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Repatriation as Inspiration

Multigenerational Perspectives on American Archaeology-Museum Relationships

April M. Beisaw and Penelope H. Duus

ABSTRACT: At the turn of the twentieth century, American museums helped to legitimize archaeology as a scientific discipline. By the next century, repatriation legislation had forced archaeologists to confront the dehumanization that can take place when bodies and sacred objects are treated as scientific specimens. Charting the future(s) of archaeology-museum relationships requires us to (1) recognize where, when, and how harm has been done, (2) confront those harmful precedents, and (3) restructure collections and exhibits in ways that heal wounds and advance research. Current research on the 1916 Susquehanna River Expedition, an archaeology-museum project funded by George Gustav Heye, provides insight into how our predecessors viewed their work. Using the expedition project as backdrop, an archaeology professor and an undergraduate student engage in a dialogue that explores the changing roles of American museums as the public faces of archaeology, training grounds for young professionals, and cultural centers for us all.

KEYWORDS: expeditions, history of archaeology, NAGPRA, North America, repatriation, Susquehanna River

We, the authors of this article, believe that the future of the American archaeology-museum relationship must be rooted in the changes that repatriation has brought to our profession. Our earliest professional predecessors removed Native objects and bodies from sites and communities in a rush to collect the Vanishing Indian. There was little thought to how that removal would impact living populations, because there was no clear Native future. Now, more

than 100 years later, Native nations have become a fundamental part of the archaeology-museum profession.

The repatriation movement certainly had a hand in this dramatic, yet lengthy, shift. In the 26 years since the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) became law, repatriation has inspired conflict, collaboration, and creativity. Archaeologists, exhibit creators, and museum directors were forced to confront harmful precedents and pushed towards new ways of working with and speaking about the Native past, present, and future. Repatriation helped give rise to tribal museums and indigenous archaeology, and both will undoubtedly continue to change museum archaeology over the next century.

Before we speculate on what the future holds, we must understand how we got to the present by reexamining the practices of those who built our archaeological museum collections. Learning from their mistakes can help explain why repatriation has been both necessary and difficult, and how it has helped chart a more responsible and respectful future. Those who came before us often had the best of intentions; whether it be to preserve the craftsmanship and artistic beauty of Native objects or to learn from past people and their things. Some had less admirable motivations.

Here, we present a brief history of how American archaeology collections were created, with specific reference to George G. Heye, Charles F. Lummis, and Frederick W. Putnam. Instead of the usual biographical accounts of these men, we use the personal papers of their employees to illustrate how museum expeditions worked. These papers provide more than names, dates, and locations; they show how the first generation of American museum archaeologists operated. In the papers of Warren K. Moorehead, Alan B. Skinner, Mark R. Harrington, and Arthur C. Parker, we can read about their struggles with the ethics of collecting

Native America. Moorehead and Skinner's 1916 Susquehanna River Expedition (SRE) serves as a case study. Figure 1 shows the locations of most museums discussed, as well as the start and end locations for the SRE: Cooperstown, New York, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

<FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE>

Figure 1. Map showing locations of museums and selected other places mentioned in the text. The Southwest Museum is not shown, due to its distance from the northeast. The Susquehanna River Expedition began in Cooperstown and ended in Lancaster, passing the Tioga Point Museum and the Luzerne County Historical Society along the way. Created by Beisaw & Duus.

From those who built our museum collections, we jump to the passage of NAGPRA and describe some of the professional responses to repatriation, as published between 1990 and 2015. The voice of archaeology's current generation should be evident in this literature. Time delays involved in publication render a literature review as inherently about the past. The future of any academic profession lies in its undergraduate training.

A small-scale survey of current and recent Vassar anthropology undergraduates and a dialogue between the authors, a college professor and an undergraduate student, are presented here as a way of peeking into the future. The dialogue and survey results suggest that repatriation is an ethical responsibility that the next generation embraces. More research will be needed to determine whether these survey results are representative of undergraduates in general, and we encourage readers to survey their own students and cohorts. A local approach goes beyond mere data collection by encouraging discussion between students and professors, employees and

employers. If we are going to do a better job at predicting the future than our predecessors, we need to be open about mistakes made, lessons learned, and assumptions that frame the future.

