

Archaeology in 2021: Repatriation, Reclamation, and Reckoning with Historical Trauma

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ABSTRACT

Archaeology in 2021 was characterized by a continued call to use the tools of the discipline to document the violence of settler colonialism in the past and present, pushing anthropology to reckon with its own role in perpetuating historical trauma. The tension between disciplinary reflection and reform was most clearly articulated in the use of archaeological geophysics to detect the unmarked graves of incarcerated Indigenous children who died at residential and boarding schools in Canada and the United States. The highly publicized investigation of these schools has brought renewed attention to issues of repatriation and historical reclamation for many communities impacted by settler colonialism. These discussions have reverberated throughout the discipline, prompting revisions to the Society for American Archaeology's "Statement Concerning the Treatment of Human Remains," reopening conversations around an African American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and informing debates around the ethics of DNA research. These conversations are part of a larger movement toward decolonizing the field by using archaeological methods to explore marginalized histories and support communities most impacted by the violences of settler colonialism.

INTRODUCTION

On May 23, 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in Canada announced that they had located as many as 215 potential unmarked graves of Indigenous children who had died at the Kamloops Indian Residential School (Secwépemc 2021). The survey of an orchard near the school grounds in Kamloops had been undertaken by archaeologist Dr. Sarah Beaulieu of the University of the Fraser Valley (Secwépemc 2021), putting the work of archaeologists at the heart of finding the truth about what happened to these children. Over the next week, news media began reporting on the results, leading to shock, horror, and outrage by non-Indigenous people

across the country. Soon after, memorials began appearing at various school sites across the lands known as Canada, with calls for criminal investigations into the deaths of thousands of children at these institutions. First Nations that had worked with other archaeologists over the past decade to try to find the burial locations of their children began making their results public (White 2021). Other Indigenous nations and organizations that wished to conduct their own searches began reaching out to archaeologists across the country.

News of the findings at Kamloops spread around the world, receiving significant international attention and prompting other settler-colonial nations to more formally look into their histories of incarcerating Indigenous children for the purposes of assimilation. For Indigenous communities, however, this news did not come as a surprise. Long had survivors of Indian residential schools in Canada and federal Indian boarding schools in the United States talked about children who had died or disappeared from schools. However, it took the results of ground-penetrating radar conducted by an archaeologist to bring renewed public attention to this horrific history.

In 2021, amid increasing awareness of the impacts of cultural genocide on Indigenous peoples, an ongoing global pandemic, and heightened attention to anti-Black racism, it became even clearer that archaeology has an important role to play in documenting historic injustices and settler-colonial violence. This can be seen in how archaeologists are reckoning with historical trauma, working with Indigenous, Black, and descendant communities on repatriation and reclamation, and addressing broader calls to decolonize the discipline.

The emerging discussion around historical trauma and reconciliation and its intersections with the field of archaeology is situated within a broader societal shift toward *historical consciencism*, an attentiveness to problematic histories of oppression and their long-term effects

on marginalized communities. This reflexivity has been spurred by several recent events in North America, which spread rapidly across social media, including the Black Lives Matter movement, which gained national attention in the United States in 2014, the 2017 #MeToo campaign to address sexual violence, and the publication of two major fact-finding reports by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on the legacy of residential schools, in 2015, and the related crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in 2019. These social-justice-oriented initiatives have sparked calls for national reckonings with epistemic colonialism, white supremacy, capitalist exploitation, and heteropatriarchy.

Within this broader reinvestment in a politicized archaeology, the tools of the discipline are being mobilized to expose the violent histories of colonialism and its ongoing impacts on people today. The rhetoric of harm and healing has become central to ongoing archaeological discussions of reconciliation. In 2021, these conversations took on several interrelated dimensions, including the need to document and address the discipline's history of scientific racism and the necessity of identifying and dismantling ongoing structures that support anti-Blackness, Indigenous disempowerment, cultures of harassment, and extractive practices (d'Alpoim Guedes, Gonzalez, and Rivera-Collazo 2021; Flewellen et al. 2021; Gamble et al. 2021).

Historical consciencism within the field has also taken more applied dimensions as archaeologists have engaged in research projects that use noninvasive field methods, oral history, archival research, digital archaeology, and material analysis to document traumatic periods and events (Lafferty et al. 2021; Lau-Ozawa 2021; Wadsworth, Supernant, and Dersch 2021). The growth in archaeologies of the African diaspora and Indigenous-colonial interactions reflect the ways in which these historically marginalized communities have engaged with colonialism,

pushing back against narratives that only focus on trauma and harm to center resilience and survivance (Panich and Gonzalez 2021; Schneider 2021). While there remain areas of tension and backlash, our review of archaeology in 2021 indicates that the discipline is at a threshold, poised to make meaningful contributions to a hopeful future.

