Collaborative Archaeologies and Descendant Communities

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Abstract

In the 1970s, public archaeology, a major theme in anthropology, sought to articulate the field’s new orientation toward engaging the nonprofessional, general public, particularly in the realm of cultural resource management (CRM). Over the decades that followed, this approach evolved to focus increasingly on ways to connect archaeological heritage to different kinds of publics. Through this work, among the most important publics that emerged were groups who claimed descent from the ancient peoples archaeologists studied. By the end of the 1990s, a significant branch of archaeological practice had shifted toward new theories and methods for directly and meaningfully engaging descendant communities. This article focuses on how in the United States, and beyond, research with Native peoples in particular has created a rich dialogue about such wide-ranging themes as ethics, collaboration, indigeneity, and multivocality. Although critiques have emerged, the increasingly active role of descendant communities has fundamentally shifted the way museums present culture and contributed to community development, tribal heritage management programs, social justice, and the advancement of the CRM industry. Descendant communities have helped to fundamentally transform archaeology into a science that is driven by an ethical engagement with key publics invested in the interpretation and management of the material past.
INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL ORIENTATIONS

In the past half-century, archaeology’s relationship with the public has dramatically shifted, from a scientific enterprise with modest concerns about its relationship with the public, to a view of public education as an obligation but one-directional, to a form of fully engaged community-based action (McDavid 2004a, Murray 2011). Although from the discipline’s beginnings archaeologists were never entirely disinterested in sharing their work with the public—in the form of museum exhibits, national parks, and popular publications—only in the 1970s did a fully articulated argument for “public archaeology” emerge. In the United States, these first formulations were centered largely on the rise of the cultural resource management (CRM) industry (McGimsey 1972). CRM entailed the creation of archaeological companies to comply with new federal laws—mainly the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)—that provided for research to be conducted on historical properties that could be impacted by projects such as highways, dams, and transmission lines (Green 1998; King 2002, 2008; McManamon & Hatton 2000).

As archaeologists began to work with different publics, new questions emerged for the discipline, particularly around what archaeology’s newfound involvement with clients and profits meant (Raab et al. 1980), what its broader ethical responsibilities (King 1983) and values (Green 1984) were, and how to define an archaeologist as a professional in this new economically driven setting (Jelks 1995, Woodall 1990). Also at this time in the United States, Native Americans became increasingly involved in archaeology, both as participants and as critics (Ferguson 1996, Rubertone 2000, Watkins 2005). In the 1970s, a handful of tribes, particularly in the US Southwest, began to develop their own CRM programs (Anyon et al. 2000). These programs served to affirm tribal sovereignty so that archaeology could be conducted on the tribe’s own terms on its own land and could also be a source of jobs and economic development (Begay 1997, Ferguson 1984, Klesert & Downer 1990). During the 1970s and 1980s, many Native communities also became highly critical of archaeological research that was conducted without their consent or input—particularly when ancestral human remains were excavated, studied, and removed to museum repositories—and compelled archaeologists to confront their relationship with Native peoples (Anderson 1985, Buikstra 1983, Echo-Hawk 1986, Granger 1980, Tymchuk 1984, Zimmerman 1986). However, even as early as the 1960s, some archaeologists had begun to seek out less confrontational, more collaborative relationships with Native peoples (Anderson et al. 1978, Johnson 1973, Sprague 1974, Winter 1980, Zimmerman & Alex 1981).