Building Museum Collections (1890 to 1935)

The systematic collecting of Native America began in the late nineteenth century when people like George Gustave Heye (1874 to 1957), a German railroad engineer, and Charles Fletcher Lummis (1859 to 1928), an American journalist, founded museums that needed filling. Lummis collected Native pottery and textiles along with specimens of gold and turquoise, as he traveled from Ohio to Los Angeles (Wilson and Falkenstien-Doyle 1999). Heye was wealthier than Lummis, which allowed him to amass a larger collection by purchasing from other collectors. At the turn of the twentieth century, both men started foundations and museums dedicated to collecting Native artifacts and began sponsoring archaeological and ethnographical expeditions.

Lummis founded the Southwest Society, a chapter of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), in 1903 (Wilson and Falkenstien-Doyle 1999: 84). Southern California's elite joined to help sponsor collection efforts and build the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles. According to Lummis, "a man owes it to his children, and to the community of which he and they are a part, to preserve and pass on to them, in perpetuity ... all that he may accumulate in knowledge and in material possessions" (as quoted in Wilson and Falkenstien-Doyle 1999: 86–87). Heye undertook a more private venture when he founded the Museum of the American Indian (MAI), in New York City (see Figure 1). The MAI, built in 1916, was also created with the intent of providing opportunities for the public to study Native materials (Pepper 1916). Heye ensured that his museum was open during evening hours, particularly for those outside of the college system (Kidwell 1999: 243–244).

Within the college system, access to Native collections was controlled by academics like Frederick Ward Putnam. Putnam was the anthropology curator at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City before becoming curator of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (PMAE) at Harvard University. The generation of archaeologists who worked with Putnam were known as “Putnam’s Boys” (Browman and Williams 2013:246). They followed the Peabody Museum Method for building collections (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2009: 67), which broke from the previous antiquarian method of purchasing objects from anyone offering them for sale. Instead, individual museums would sponsor official expeditions that would train archaeologists and ethnologists while obtaining materials for museum collections. The new method was intended to discourage uncontrolled excavation (looting) of sites. This change helped to legitimize archaeology as a scientific discipline.

Expeditions spread out across North and South America, and Putnam’s Boys led many for Lummis, Heye, and similar organizations. The career trajectories of a select few are presented here. George A. Dorsey was one of Putnam’s first Harvard graduate students (Browman and Williams 2013: 201) and later became curator of archaeology at the Field Museum of Chicago (FMNH). Mark R. Harrington was Putnam’s assistant at the AMNH before working for Heye’s MAI and then becoming curator of archaeology at Lummis’s Southwest Museum. Warren K. Moorehead was hired by Putnam to bring archaeological collections to the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Moorhead often worked for Heye, even after he became director of the Robert S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology (RPMA) at Andover, Massachusetts. Arthur C. Parker met Putnam while both worked at the AMNH. Parker moved to the PMAE, then the New York State Museum (NYSM), and became New York’s first state archaeologist. Alanson B. Skinner worked with Putnam, Harrington, Parker, Moorehead, and Heye, and spent some time at

the Milwaukee Public Museum. These career trajectories show that American archaeology, at the turn of the twentieth century, was a tight-knit community of professionals who worked with and for a small number of public and private museums.

This start of museum archaeology took place during a time when Native Americans were seen as a dying race. For the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Putnam sought create “a perfect ethnographical exposition of the past and present peoples of America” (Anonymous 1890: 312). To counter the “progress” that had already changed Native cultures, Putnam’s exhibit would include elders demonstrating the practices of their ancestors. A sense of urgency permeated these plans; “Another World’s Fair could not secure such an exhibition. The time will have passed when it was possible” (Putnam as quoted in Anonymous 1890: 312). But two decades later, the myth of the Vanishing Indian still made news headlines. For example, in 1914, the *New York Times* ran a story titled “Gets Rare Trophies of Vanishing Race” with the bylines “Alanson B. Skinner Spends Three Months Among Indians Gathering Cherished Relics,” “Lived in Tepees of Sioux” and “Last War Bundle of the Kaws Obtained for American Museum of Natural History” (Anonymous 1914: C2). Native cultures were proving to be more resilient than Putnam and his boys had thought, but that resiliency did not slow the pace of collecting. Expeditions, like the SRE, fanned out across the Americas to gather “relics” and document past and present ways of life.