RECKONING WITH HISTORICAL TRAUMA THROUGH ARCHAEOLOGY

Following the discoveries at Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced a comprehensive investigation into the Indian boarding school program from 1819 to 1969 (Secretary of the Interior 2021). A major goal of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative is the identification of boarding school facilities and associated student burial sites and to determine the Tribal affiliations and identities of the children interred in these cemeteries. As outlined in Haaland's June 2021 press release, formal consultation with Tribal Nations, Alaska Native corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations regarding the identification, protection, and repatriation of boarding school burial sites are a central facet of the department's investigation. Haaland's initiative has prompted a growing public discourse around Indian boarding school policies in the United States. In 2021, media coverage of Indian boarding schools skyrocketed, with major news sources like NPR, Reuters, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* publishing feature articles and podcasts on the topic.

While national attention has only recently focused on US boarding schools, Indigenous communities and academic researchers have been quietly working for several decades to document the physical violence, sexual abuse, and neglect experienced by generations of Indigenous youth in boarding schools across the country. Since 2012, the Native American

Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) has been conducting documentary research on boarding school sites and disseminating resources to Tribal communities working to heal from historical trauma. To date, NABS (2020) has identified 367 boarding schools, which operated in 29 states; however, only 38 percent of these schools have known associated records. The glaring absence of documentation at Indian boarding schools in the United States demonstrates the ways in which settler-colonial states have worked to erase evidence of violence against their citizens.

Despite the ongoing documentary efforts around federal Indian boarding schools in the United States, there remains a lot more knowledge and awareness of the impacts of residential schools and missing children in Canada due to the work of the TRC (2015c). This commission was established in 2007 in response to a large class-action lawsuit by survivors of residential schools in Canada (TRC 2015c). The central purpose of the TRC was to witness the testimony of survivors, tell the truth of their experiences, and lay out a path toward reconciliation. The continued absence of a TRC in the United States means that a lot more foundational work is required to reckon with the bleak history of boarding schools.

In an editorial published by the *Washington Post*, Indigenous historian K. Tsianina Lomawaima (2021) argued that addressing the problematic history of American Indian boarding schools will require holding the US government accountable for its problematic policies. By officially documenting the wrongdoings of government or nonstate actors, academic, grassroots, and federally sponsored fact-finding efforts seek to restructure the relationships between dominant and historically marginalized communities within settler-colonial societies reckoning with longer histories of physical and structural violence. Underlying these formal and informal reconciliation efforts is the premise that historical acceptance of past actions and the impacts of these actions will lead to respectful, ethical, and equitable treatment in the future (Lederach 2005).

Current research on boarding schools in the United States and Canada is situated within a broader paradigm that Chip Colwell has called an “archaeology of reconciliation.” As laid out by Colwell, archaeologies of reconciliation seek to heal breaches, redress imbalances, and restore broken relationships in the present based on the study of the past (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2007, 29). As a political concept, “reconciliation” initially referred to the reestablishment of a conciliatory state in societies emerging from violent periods of civil war or authoritarian rule (Bashir and Kymlicka 2008, 3–4). In an effort to address historical injustices, truth commissions, like the one in Canada, have become a common facet of the reconciliation process. Truth commissions seek to break cycles of violence and human rights violations by officially documenting the wrongdoings of government or nonstate actors during periods of upheaval. The goal of these fact-finding efforts is to produce policies that correct the underlying causes of human rights and civil rights violations.

Archaeologists have contributed to TRCs by exhuming and identifying bodies in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and following the 1981 massacre at El Mozote by the El Salvadoran army (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2007, 30). In contexts of genocidal violence, archaeology and history can be used to tell the untold stories of victims and create opportunities for family members and their communities to mourn the dead. Within a reconciliation framework, these acts of mourning are the first step toward healing broken relationships and play a critical role in facilitating closure and acceptance among the survivors of genocide.

The concept of reconciliation has expanded to include institutional efforts to restructure the relationships between dominant and historically marginalized communities within settler-colonial societies reckoning with ongoing physical and structural violence. It is worth noting that while the concept of reconciliation has provided some psychological and financial benefits to

survivors of historical violence, research by Priscilla Hayner (2001) has shown that very few TRCs actually succeeded in bringing about genuine transformation in intergroup relations. The concept of reconciliation has also been critiqued by Black and Indigenous scholars for falsely marking an end to troubled relations between dominant and oppressed sectors of society rather than the beginning of a much longer process of systemic change.

