inventors, which first made her name visible on the national front, published in *The Revolution,* the newspaper co-edited by Stanton and Parker Pillsbury (Boland 2006:4). In 1850, Gage signed a petition vowing to defy the newly passed Fugitive Slave law despite the six-month prison term, $1,000 standard fine, and $1,000 fine per fugitive helped, and the house has been documented by her children as being a stop on the Underground Railroad (Wagner 1998:4). Parts of the first three volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage* were compiled and written here, and accounts place such period notables as Lillie Devereux Blake, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gerrit Smith, Belva Lockwood, Lucretia Mott, William Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell Phillips as having visited the house (Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation 2006). Between 1878 and 1881, Gage edited the NWSA's official newspaper,

The National Citizen and Ballot Box, from the house, with Stanton and Anthony as corresponding editors and with the goal of "mak[ing] those women discontented who are now content" (Boland 2006:11; Wagner 1998:32). Clearly, the Gage house was not simply a domestic haven from the political cares of the world.

Archaeological Research

The Gage house and property are currently owned by the Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit historical foundation formed in 2000 by Gage researcher and expert Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner and a network of Gage descendants and enthusiasts. With the stated goal of "educating current and future generations about Gage's work and its power to drive contemporary radical social change," the foundation purchased the house and property in April of 2002 (Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation 2004). The house is currently being stabilized and restored to its 1870s appearance on the basis of photographs taken by Gage's son-in-law, author L. Frank Baum (of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* fame). As it was used as a multiple-unit rental property for years, significant work is needed to return the house to its Gage-era appearance. Upon completion, the house will be re-opened as a historic house museum with the purpose of interpreting Gage's life and works to visitors. The house is one of the few publicly accessible locations of antislavery and woman's history activity in the state of New York and is the only interpretive site where Baum spent time.

Archaeological research at the Gage house has been ongoing since the summer of 2005. In the summers of 2005 and 2006, shovel test pitting across the property identified the extent of archaeological deposits, probable locations of outbuildings, and the extent of disturbances from the twentieth-century uses of the property. Area excavations were conducted immediately behind the house in the summer of 2007, exposing a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sheet midden and intact outbuilding foundation. These excavations were conducted with the aid of participants in an archaeological field school offered through the University of California, Berkeley, as well as two short public field schools provided in partnership with the local chapter of the New York State Archaeological Society. Additional excavations in the summer of 2008 further investigated the outbuilding foundation and sheet midden found during the 2007 excavations.

The purpose of archaeological research on the property is twofold: to identify the evolution and uses of the yard space over time in order to inform the planned restoration of the property and to examine material culture from the nineteenth-century archaeological deposits on the property to gain insight into the household's daily practices. Thus far, the archaeological testing has recovered a variety of domestic artifacts, including ceramic teawares. In conjunction with what we know of the Gage household based on the documentary record, the recovery of this class of artifact suggests one example by which material culture was used differently in this household. While such analyses are necessarily preliminary at this early stage, this example highlights the potential for utilizing such activist-associated contexts as a means to interrogate how a diverse range of meanings could be assigned to mundane, mass-produced material culture through practice.

Most archaeological discussions of teawares within the context of nineteenth-century sites emphasize their feminine, middle-class connotations, in addition to their potential for association with sacred notions of the domestic sphere and family or, conversely, as socially competitive displays (Wall 1991, 1994; Wood 2004). Diana Di Zerega Wall's (1991, 1994) landmark work on the tea- and tablewares used in nineteenth-century New York City households emphasizes the distinction between teawares used for family meals and those used in socializing with non-family and the element of social competitiveness that they could reflect in the latter case. Gothic-style tea- and tablewares, in particular, have been seen as indicative of the perception of "the sacred aspect of women's domestic role within the ritual of family meals" and the cult of domesticity, which was held in sharp contrast to the public, competitive marketplace (Wall 1991:78–79). In the case of the Gage house, however, it is interesting to think of the teawares recovered, which include paneled Gothic-style vessels (the focus of Wall's [1992, 1991] analysis), within the context of the political activism that we know occurred within the household. As Gage sought to do no less than overthrow the existing gendered and racialized order of the period, it is highly unlikely that her use of these teawares can be taken as evidence of her adherence to the ideal of separate spheres or the cult of domesticity. Rather, I like to think of the potentially subversive nature of the "tea parties" that were held in the Gage house, as women like Gage, Stanton, and Anthony plotted revolution over cups of Earl Grey, and forged friendships and alliances which would form the basis of their political activism (cf. Wood 2004). Thus, activist contexts—as spaces where people in the past lived conscious critiques of society—can spur a reformulation of our conceptions of how material culture was potentially used in the past and, in the process, accomplish the goals mentioned earlier—denaturalize understandings of that past, dismantle stereotypes, and assert the presence of active agents.