The 1916 Susquehanna River Expedition

Heye’s expeditions took archaeologists all over the United States. In 1916, Mark Harrington set off to survey the Red River Valley of Arkansas, and Warren Moorehead and Alanson Skinner set off for the Susquehanna Valley of New York and Pennsylvania. The SRE leaders planned to

survey the entire Susquehanna, from Cooperstown, New York, to the Chesapeake Bay (see Figure 1). Moorehead's correspondences convey his excitement, then frustration, then disappointment: the SRE was a failure. Heye would not provide Moorehead with the resources he requested, including funds for a summary report. The report that does exist (Moorehead 1938) was compiled the year before Moorehead's death (13 years after Skinner's death) and is actually a compilation of short pieces written by Skinner and those the SRE met along the way; it provides neither site-by-site results nor a comprehensive summary of the expedition.

The failure of the SRE provides us with a worst-case scenario for understanding why so many of today's museum collections are lacking in organizational clarity. There is no single inventory of what was collected, artifacts were distributed among several museums, and those obtained from collectors cannot be distinguished from those recovered from the SRE's own excavations. The objects Beisaw has been able to locate have only a vague provenience, usually a town name. Moorhead and Skinner were experienced archaeologists, more than capable of leading a successful expedition, but the challenges they met were insurmountable.

Moorehead's papers detail the effort he put into planning the SRE. He sent out announcements of the expedition to all known "relic collectors" along the planned route. Dozens responded, offering to bring their collections whenever the SRE was nearby, some assuming Moorhead was looking to purchase. He later regretted sending those circulars, for it raised concerns over the large-scale removal of artifacts from where they were found. Hoping to start at the New York headwaters of the Susquehanna, Moorehead contacted Parker, the New York state archaeologist at the NYSM, and invited him to join the SRE as collaborator or observer. John M. Clarke, director of the NYSM, objected to that plan. As he saw it, the archaeology of New York was the job of the NYSM, not Heye (Andover 90.183 Correspondence Folder C). Moorehead

reassured Clarke that his impact would be minimal; “it is not my purpose to dig on any great number of the sites, even if I had the time and money. Furthermore, I have no funds for the purpose of buying collections, and all such will be left for you” (Moorehead, 11 May 1916).

Clarke forced the expedition to move quickly to Pennsylvania.

There, George P. Donehoo, secretary of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, joined the SRE as that state’s representative. In a letter to F. W. Hodge, acting chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Donehoo reveals his enthusiasm for the SRE, saying “We will investigate all of the village sites on both sides of the Susquehanna, West Branch and Juanita.” (NAA Donehoo Letters 1909 to 1949). No such exhaustive survey was conducted. Although Donehoo had reassured Moorehead that “nothing whatever will be done to interfere with your plans” (Andover 90.183 Correspondence Folder Donehoo, Rev. George P), Donehoo could not prevent heavy rains or convince farmers to allow archaeological ground disturbance during the summer growing season. Short on funds and cooperative landowners, the SRE focused their time on meeting with artifact collectors and historical societies as they traveled through Pennsylvania.

The SRE did conduct one week of intensive excavation near Athens, Pennsylvania, after meeting an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist. Louise Welles Murray excavated on her own land and deposited artifacts in the Tioga Point Museum that she started. She was eager to have the attention of the Heye Foundation and its SRE team, but she wanted artifacts to stay near where they were found. Moorehead grew frustrated and left Skinner to manage the excavation. Skinner’s detailed account of it forms the bulk of the SRE report (Moorehead 1938). Despite Murray’s objections, Skinner shipped some artifacts and human remains to Heye, along with requests for additional funds. The expedition was already over budget. Heye responded to Moorehead, saying that the artifacts were not impressive enough to authorize additional funds

(Andover 90.183 Correspondence Folder Heye, Geo. G.). Moorehead sent some personnel home to save money.

Once the SRE reached southern Pennsylvania, a reception was held at the state capitol. Instead of facilitating the SRE survey of that region, the state representatives said they would do their own survey. Moorehead was probably relieved. He returned to Massachusetts but directed Skinner to continue down river to Maryland. After the SRE ended, Moorehead wrote to both Donehoo and Heye asking for help in raising funds to produce a report (Andover 90.183 Correspondence Folder Donehoo, Rev. George P) but neither came through. Moorehead put the SRE and its report writing aside until his retirement.

The SRE Collection(s)

Despite the SRE's connection to multiple museums, none curated a collection under the label of "Susquehanna River Expedition." The SRE artifacts seem to have been distributed between Moorehead's RPMA, Heye's MAI, and at least two small Pennsylvania museums, the Tioga Point Museum and the Luzerne County Historical Society. Each contains artifacts associated with the counties or towns that the SRE passed through or the name of a collector they were in contact with. None of these artifacts have clear provenience. The site map that Moorehead mentions in his final SRE report is lost. Beisaw has not yet attempted to locate any SRE human remains.