In the past five years, the particular skill sets of archaeologists and historians have been called upon in national efforts to address historical injustices associated with state- and church-operated Indigenous schools across North America. As discussed in the introduction, in Canada, archaeology, and particularly ground-penetrating radar, has played a role in helping expose the country's tragic history of residential schools. While the primary mandate of the TRC on residential schools was to witness the testimony of survivors of these institutions, one unanticipated outcome of these investigations was the identification of thousands of children who died at or went missing from residential schools across the country. Testimonies indicating the untimely death of children in these schools were so prevalent that it prompted the TRC to dedicate a section in the final report to missing children (TRC 2015b) and to include in their "94 Calls to Action" (TRC 2015a) several recommendations around identifying and protecting the burial places of children who died while incarcerated at these institutions. Although archaeologists across Canada have been working with different Nations to use remote sensing and geophysics to search the grounds of residential schools throughout the past decade (Nichols 2015, 2020; Simons, Martindale, and Wylie 2020), it was not until the news from Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, six years after the publication of the TRC report and calls to action, that the work of searching for graves gained momentum and Indigenous communities received enough public support to pursue justice for what happened to their children.

In the United States, much of the ongoing research on boarding schools has also centered on identifying unmarked graves in an effort to foster reconciliation and healing. For example, state archaeologist John Seebach and a task force of Tribal representatives and state officials opened up investigations in 2019 into unmarked graves associated with the Teller Indian School, in Grand Junction, Colorado (Cleveland 2021). That same year, Marsha Small, a Northern Cheyenne researcher, used a variety of subsurface visualization methods to identify 222 potential graves at the site of the former Chemawa Indian School in Oregon (Beaumont 2021). Building on the use of ground-penetrating radar in other boarding school contexts, Albuquerque city officials have commissioned archaeologists to investigate the possibility of unmarked graves around the Albuquerque Indian School in New Mexico (The Paper 2021).

As outlined by Paulina Przystupa (2020), academic archaeological research on Indian boarding schools in the United States has drawn on feminist constructions of resistance (Surface-Evans 2016), practice-theory approaches to power and the construction of physical spaces (Przystupa 2018), and postcolonial notions of identity (Lindauer 2009) in order to document the experiences of Native students rather than the predominantly white government officials and teachers in power. Other scholars have drawn on Indigenous frameworks to understand the complex interplay between domination and resistance at Indian boarding schools. For instance, historical archaeologists William White and Brandi Bethke (2019) use the concept of “landscapes of resilience” to discuss the ways in which Blackfeet youth resisted assimilation at the Cut Bank Boarding School in Montana and to frame how contemporary community members are reimagining and restorying this school site and its surrounding landscape. Similarly, in discussing historical trauma at the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School in Michigan, Sara Surface-Evans and Sarah Jones (2020, 114) use Saginaw Chippewa oral histories

and discourses of haunting to move “beyond stories of suffering so that community members find and reclaim their own stories of empowerment.”

In the Canadian context, Simons, Martindale, and Wylie (2020) frame their experience of supporting the search for unmarked graves by the Penelakut First Nation at the Kuper Island Industrial School as “bearing witness,” a concept that resonates in Indigenous nations and is woven throughout the work of the TRC. They argue that the role of archaeologist as witness is a reciprocal act in which they serve as witnesses to the past but are also witnessed by the community “who must continuously evaluate [their] trustworthiness and hold [them] accountable” (25). Drawing on collaborative methodologies, Nichols (2020) discusses the process of developing a community-based approach to exploring the history of the Brandon Indian Residential School, including the importance of communication, ceremony, and reflection throughout the sensitive work of locating missing children. The long-standing collaboration between Nichols and the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation demonstrates the complexity of many residential school landscapes, as there have been impacts to the land since the school was in operation. Searching for the missing children takes time, care, and strong relationships to be done well.

Archaeologists have also turned to Gerald Vizenor’s (Anishinaabe) concept of survival as a way of reframing Indigenous experiences at sites of assimilation. As conceptualized by Vizenor (2008, 1), “survivance” describes Indigenous forms of resistance and resiliency that assert “an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion.” Lindsay M. Montgomery and Chip Colwell (2020) draw on Vizenor’s concept of survivance in their interpretations of ethnographic objects collected by an Indian school teacher named Jesse H. Bratley from community members on the Port Gamble S’Klallam, Cheyenne-Arapaho, Rosebud,

Hopi, and Havasupai reservations. Last year, Davina Two Bears (2021) used the concept of survivance to frame the various ways in which Navajo students at the Old Leupp Boarding School refused to be victims within the school's oppressive structures. Two Bears theorizes Navajo survivance specifically in terms of the continuation of K'e relationships and the persistence of traditional foodways and weaving practices.