The role of Native Americans in US-based archaeology was further codified in 1990 when the US Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which gave lineal descendants and tribes rights to claim certain kinds of cultural items and human remains (Fine-Dare 2002, McKeown 2013, Mihesuah 2000). Through consultation, archaeologists and museum professionals were compelled to talk and exchange ideas, which often led to new forms of collaboration (Dongoske 1996, Peters 2006). Then, in 1992, Congress amended the NHPA to allow tribes to form their own Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, with many of the same powers as those of State Historic Preservation Offices, which further strengthened tribal sovereignty and empowered tribes to have a strong role in managing their own cultural heritage (Stapp & Burney 2002). These laws affected US archaeology (Killion 2008) and also joined a broader worldwide movement in settler societies—such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—which were increasingly redressing the negative consequences of their colonial histories (Jenkins 2011, Krmpotich 2014, Sully 2007, Turnbull & Pickering 2010). With these shifts, scholars in the United States became part of a broader global movement (Stone 2005).
In the 1980s, these political and legal battles were joined by a theoretical shift in archaeology. For a generation, the New Archaeology, or processualism, predominated as a form of inquiry that moved the field from descriptions of objects and culture groups to a material science that sought to formulate scientific laws, explain sociological processes, and devise probabilistic predictions (Martin 1971). In response came the postprocessual movement (Earle & Preucl 1987, Leone et al. 1987, Shanks & Tilley 1987), which among other features opened up a theoretical space to consider archaeology’s political implications (Meskell 2002, Trigger 1984, Ucko 1986) and how the field engages with and represents its subjects (Gero & Root 1990, McGuire 1992). In response to a growing concern about how to meaningfully involve the public with archaeology, several projects experimented with public outreach and education (Potter 1990, Potter & Leone 1987, Pryor 1989). Notably, in some parts of the world, such as in Latin America, the processional/postprocessual dichotomy was less clear, for example in Latin America where archaeologists could use processual methods for research but also work toward more effective community engagement and public outreach (e.g., DeLugan 2012, pp. 44–62).

As a result of these converging trends, archaeologists began to conceive of their engagement not with one public but with many publics, each deserving its own careful theoretical, methodological, and ethical considerations (McManamon 1991). When the Society for American Archaeology revamped its principles on ethics in the early 1990s, some of the key responsibilities they outlined were those to the public and other living stakeholders (Lynott & Wylie 1995).

By the 1990s, public archaeology no longer referred only to the CRM industry. It increasingly did not refer to a one-way didactic interpretation of the past for the public. Rather, the field was considering more sophisticated and nuanced relationships with different publics (Jameson 1997), which would move away from presentation toward participation (Derry & Malloy 2003, Frink 1997, Hoffman 1997). Archaeologists became concerned about public opinion (Pokotylo & Guppy 1999) and about spelling out how the public benefits from the archaeological work (Little 2002). The democratic ideals of the Internet were seen as a particularly ripe venue for public engagement (McDavid 2002b, 2004b; Walker 2015). Particularly with Native Americans, dialogue and concrete case studies of collaboration began to be presented, collated, and carefully considered; this work included one early, important book that truly was a “stepping stone to common ground” for a range of Native and non-Native scholars and activists (Swidler et al. 1997), as well as a special section of the Society for American Archaeology newsletter to address collaboration, which eventually led to a widely embraced edited volume (Dongoske et al. 2000). Public archaeology now meant active, meaningful engagement to serve a community’s goals (Merriman 2004)—it became a form of applied archaeology focused on the living meanings and values of the past (Brighton 2011, Komara & Barton 2014, Shackel & Chambers 2004). By the beginning of the new millennium, this concept of an outward-looking archaeology became a global movement in the field (Brady 2009, Funari 2001, Geurds 2007, Green et al. 2003, Kenoyer 2008, Okamura & Matsuda 2011).

THEORIES AND PRACTICES

Working together, archaeologists and descendant communities have deeply reshaped archaeology’s relationship with its subjects (Nicholas et al. 2011, Rossen & Hansen 2007). As Kerber’s (2006) seminal edited volume demonstrated through a series of case studies, collaboration necessitates a form of cross-cultural communication and negotiation, which archaeologists and Native peoples had undertaken because of regulatory compliance (in museums and to manage sites) and also often voluntarily because they saw the mutual advantages of working together on research and
public education. Collaboration has infiltrated how students are trained (Chilton & Hart 2009, Murray et al. 2009, Silliman 2008), how ethics are framed (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson 2004, McGill 2010, Singleton & Orser 2003, Zimmerman 2005), and how knowledge of the past is constructed and shared (Van Broekhoven et al. 2010, Welch et al. 2011). Archaeology’s novel concern for its relationship with different communities has encouraged new methods that bridge to ethnography (Castañeda & Matthews 2008, Edgeworth 2006, Hamilakis & Anagnostopoulos 2009, Mortensen & Hollowell 2009, Strouli & Sutton 2010). These ethnographies have helped demonstrate how archaeology is a social practice, how it is shaped by politics, and how heritage is not a given inheritance but actively constructed by a range of stakeholders who often have different goals, values, and worldviews.