The Ohio Historical Society's collection of Moorehead's personal papers reveal that upon receiving shipments from Skinner, Heye would send back any artifacts that he didn't want. Moorehead would receive these at the RPMA and then offer them to other museums, not for sale but in trade (Ohio Historical Box 2 Folder 17 Heye). A circular authored by Moorehead and

stored in his Andover archive (Andover Box 8 Folder 6 Object Sale/Exchange) advertises that “points, knives and net sinkers from ancient sites in Pennsylvania” are available to trade for “[a]ny unique objects unusual in your region.” This circular is stored with a document titled “Regarding the Sale of Collections.” In that policy, Moorehead discourages readers from seeking to profit off of artifact collecting, saying that it is impossible to recover costs spent in obtaining the objects. Donation of collections to museums is encouraged, for the “scientific value.” Assuming his circular was of interest to other museum curators, Moorehead distributed SRE artifacts widely.

Skinner’s will (Autry 201.1 Biographical) suggests that he may have kept some SRE artifacts for himself. It asked that his anthropology collections be split between Harrington, Parker, and Samuel A. Barrett, then director of the Milwaukee Public Museum. Skinner’s “Iroquoian relics,” were to go to Parker after Skinner’s young daughter, Esther, selected whatever six objects she would like to keep. Any SRE objects Skinner had retained were likely part of that collection. A personal communication between Beisaw and Skinner’s granddaughter suggests that Esther was not actually allowed to keep any artifacts.

Harrington had Skinner’s personal archive curated at the Southwest Museum. These papers include price lists for purchasing ethnographic materials, such as the Noice Eskimo collection (Autry 201.10.16), and correspondence with some of his sources. In 1924, the Curio Indian Trading Company of Oklahoma wrote to Skinner, asking if he would like to make a purchase. Skinner responded, “I am still interested in Indian things, and may be able to place some for you. What are you asking for the Osage bundles? Also what other things have you from the Osages, Poncas, and Ioways and Otoes especially? Could you send me a price list? I am

constantly in touch with Museums and persons interested, and sometimes buy myself' (Austry 201.4.11 Correspondence Folder P-Wa).

Relevancy of the SRE to Today

It is easy to dismiss the SRE as a failed project, but that failure serves as an example of the complex histories behind museum collections that can complicate repatriation. In the tight-knit community of early 1900s museum anthropology, Moorehead and Skinner were no different from any of Putnam's Boys. At the Field Museum, George Dorsey and his colleagues also focused on creating large collections, not in gathering information about those objects.

According to Almazan and Coleman (2003), many of the earliest collections include just the name of the object, the price paid, and the tribe it was associated with, if there is any information at all. Even Franz Boas, who served as Putnam's principal assistant for the Columbian Exposition (Browman 2002: 515), sold ethnographic objects to Heye in order to fund his work on Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwagu'ł) cultures (Kidwell 1999: 237). The trading of artifacts between museums, mixing of personal and professional collections, and purchasing from collectors illustrates how the object itself was more important to our predecessors than the context from which it was obtained.

The expedition system of building museum collections did not put an end to the outright buying and selling of artifacts. Expedition archaeologists were under pressure to keep their sponsors happy, and funding shortfalls could be made up with just the right artifact sale. There were no archaeological professional societies or established ethical codes to guide these predecessors. When the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) was formed, between 1934 and 1935, Parker was elected president, Harrington was elected vice-president, and Moorehead

signed the constitution (Griffin 1985). The SAA's current code of ethics, adopted in 1996, directs members to avoid and discourage the sale of artifacts, whenever possible.

The Repatriation Generation of Museum Archaeologists (1989 to 2015)

Not all American repatriation has been based in NAGPRA. Repatriations began before its passage and Heye's MAI collections are subject to their own repatriation law. In 1989, a congressional act created the new National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) with Heye's MAI as its foundation. Moving collections from New York to Washington, D.C., provided a unique opportunity for collaboration with Native groups and individuals, who helped design the museum and its exhibits. The NMAI took more than a decade to create, opening to the public in 2004. In the meantime, professionals published their ideas of how repatriation would or should change other American museums.