Taking a practice-based approach, moreover, affords us the ability to consider all daily action and choices as informing, on some level, the constant reshaping and reproduction of ways of life (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984). This, in particular, is wherein special relevance may lie for current activists. Despite charges of methodological individualism (cf. McGuire and Wurst 2002), the

study of past individuals who sought to effect sociopolitical changes through their life's work provides a powerful sense of legitimacy for groups seeking such changes today. By studying the lives of those we know as historical activists through archaeology, we can add both nuance and texture to interpretations, which are already ongoing in the present, at historic sites such as the Gage house and by groups seeking to affect social change. Moreover, such studies can both highlight the struggles of the past that resulted in taken-for-granted rights today, such as woman suffrage and non-segregated education, and perhaps spur the contemporary public into more active civic engagement (Moyer 2005). The tactics utilized by activists in the past, including solidarity, decentralized authority, and fluid networks of actors, can also serve as a guide to activist action in the present (Sayers and Wood 2005). This focus on past activists, as part of conceptualizing ourselves as archaeologists and activists in the present, has an additional dimension, related to the power which controlling heritage confers to contemporary activists, which will be discussed below.

CONTEMPORARY ACTIVISTS AND THE PAST

As the decision to identify oneself as an activist is necessarily personal, I'd like to discuss my own reasons for involvement with the Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation as, in this case, it predated the archaeological research being conducted by about four years.

I came to be involved with the Gage Foundation while an undergraduate, as an outgrowth of a course I took on the history of the woman suffrage movement in 2000. I initially volunteered for the foundation in helping organize a conference and went on to conduct historical research and work as an administrative assistant of sorts until my graduation in 2002. As a student studying both women's studies and anthropology and fascinated with social reform movements, this participation allowed me to make concrete, tangible links between the academic studies of feminism I was ensconced in and feminist practice outside of academia; it also introduced me to the vibrant communities of social activists outside of my campus bubble. In so being involved, I came to understand myself as a feminist; and thus, in a very real sense my intellectual and philosophical development is inextricably bound to my experiences at the Gage house. In returning three years later to conduct research in part on this property, my history with the foundation placed me squarely as a stakeholder in the stories that are being told and meanings being made at this site—as a feminist excavating the home of a feminist and collaborating with a vibrant group of activists. This self-positioning as a stakeholder is, in an additional sense, beyond that based on a sense of archaeological professionalism, where it seems we typically position ourselves. This, I believe, is what positioning ourselves as activists in addition to archaeologists does—it redefines our position as a different kind of stakeholder.

As mentioned earlier, the goals of archaeological research on the Gage property are twofold: to provide information on the yard space to aid with its eventual restoration and to recover information on the household's daily practice through an examination of the associated archaeological deposits. Our partnership is beneficial for myself as well as the foundation. Most obviously, the partnership benefits me greatly, in that it allows me to conduct the necessary research. In a less vulgar sense, it also allows me to continue my relationship with a community of like-minded individuals and to put my archaeological research skills into practice to benefit a community that I wish to support. Additionally, such involvement helps me rehabilitate the image of archaeology in the eyes of the foundation; coming from a pro-indigenous standpoint, my proposal for archaeological research was initially seen as part of the same exploitative and ivory-tower type of research for which archaeology and anthropology have long been criticized. Such a challenge forces me to look carefully at my research practices and ensure that my work does not replicate such previously existing relations of dominance and exclusion.