Collaboration is dynamic and fluid; it is not one set of practices. Rather, collaboration lies on a continuum, which was originally conceived as a spectrum of three modes of practice: resistance, participation, and collaboration (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson 2008, pp. 10–14). However, given nearly a decade of conversation, a revised version is needed that expands the continuum to include colonial control on one end of the spectrum and community control on the other (Figure 1). This framework helps us understand how some archaeological projects and practices are colonial (Dommelen 1997, Nicholas & Hollowell 2007), form in resistance to the needs and values of communities (Burke et al. 2008), involve one-directional participation (Rowley 2002), are collaborative by providing equal benefits to and involvement of all parties (Dowdall & Parrish 2003, Duin et al. 2015, Gumerman et al. 2012), and fully empower communities to speak for themselves and control heritage on their own terms (Brugge & Missaghian 2006, Welch et al. 2006). A key theoretical emphasis on collaboration is a kind of “critical multivocality” in which “numerous perspectives and values are brought together to enlarge our shared understandings of the past” (Atalay et al. 2014, pp. 11–12). This theme has provided a rich array of case studies and conversations (Atalay 2008, Ferguson & Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2006, Hodder 2008, Silberman 2008, Wylie 2008, Zimmerman 2008).

Another key framework has been provided by Atalay (2012), who has advocated for archaeologists to use a method called community-based participatory research (see also Atalay 2007, 2010). This approach is descended from earlier, innovative community-based efforts (Marshall 2002, Moser et al. 2002, Sen 2002, Stanish & Jusimba 2000) but extends these practices by inviting archaeologists to directly confront the problems of the discipline’s relevance to diverse publics, to identify and work with its myriad audiences, and to expand its benefits more widely. Community-based participatory research is a theoretical framework but most basically “provides a method for a community and an archaeologist to work together to pursue a research design that benefits them both as equal partners” (Atalay 2012, p. 5). The method involves a continual loop of engagement, in which archaeologists and community members collaboratively define the questions, methods, and outcomes of a given project. Significantly, in this mode “collaboration is not motivated primarily by the benefits it bestows on archaeology. Rather it advocates a partnership approach that is motivated by the rights communities have to be active participants in the creation of knowledge” (Atalay 2012, p. 45). Atalay argues that the advantages of this approach are many, including building capacity for local communities, addressing real-world problems, bringing together diverse knowledge systems, fostering reciprocal benefits, and empowering communities that have often been historically disempowered. This approach, although differing in its details, fully aligns with those arguing for an advocacy research agenda (Rossen 2006, 2008) and cocreation (Bollwerk et al. 2015, Ferguson et al. 2015). This approach offers a specific path for those who want to create an archaeology that matters (Little 2007, Sabloff 2008, Stottman 2010).

Yet another way of framing these approaches is through indigenous archaeology. Nicholas & Andrews (1997) first conceptualized the possibilities of an indigenous archaeology, but other
scholars also began to consider what archaeology would look like if it more fully incorporated the perspectives of indigenous peoples (Bray 2003, Conkey 2005, Watkins 2000). Smith & Wobst's (2005) edited volume was among the first to emphasize that including indigenous values and viewpoints in the field would provide a key means of decolonization—redressing the problems created by archaeology’s underlying colonialist logic and political economy. This theme was embraced in a special volume of *American Indian Quarterly*, edited by Atalay (2006), and today remains a hallmark of indigenous archaeology (Bruchac et al. 2010, Wilcox 2009). Although indigenous archaeology highlights the participation of indigenous peoples themselves in the field (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2009a; Gonzalez et al. 2006; Lippert 2006, 2008b; Martinez 2006; Nicholas 2010a; Two Bears 2006; Watkins 2003), the approach generally seeks to move beyond simple dichotomies of Native/non-Native (Paradies 2010) or even restrictions to “indigenous” contexts (Atalay 2007). Indeed, most of these scholars would agree that the ultimate goal is not to segregate indigenous scholars and worldviews from the field’s mainstream but to end indigenous archaeology by fully integrating these scholars and their views into everyday practices (Nicholas 2010b).