By 1996, the ethics of managing old collections and acquiring new material was the subject an entire volume. Moira G. Simpson's (1996) *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* considered the role of American museums as Native American cultural centers and chronicled the rise of the Tribal Museum. She argued that museums were the place to banish stereotypes by reinforcing "the cultural identity of the tribe, particularly for the benefit of youngsters" (Simpson 1996: 136). Not everyone was convinced. A reviewer pushed back, arguing that keeping artifacts near where they were found, as tribal museums often do, reduces their educational value (Clarke 1997). Willard L. Boyd, a former director of the Field Museum of Chicago, seemed to embrace the uncertainty that repatriation brought (Boyd 1999). He argued that museums are predisposed to controversies arising from new interpretations and that curators must always reexamine the scholarship of their predecessors to chart new ways forward.

According to T.J. Ferguson, archaeology's separation from ethnology had "weakened the social and intellectual interaction" between archaeologists and those whose past they study (Ferguson 1996: 64). But the combination of NAGPRA, tribal museums, and tribal archaeologists were forcing the field to become more reflexive (Ferguson 1996: 70). Kathleen Fine-Dare, a cultural anthropologist, studied the repatriation processes at her own institution. Her monograph on the subject complicates the role of repatriation as a way to "mend past injuries" (Fine-Dare 2002). She concluded that even although repatriation can be a difficult process, reburying the "spoils of war" can symbolize a new beginning (Fine-Dare 2002: 3). Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh took that new beginning back to the museum, arguing that repatriation reverses the flow of objects and knowledge from museums to Native nations (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2004: 38).

By 2010, Stephen Nash and Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh declared repatriation as an integral part of life for many museum professionals (2010: 99). Their special issue of *Museum Anthropology* featured a series of articles for NAGPRA's twentieth anniversary. The introduction says, "NAGPRA is not a product or single historical moment, but rather it provides a mechanism to craft values, forge relationships, and configure social institutions" (Nash and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2010: 100). Contributors told of their experiences with repatriation through case studies. Some are quite positive and even celebratory, while others focus on NAGPRA's shortcomings and the trauma that repatriation has brought. Eric Hemenway of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians contributed an emotional article where he says that "knowing the means by which these museums acquired the [human] remains and objects made the experience of visiting the museum even more negative" (Hemenway 2010: 172–173). Emily Moore specifically critiques the 1899 Edward H. Harriman Expedition, saying that it embodied

“the colonial collecting practices that NAGPRA, in part, attempted to redress” (Moore 2010: 125).

A common theme in the repatriation literature is how museum collections often manifest the colonial past, regardless of their sources. Miranda J. Brady argued that because the NMAI is a national museum, it serves to “naturalize the phenomenon of collecting Native people and culture as patrimony for national identity” (Brady 2009: 139). Michael F. Brown argued that cultural property cannot even be discussed “without doing violence to the group that claims it” (Brown 2010:151). Despite this pessimism, Brown advocated that certain objects could be used to “define common ground” and encourage “appreciation of cultural differences” (Brown 2010: 161).

Alex W. Barker argued that museums can put objects in front of the public but visitors will see them through their own cultural perspectives (Barker 2010: 296). He cited a study commissioned by a coalition of archaeology organizations (Ramos and Duganne 2000), as evidence that museums aren't teaching visitors about archaeology or Native America. Approximately 1,000 American adults were randomly selected to complete a telephone questionnaire. Eighty-eight percent said that they had visited archaeological museum exhibits, but only 9 percent reported having learned about archaeology through museums (Ramos and Duganne 2000: 12). When asked what the word “archaeology” brought to mind, only 1 percent mentioned Native people (Ramos and Duganne 2000: 11). Respondents equated archaeology with museums but did not see either as a source of knowledge about Native cultures.

More collaboration with members of the cultures being displayed was clearly needed. Laine Schultz argued that collaborating “behind the scenes” is not enough; visitors need to be made aware of how museum “experts” engage with living and active cultural communities

(Schultz 2011: 2). She also argued that collaboration requires museums to think about accessibility, not just in a physical sense but also in the emotional and ideological senses. Examples provided include having ventilated rooms for smudging (Schultz 2011: 5), a practice that acknowledges the power of museum objects and of the cultural information being shared. Steven Conn argued that the museum landscape was in a “period of confusion” of what to do with anthropological objects (Conn 2010: 34) as they worked to create more space for public education and shift from supporting nationalism towards celebrating heritage. For some, the issue regarding accessibility raises the question as to whether museums still need objects, or at least originals, given all that we can do with technology (i.e., Dawson et al. 2011).