Such research benefits the Gage Foundation, too, for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, it allows for compliance with state and federal historic preservation laws. Given that the rehabilitation and restoration of the property is being funded largely through state funding, compliance with these historic preservation laws is crucial. The research also provides additional information above and beyond that contained in the documentary record for the restoration of the property to its nineteenth-century appearance.

The fact that archaeology is often a topic of fascination for the general public, too, benefits the Gage Foundation. Since I started this project in 2005, it has been covered by the local television news and various newspapers (Ashley 2005; Moses 2005; *Post-Standard* 2006; Read 2006a, 2006b), which brings the foundation's existence and mission to the attention of a wide variety of people in the area. Likewise, archaeology's visibility brings to the site people, both local and non-local, who may not otherwise have heard of or been interested either in Gage as a historical figure or the foundation. Thus far, we've found that a simple sign on the side of the road (the property is located on the main thoroughfare through the village of Fayetteville), stating, "Archaeological Dig Today—Public Welcome," is quite effective in drawing in the public; several of such drive-by visitors have become some of our most devoted volunteers on the project. Visitors to the site have varied from neighbors and passers-by to a home-school student group. Informal site tours and exhibits of historical maps, documents, and artifacts found on the property allow visitors to learn more about the project in particular and Gage in general. A regularly updated

Web blog (GageDig Blog 2006) relates project goings-on and interpretations as they are formulated and provides a means by which visitors (as well as the foundation's members) can remain engaged in the project if interested. Finally, even though the theoretical trends within archaeology of late have emphasized the fluid and situational nature of knowledge production, conducting archaeological research at this historic site endows the Gage Foundation's work with a measure of scientific legitimacy as perceived by the public. While the process of research, which highlights the flexible nature of interpretations, is explained to the public, nonetheless, in my experience visitors tend to appreciate the findings—and relate to their children such findings—within the guise of scientific research, with an emphasis on "hard" science.

Thus, the archaeological research currently being conducted at the Gage house benefits both myself and the Gage Foundation in a variety of ways. Now, I'd like to move on to a discussion of how such uses of the past in the present function and highlight some of the issues that may be present in such uses. This is not to say that such collaborations between archaeologists and activists in creating knowledge about and utilizing the past shouldn't be pursued; rather, I argue that such potential tensions are all the more reason for such collaborations.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND CONTESTED PASTS IN THE PRESENT

Clearly, the past is often used as fodder for contemporary actions, as exemplified by the Gage Foundation in our discussion here. Various scholars have discussed the tension between such understandings of the past in the present and the intensely personal nature of identification with the past (Handsman and Leone 1989; Leone 1981; Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998; Shackel 2001; Wylie 1985). Leone (1981:12), in particular, remarked on the paradox inherent in uses of the past in the present, noting that "the past cannot be relived but knowledge of it is believed essential for our identity as a society." Thus, there is a sense of inevitable "difference" between the past that was and what we make of it in the present, and this lends itself to contention over the uses of history by current interest groups.

First, however, the fact that personal identification with the past provides a profound sense of support for current actions should not be overlooked. Writer Vivian Gornick (2006, 2005) has discussed how the writing of Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a fundamental influence on her own entrance into feminist activism. In addition, she has also discussed how the narrative of the struggle for woman suffrage functions as "a founding myth" for American feminists and

how "some of us can never get enough of it" (Gornick 2006:8). Wagner, executive director of the foundation, similarly came upon Gage at a crucial point in her own personal development as an activist in the antiwar and women's liberation movements (Sally Roesch Wagner, personal communication 2006). Rather than seeing this kind of personal attachment as a weakness, as something to be suspicious of, I would argue that it demonstrates the power of history and provides a strong argument for continually pursuing a varied and detailed knowledge of the past. In short, this sense of identification is often the same reason that we as archaeologists come to be involved in what we do, and the significance of opportunities to be a part of the process of constructing such knowledge should not be understated.