These conversations concerning how to include indigenous and community voices in interpretations of the past and in heritage management have also expanded outward to include museum practices. Although there is a longer history of community engagement in museums than is typically acknowledged (Archambault 2011, Bernstein 1992), in the past three decades, scholars have increasingly focused on creating avenues for community participation in museum exhibits, curation, and research (Peers & Brown 2003). One key driver for this shift in museums was NAGPRA and repatriation claims, which forced museum professionals to consult and often find common

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**Table: Colonial control vs. Indigenous control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonial control</th>
<th>Resistance</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Indigenous control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals set solely by archaeologists</td>
<td>Goals develop in opposition</td>
<td>Goals develop independently</td>
<td>Goals develop jointly</td>
<td>Goals are set by tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is extracted and removed from community</td>
<td>Information is secreted</td>
<td>Information is disclosed</td>
<td>Information flows freely</td>
<td>Information is proprietary and controlled by tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descendants involved as laborers</td>
<td>No stakeholder involvement</td>
<td>Limited stakeholder involvement</td>
<td>Full stakeholder involvement</td>
<td>Archaeologists are employees or consultants of tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No voice for descendants</td>
<td>Little voice for descendants</td>
<td>Some voice for descendants</td>
<td>Full voice for descendants</td>
<td>Full voice of descendants is privileged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiescence is enforced by state</td>
<td>No support is given/obtained</td>
<td>Support is solicited</td>
<td>Support is tacit</td>
<td>Support is authorized by tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of science are optimized</td>
<td>Needs of others are not considered</td>
<td>Needs of most parties are mostly met</td>
<td>Needs of all parties are realized</td>
<td>Needs of tribe are privileged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 1**

Five historical modes of interaction with tribes in the United States.
ground with their Native counterparts (Bell et al. 2008, Bernstein 1991, Gonzalez & Marek-Martinez 2015, Lippert 2008a, Peers 2013). A second key driver was the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in 2004, which explicitly—although often uneasily—sought to privilege Native voices (Lonetree & Cobb 2008).

One area that has received much attention is how museums manage their collections. The Reciprocal Research Network is one experimental database project that sought to empower local communities to help define and organize collections from their cultural vantage points (Rowley 2013). Other projects have similarly experimented with using digital database management programs to empower descendant communities to shape the knowledge systems that organize museum collections in Canada (Hennessy et al. 2013), the United States (Leopold 2013, Srinivasan et al. 2010), and Australia (Christen 2007). A new emphasis has been placed on the agency of objects and the empowerment of communities in museum contexts (Harrison et al. 2013). Museum collections are now seen as complex entities that require collaborative methods to more fully interpret (Baird 2011, Hays-Gilpin 2011, McChesney & Charley 2011, Sekaquaptewa & Washburn 2006).

Despite the growing census of collaborative archaeologies, numerous critiques and criticisms of these collaborative methods have emerged (Ray 2009). Some suggest that the concept of “community” is often too simply employed, when communities are rarely uniform or cohesive (La Salle 2010). Certainly, perhaps too often archaeologists say that they are working with a community when in fact they are working with a small subset of individuals who share their interests and see the potential benefits of collaboration. Additionally, projects that, on the surface, seem successful may be found to have a number of problems when analyzed. Advocates of collaborative research need to analyze and evaluate their work more systematically (Guilfoyle & Hogg 2015). Arguably, collaboration’s limitations are often the result of our academic systems, which continue to undervalue collective indigenous knowledge, and of scholars’ inability to deeply question their own assumptions, beliefs, and practices (Dewbury & Broadrose 2011). Others may point to how collaborative archaeology can cause harm when it selectively promotes one group’s voice over that of another (Supernant & Warrick 2014). Others see the way collaboration is typically approached in museums as a form of neocolonialism rather than as decolonization (Boast 2011). Collaboration is too often seen as a simple solution to the problems of the discipline’s past rather than as a method that requires a complicated process of negotiation (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2010). Furthermore, equality is never simply enacted. As McMullen (2008) points out, for example, who decides how money is used in a collaborative project can easily skew the balance of power.