Celebrating heritage brought a new set of concerns over authenticity and authority. Larry J. Zimmerman challenged idea that the Native voice should be the *only* voice included with museum displays (Zimmerman 2010). Telling an accurate story, he argues, requires us to “dump notions of authenticity” and “embrace the principle that cultural realities are complicated, multithreaded and multivocal” (Zimmerman 2010: 35). How does archaeology intersect with cultural realities? Joe Watkins argues that archaeologists disconnect the living present from the archaeological past when we create “cultures” out of artifacts and “then act as if those cultures were people, not the *products* of people” (Watkins 2013: 17, emphasis original). Archaeology should connect people to the past, not disconnect them. Our museum practice should facilitate this.

Sarah Byrne proposed that we reconnect people to museum objects by reconsidering how the objects are categorized and stored (Byrne 2013). Regrouping objects by their original use and not by material type, she argues, would allow descendants, visitors, and researchers to interact with museum assemblages in a more authentic way. Regrouping could “reveal new

relationships” and “feed into new creative displays” not only for the museum professional but also for the groups that they collaborate and consult with (Byrne 2013: 225). We certainly need more ideas on how to make old collections work for the new roles that museums are taking on.

While passage of NAGPRA forced American archaeology museums to confront repatriation all at once, other countries have undergone similar changes in ethical practice. For example, Neil G.W. Curtis showed how NAGPRA was part of a Scottish system of repatriation that is rooted in ethics, not law (Curtis 2010). Newer volumes like *Museums and Restitution: New Practices and New Approaches* (Tythacott and Arvanitis 2014) address the moral responsibility of museums with an international set of case studies.

The repatriation literature is ripe with case studies, but there is room for more generalized dialogue about how to bring its lessons to all archaeologists and museum professions, regardless of nationality or job description. Repatriation is no longer a job that a few people are responsible for carrying out; it is an integral part of archaeology and museology. Artifacts are not inanimate objects, they are “catalysts for the telling of oral histories, language and vocabulary, family stories and memories, artistic techniques, modes of production, historic relations, and shifting worldviews” (Krmpotich 2015: 112). We are curating relationships instead of objects and working to counter national narratives, like that of the Vanishing Indian, instead of supporting colonialism. These changes have not been uniformly adopted or applied, but with repatriation as inspiration, the next generation will continue to reshape museum archaeology.

The Future of the Museum-Archaeology Relationship

Today’s students and early career professionals are the future of museum archaeology. This article attempts to encourage widespread dialogue with them through a local example. Beisaw,

an assistant professor, and Duus, an undergraduate student, use a small-scale survey of Duus's cohort to inform their own dialogue. Duus devised the survey, which was approved by Vassar College's IRB, to gain a sense of what her peers thought about public education, exhibit creation, and cultural representations. The survey was circulated to current and recent Vassar anthropology students and AMNH education volunteers, but only those with close ties to Vassar responded. We thank the respondents for the time and perspective, and hope we have appropriately summarized their views below. We encourage others to undertake similar surveys within their professional networks, for we would all benefit from more dialogue on ethics.

Survey Results

Twelve participants, eight women and four men, returned completed surveys through email. All respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25. Half had not yet finished their college degree and half held either a BA or a BS. Nine respondents had been employed by a museum: four had held paid positions and five were unpaid. Nine respondents had been employed by an archaeological project: three had paid positions and six were unpaid.

If you could visit any museum in the world (regardless of cost, travel time, etc.) which would you choose and why?

Five out of 12 said the British Museum. Of these, three wanted to see artifacts from many different cultures, and one acknowledged the museum's "unethical history." Other museums were chosen for similarly unique opportunities. Skeletons: Animals Unveiled in Orlando, Florida, was chosen for its variety of skeletons; the Tate Modern in London was chosen for its "innovative exhibitions"; and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam was chosen to see how recent

renovations may have changed “the relationship between objects and museum spaces.” Note that no museums specializing in Native American culture or archaeology were chosen.

Have museums influenced your interest in archaeology? If yes, how so?

Ten out of 12 said visiting museums influenced a general interest in archaeology and exposed them to new fields of study, like anatomy or Egyptology. However, academic experiences have shaped their professional interests. One person noted that museums influenced them, but not necessarily in a positive way.

Are museums an effective tool for sharing archaeological knowledge? Why or why not?