The inescapable distance between the past and the present (Leone 1981) and the fact that our knowledge of the world is mediated by our imperfect human senses (McGuire 2004), however, do lend themselves to conflict between different groups with respect to the meaning of the past. As Paul Shackel (2001:3) has noted, "The tension between and within groups who struggle for control over the collective public memory is ongoing, since the political stakes are high. Those who control the past have the ability to command social and political events in the present and the future." Thus, as archaeologists seeking to position ourselves as activists as well, we need to be cognizant of the broader sociopolitical contexts in which we are immersing ourselves and our work. That said, such considerations should not prevent archaeologists from forming alliances with communities and groups seeking to achieve common goals in the present.

Such contestation over representations of the past currently surrounds the historical figure of Matilda Joslyn Gage over the issue of abortion, arguably one of the most polarizing issues of our time. The Feminists for Life of America (FFLA), an anti-choice nonprofit organization, has adopted Gage—along with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton—as a "feminist foremother" who opposed abortion in the nineteenth century (Derr 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Derr and McNair 2006; Schnittman 2003). In contrast, the Gage Foundation disagrees strongly with this anti-choice interpretation of Gage's philosophy and writings. Both organizations, however, utilize Gage, the historical figure, as a means to ground their current actions and goals.

The Feminists for Life of America emphasizes the status of Gage, Stanton, and Anthony as historical feminists on their Web site and in their publication, *The American Feminist,* thereby situating the anti-choice position of today as a return to the beliefs of these founding feminists' views. In their fundraising appeals in *The American Feminist,* likewise, categories for donors to aspire to include the "Susan B. Anthony Circle," the "Elizabeth Cady Stanton Circle," and

the "Seneca Falls Society Circle," thereby allying the FFLA with the master narrative of woman suffrage history (Bottcher 1998; FFLA 2003). In August of 2006, the FFLA purchased the Susan B. Anthony birthplace site in Adams, Massachusetts, and as of this writing, the structure's planned use was not yet decided upon (FFLA 2006).

The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, too, clearly draws on Gage's historical currency as a basis for their actions in the present. The foundation's mission statement, which sets up the organization as an entity seeking to educate the public on Gage's legacy, states in part,

> As Gage lived consistent with her values, our mission includes honoring her life by restoring, preserving and maintaining her home as a place where people can learn about her and her family and the life of a 19th Century activist. As Gage was a passionate campaigner for women's rights and dignity, our mission includes communicating the conditions of women's lives in Gage's lifetime and celebrating the 19th Century women's rights movement, its relevance to contemporary life and the continuing work to eliminate all forms of unjust treatment of women. (Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation 2004)

Additionally, the Gage Foundation's interpretation of the house includes emphasis on Gage's involvement in abolition and the Underground Railroad, her ties to the local Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Nations in upstate New York, her influence on the writing of her son-in-law (L. Frank Baum), and her involvement in the fight to maintain the separation of church and state. These five interpretive themes are translated into the interpretive tours of the house given to visitors and for special events. These events have included hosting several national-level conferences on Gage and women's historical status and organized religion, hosting scholars in women's history, and holding public discussions with Onondaga Nation clan mothers on the heated topic of Native American land claims currently working their way through the court system in New York. Thus, the Gage Foundation clearly also looks to Gage as the basis for their actions in the present.

In contrast to the Feminists for Life of America, however, their stance on Gage and the issue of abortion is not made overtly in the materials available online thus far, in large part because of the delicacy of navigating the strictures imposed by the 501c(3) nonprofit educational status; however, the Gage Foundation's stance is clearly pro-choice. In 2002, the foundation co-sponsored an event commemorating the twenty-ninth anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and Planned Parenthood of the Rochester/Syracuse Region. The foundation

argues—again, on the basis of Gage's writings—that her beliefs regarding abortion correspond to theirs.