Perhaps the most robust critique of the movement to establish an indigenous archaeology has come from McGhee (2008), who argued that the concept is highly problematic because it depends on an essentialized view of indigenous peoples (see also Echo-Hawk 2010, McGhee 2010). He argues that some archaeologists have elected to work with indigenous peoples because they are viewed as having an inherent, timeless connection to their ancestors merely because of their racial identities. McGhee seemed to support a generalized working relationship with communities but insisted that the rights of indigenous peoples not be based on their racial identities. The replies were varied but came from practitioners who insisted that indigenous archaeology and collaborative methods are not based on an essentialized view of the indigenous. Rather, indigenous archaeology is grounded in the specific and historical relationship that modern people have to their past (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010). Silliman (2010b) also pointed out that including indigenous viewpoints—with their unique values and knowledge systems—enriches archaeology precisely because these viewpoints are different from the Western and often colonial frameworks that continue to dominate the field. McGhee’s recommendation to keep indigenous and scientific knowledge systems separate but equal should be rejected because it misunderstands these as homogenous spheres of knowledge, unnecessarily creates intellectual divisions, and reintroduces
the specter of racial segregation (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson 2010, Wilcox 2010b). Partnerships with local communities invested in archaeology arguably produce more nuanced and expansive interpretations of the past and equitable management practices in the present (Croes 2010).

CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE ORIENTATIONS

Work with descendant communities has improved the quality of archaeology (Ferguson 2009). Collaborative engagements have helped rethink archaeological language (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2009b), interpretations of places and cultural histories (Bernardini 2005, Duff et al. 2008, Fowles 2010, Hedquist et al. 2014), ancestral connections and affiliations (Adler & Bruning 2008, Dongoske et al. 1997, Liebmann 2008), and core concepts such as colonialism, change, and continuity (Silliman 2005, 2009, 2010a; Wilcox 2010a). The benefits and positive results of archaeological study, as a result of community-driven work, have also been widely observed outside the United States (Kellett 2006, Pwiti & Chirikure 2008, Watkins 2014).

Collaboration has also benefited descendant communities. It has contributed to the creation of local museums (Fuller 1992, Hoobler 2006, Kasper & Handsman 2015), development projects (Bria & Cruzado Carranza 2015, Shackel 2004, Woodfill 2013), and CRM programs (Jackson & Stevens 1997, Kultan & Munnell 1997, Kuwanwisiwma 2002, Welch 2000). By responding to community needs, collaborative methods can help communities recover after traumatic events, such as an earthquake (Praetzellis et al. 2007) or an epidemic (Schmidt 2010), and respond to vitally important social issues, such as race relations (Brown 2015, Jennings 2015) or climate change (Newland 2015). Community-based work is often focused on social justice and redressing history (McDavid 2002a, Mullins 2007); it embraces activism (McGuire 2008); it, in all seriousness, strives for peace, justice, healthy communities, and environmental harmony (Little 2009).

The evolution and rise of collaborative archaeologies constitute a paradigm shift (McAnany & Rowe 2015). The basic concepts and practices of archaeology’s prevailing framework have been altered by the field’s engagement with descendant communities and the collaborative work that has emerged from it. The values and techniques of the archaeological community have shifted to be more inclusive of myriad publics, to provide a voice for interpretations of the past from descendant communities, and to share in the stewardship of heritage resources. Collaboration is a fundamental change in mindset for archaeologists (Wiltshire 2011). Over the past half-century, archaeologists have come to see the question of how to interact with different publics as a key methodological and theoretical problem that demands investigation. As we move into the twenty-first century, investigators understand that collaboration with descendant communities is not a simple solution to the complex problems of direct engagement, shared benefits, and equal voice. Rather, it is a vital means to work through the ethical, political, and social quandaries raised by the admirable goal of transforming archaeology into a science that is driven by an ethical engagement with key publics who are invested in the interpretation and management of the material past.

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