Responses were mixed. Most participants said that museums shared archaeological knowledge but that they focused on conclusions instead of process. One said they saw “a drive to sensationalize rather than teach,” that was likened to showing off. Some respondents said that effectiveness was dependent on the context and text provided with the objects. Public outreach and education was celebrated as giving the public opportunities to visit or work with archaeology and thereby reaching larger audiences showing them active research.

In your experience as a visitor, what exhibits (or parts of exhibits) have been most effective at teaching you something?

Some respondents had simple requests, such as for “clear, concise wall labels,” saying that “the descriptive text surrounding objects is most effective” at communicating information to them. Others stressed the importance of “hands-on” and interactive components, saying that “reading information off of a plaque gets boring after an hour, so breaking that monotony with more

physical learning is much more beneficial.” Others agreed that “interactive exhibits have always taught [them] the most.”

What do you think the role of technology (e.g., 3D-printed models, computer and tablet activities, virtual reality, etc.) should be in exhibits related to archaeology?

The consensus was that technology, such as electronic games and 3D-printed replicas, should be utilized in exhibit space. The only reservation being that such technology “must be used in connection with actual objects,” as a “supplemental tool.” Three-dimensional printing was overwhelmingly seen as a positive advance, especially for promoting interaction with otherwise delicate material. One respondent said that “making information available online may also be interpreted as a form of ‘digital repatriation.’”

Do archaeologists working in museums have an ethical responsibility to the descendants of the makers/owners of an object/collection?

Respondents were all in agreement that museum archaeologists have such ethical responsibilities. One said that this was the most important part of a museum’s work and that descendants should have a say, and even make decisions with staff, regarding how objects are treated and displayed. Museums were also seen as benefiting from more contact with descendent groups by providing stories “that turn a site from ... a simple archaeological locus to tangible landscape history.”

Do Native American cultural halls have a place in natural history museums? Why or why not?

Responses were split: three answered “yes,” two answered “no,” and six gave conditional approval. Some conditions were that cultural halls were included for other groups, including Europeans, that the groups represented agreed to be showcased, and that these “outdated and often oppressive” halls be remodeled under the guidance of members of those cultures. Cultures, one wrote, should “not be equated with stuffed animals and fossils.”

Have museums done harm to individuals or cultural groups in the past? If so, how should museums and/or archaeologists rectify this?

Participants acknowledged that archaeology museums have been “prime examples of racism and Eurocentrism,” through directly or indirectly silencing and/or oppressing groups. Suggested ways to improve on this varied. Many stressed the importance of engaging in dialogue with such groups and helping them reclaim their heritage. One respondent said that “the opinion of the archaeologist is not more important than [that of] somebody who many not have a formal education in the field.” Only one respondent directly addressed their predecessors, noting that “the best way we can rectify the failings of the discipline in the past is to continually educate and force those archaeologists set in older paradigms to re-evaluate and think outside their limited box.”

Can museums located in major population centers effectively act as Native American cultural centers? (e.g., the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City and Washington D.C., and the American Museum of Natural History in New York City) Why or why not?

Responses to this question were fairly mixed: one said “yes,” four said “no,” and seven said “possibly.” Positive responses focused on access, but not necessarily Native access. The more

mixed responses said that it depends on how Native American voice(s) were included. Some were concerned that museums were cultural centers for educating non-Natives, not for Native community building. One negative response said “the idea of ‘Native American’ as a single community is misrepresentative of the multitude of societies that lived in America before Europeans.”

The Take-Away

The next generation of archaeologists and museum professionals are hopeful about what can be done to improve relationships between museums, archaeologists, and Native source communities; they see collaborations between institutions and communities as essential.

Although respondents acknowledged the importance of the recent changes in museum practice, they believe that there is much more to be done, including educating archaeologists set in older paradigms. While the idea of digital repatriation is a complex one that has not yet been dealt with in the literature, the next generation see technology as an integral part of future museums.

Discussion

After summarizing the responses of her peer group, Duus and I sat down to have our own dialogue about the past, present, and future of museum archaeology. We each came to the discussion with a set of prepared questions but allowed the conversation to flow naturally and take us to some unexpected places.

Beisaw: Penelope, what exposure to repatriation had you had before taking my repatriation course? And how did the course impact your views on museum archaeology?

Duus: When I was an intern at the AMNH, we had weekly lectures. Someone from the Anthropology department talked about the Willamette Meteorite that's in the Hall of the Universe and the repatriation claim made for it by the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon. An agreement allowed the meteorite to stay at the museum (American Museum of Natural History 2000) as long as ceremonies involving it could be performed once a year and the AMNH created the Internship Program for Native American Young People. Before the repatriation class, I thought that this agreement was perfect. Afterwards, I was more aware of the power structures involved. Perhaps the Grand Ronde hadn't had as much negotiating power in that situation, and that could have altered the outcome.