"Feminists for Life" and similar groups have argued that our feminist foremothers were anti-choice. Listen to the words of the suffragists one hundred years ago and decide for yourselves. Elizabeth Cady Stanton said she believed in "a woman's right to give her body to the man she loves and no other, to become a mother or not as her desire, judgment and conscience may dictate . . . [and] to be absolute sovereign of herself." Stanton's daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch, similarly believed that "Motherhood is sacred—that is, voluntary motherhood; but the woman who bears unwelcome children is outraging every duty she owes the race." Matilda Joslyn Gage referred to the subject

> which lies deeper down into woman's wrongs than any other. This is the denial of the right to herself. . . . [D]own through the Christian centuries to this nineteenth, nowhere has the marital union of the sexes been one in which the woman has had control over her own body. Enforced motherhood is a crime against the body of the mother and the soul of the child.

So what do you think? Would they have joined the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League or the anti-choice Feminists for Life? (Sally Roesch Wagner, personal communication 2006).

Courtney Workman's (2001) examination of the history of *The Woman Movement* monument, the marble sculpture depicting Stanton, Anthony, and Lucretia Mott, presented to the U.S. Capitol in 1921 by the National Women's Party, found similar contestations over these historic women and the issue of abortion. In the case of this particular monument, both EMILY's List, an organization which supports the campaigns of pro-choice, female Democratic candidates, and the Susan B. Anthony List, an organization which funds the election campaigns of female anti-choice congressional candidates, contributed to the effort to relocate the monument from storage to public display within the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. This instance is another example of how historical figures are utilized by modern groups to assert a particular political agenda; moreover, it is illustrative of how the *same* historical figures can be adopted by groups in polar opposition. As Workman notes, "it is contentious to label pioneers like Stanton, Anthony, and Mott as 'feminist' or to describe them as pro-choice or pro-life, because these terms were absent from their lexicon" (2001:57); there is the potential problem of assigning modern categories of political belief to past actors, as the overall context in which they operated has changed drastically. That said, this caveat does not diminish the sense of legitimization and precedent that modern groups may feel when al-

lying themselves with historical figures. In my personal case, I wholly agree with the Gage Foundation's political stance and its interpretation of Gage as likely being what we would now call pro-choice based on our knowledge of her writings. This example illustrates the contested nature of "owning" knowledge about the past.

While our archaeological research may not often be able to inform on debates such as the suffragists and attitudes toward abortion debate as described above (cf. Crist 2005), recent archaeological research has touched on related hot-button social and cultural issues currently being debated within the wider community, such as sexuality (Schmidt and Voss 2000) and contraceptive practices (Wall 2005; Wilkie 2003; Yamin 2005). As Shackel (2001:3) has noted, "elements of the past remembered in common, as well as elements of the past forgotten in common, are essential for group cohesion"; there is the possibility for new information to throw some elements of remembering and forgetting into question. Moreover, "heritage creates a usable past, and it generates a precedent that serves our present needs. . . . Heritage connotes integrity, authenticity, venerability, and stability" (Shackel 2001:10). Thus, while such politicized considerations have not hampered pursuit of my research at the Gage house, they must be considered nonetheless as we posit our own work as politically engaged and activist. For activist groups with which we ally, the past will likely be a contested arena of conflicting interpretations. Our archaeological research in such contexts can potentially become implicated in the changing perceptions of the relevance of these historical narratives and may not always match up with the needs and desires of activist groups.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have sought to outline three significant considerations for archaeologists. First, we must recognize the situated and political nature of the work we do and attempt to make our work relevant to people working in the present to effect social change. Second, the study of historical activists can inform contemporary activists of tactics used, make accessible to the public a history of struggles for change, and address questions of how materiality was used to create identities in the past. And finally, in inserting ourselves into these activist spheres, we need to be cognizant of what we are getting ourselves into, as the use of the past as legitimization for current actions is a powerful and yet contentious practice. Current research at the historic house site of Gage, a nineteenth-century feminist and activist, as well as the contemporary foundation that owns and interprets her life illuminate the above issues related to the potential for activist-inspired research.

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