Duus: When you were an undergraduate, how much was repatriation discussed in your courses?

Beisaw: I studied paleoanthropology as an undergrad, so we didn't talk about repatriation. We did discuss how paleoanthropologists worked with the local people, how those people had some say in the research, and how fossils usually stay in their country of origin. I assumed that similar cooperation was at work in archaeology.

Beisaw: While writing this article, you got a view into the history of collecting that few undergraduates are exposed to. Does knowing about this past provide responsibilities for your generation's work?

Duus: The historical parts of this article shows how the collection process could go wrong. Even though they were trying to be scientific and organized, it turned into a mess. I think recognizing such circumstances, not only racism and power differences, is important.

Duus: What difference in character have you observed in the field since you became involved? Especially concerning the split between people who see repatriation as good or bad.

Beisaw: When I switched to archaeology, repatriation would come up during excavation conversation as being antiscience. This point of view was especially characteristic of the older individuals. But through time repatriation stopped being a major topic of field conversation. Instead, those who talked about repatriation were those who “do repatriation,” and that still seems to be the case. To many it is somebody else’s job, not an organizing principle.

Duus: When NAGPRA was passed, many worried that museums would be emptied. Twenty-six years later, museums still have massive collections. New technology (especially 3D scanning) is now raising concerns over deaccessioning. Do you see deaccessioning and repatriation as parallel processes?

Beisaw: Repatriation has to happen for ethical reasons. I think deaccessioning has to happen for different reasons. There’s a lot in museums that needs work to understand why we have it and why we should keep it. Using technology to create replicas causes new storage issues, but also can lead to unethical duplication of objects that shouldn’t be curated.

Beisaw: What role do you think technology should play in an ethical archaeology, instead of the more commonly discussed visitor experience?

Duus: Technologies such as 3D printing could be used to create replicas of objects when something is repatriated, with the consent of the tribe, of course. A question that comes from that is whether or not those replicas will actually be useful. You can make replicas and digital versions, but you have to ask yourself if they’re just going take up space on a shelf or hard drive.

Beisaw: “Is it real?” is the first questions I get asked whenever I’m in a museum with a friend. Will technology make museums more like Disney World, rather than an academic institution?

Duus: It’s a valid concern but in my experience I haven’t seen it really affect visitors. In the Spitzer Hall of Human Origins at AMNH, nearly everything is a cast, but people still get excited.

As long as there's an object there that looks real, that's enough for the majority of people to be interested.

Beisaw: What do you think the current generation of museum archaeologists should do to ensure the success of your generation?

Duus: It seems like the most important thing to my generation is that conversations between museums and source communities continue and become more prevalent. Those relationships must continue and be strengthened.

Beisaw: Where it where does this relationship building start?

Duus: Museums needs to reach out to Native leaders and incorporate those communities at whatever level they wish. Colleges and universities can foster this by incorporating Native people more formally into the field, as archaeologists and curators.

Conclusion

The 1916 Susquehanna River Expedition provided a means for examining the practices that filled American museums, and often created problematic collections. Expeditions were often constrained by small budgets, despite the intentions and expectations of their staff. In the rush to fill museums, obtaining objects often meant buying, selling, or trading. The object itself was more important than where it came from or how it was obtained. When Native Americans began petitioning museums for the return of their cultural property, inadequate museum records often complicated the already emotional repatriation process.

The passage of NAGPRA forced a reflexivity that recast museums as centers of controversy and relics of colonialism. Objects that were once prominently displayed went into storage or were sent back towards the places they were obtained from. Some objected to this

dispersal, for centralized museums had educational potential. But a survey (Ramos and Duganne 2000) revealed that Americans don't associate museums with learning about Native America or archaeology. Instead of emptying museums, repatriation provided a new beginning, an organizing principle under which we could reimagine the future.

Through multigenerational dialogue we can confront the problems of the past and continue moving museum archaeology towards futures. One possible future may see archaeology museums emphasizing the curation of relationships instead of objects. Our small-scale survey of the next generation suggests that they value the partnerships that repatriation has fostered and are eager to incorporate more technology into museums. They will need to be well versed in ethics to ensure that mistakes are not repeated.

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