Multivocality is a key feature of the burgeoning body of archaeological research oriented around truth and reconciliation. Researchers have fostered multivocality in a variety of ways, including through coauthorship, the use of oral histories and personal narratives shared by Indigenous descendants and survivors of boarding schools, and by developing collaborative research projects that include Indigenous community members (e.g., Lim et al. 2021). Sarah Cowie, Diane Teeman, and Christopher LeBlanc's (2019) collaborative work with members of the Washoe, Paiute, and Shoshone tribes to document daily life at the Steward Indian School in Nevada demonstrates how a multivocal "slow" approach to archaeology can create spaces for truth and healing. More recently, Matthew Rooney and his colleagues (2022) worked collaboratively with Chickasaw community members during their excavations of the Charity Hall mission and school in Mississippi. As part of the Chickasaw Nation's Explorer program, enrolled college students assisted with excavations at the site in 2019, providing youth with an opportunity to reconnect to ancestral places in the Southeast. Based on the increased attention these dark histories received in 2021, we believe that researchers will continue to be called upon to use archaeological methods to find children who died at boarding and residential schools. Such work must ultimately be community-led, with archaeologists acting as witnesses, technical experts, and advocates for Indigenous communities.

REPATRIATION AND RECLAMATION IN NORTH AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The recent publicity around unmarked graves, along with the growing body of historical archaeological research on these schools, has contributed to a renewed debate around repatriation in the United States. Since 2016, Native communities have been actively working to repatriate the bodies of students who died while attending the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. Founded by Richard Henry Pratt in 1879, Carlisle is the oldest and most well-known boarding school in the United States and therefore a particularly politically charged site for debates over repatriation. Because the Carlisle cemetery is located on lands owned by the Army War College rather than the federal government, the college is not legally required under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) to consult with Tribal Nations or return human remains. This limit in NAGPRA's jurisdiction has fundamentally hindered the repatriation efforts of Native nations seeking to reclaim the bodies of Tribal members who died at Carlisle and other off-reservation boarding schools across the United States. For instance, in 2016, the Rosebud Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) Ben Rhodd began talks with the Army War College to repatriate the remains of eleven students who were part of Carlisle's first class (Estes 2019). Rosebud's efforts were initially stymied by the lack of documentation needed to prove direct descent under Army Regulation 210-190. In July 2021, after five years of extended consultation work between the tribe and the Army War College, the bodies of Rosebud Sioux youth were finally repatriated.

In 2017, the Northern Arapaho THPO successfully repatriated the bodies of three children, Little Chief (Dickens Nor), Horse (Horace Washington), and Little Plume (Hayes Vanderbilt Friday). Disconcertingly, Little Plume's grave contained two sets of remains, drawing

attention to the ways in which institutional practices at boarding schools like Carlisle have obscured the identities of Native children and obfuscated Indigenous attempts to connect and reclaim their ancestors (Marroni 2017). Similar accounts exist from residential schools in Canada of mass graves and multiple internments in one grave, making the identification of individual children very challenging. The Northern Arapaho community's success in repatriating these children relied on their ability to provide a certified affidavit from a direct living descendant in accordance with Regulation 210-190 (Peter 2019). As Yaqui legal expert Rebecca Tsosie (2007) argues, such burdens of proof reflect an Anglo-European understanding of human remains as property governed by individual or familial rights. This approach conflicts with the collectivist values held by Indigenous communities.

In addition to such ontological disconnects, the Army War College's regulatory requirement is often difficult to fulfill given Carlisle's fragmentary archival record and the fact that many of the children who attended the school were orphans or have no living descendants. This law also excludes Tribal entities from acting as advocates on behalf of the deceased, significantly limiting Indigenous assertions of sovereignty over their ancestral remains. Despite these challenges, the precedent set by the Northern Arapaho repatriation has opened the door for several other communities to reclaim the remains of their children. In June of 2018, a multi-Tribal repatriation request successfully reclaimed and reburied the remains of George Ell (Blackfeet), Herbert Little Hawk (Oglala Lakota), and Dora Brave Bull (Standing Rock) (Estes 2019).

The Canadian context for repatriation is significantly different from the United States. In the absence of any national legislation or framework for repatriation (Bourgeois 2021), the return of ancestors to their home communities tends to vary across institutions and across the country.

In some cases, the absence of legislation has led to the development of good relations and proactive repatriation (e.g., Rowley and Hausler 2008), but in others, the work of returning ancestors has barely begun. With the investigations underway around residential school grounds, questions of exhumation, identification, and returning children to their home communities have been raised by Indigenous people. For many Elders and survivors, locating burial places is enough, as the thought of disturbing the graves of children is too painful and disruptive to imagine. Some Indigenous communities, however, have indicated that they will be proceeding with exhumation and forensic analysis to be able to send the children back home (Nichols 2020, 51) and potentially pressing criminal charges against those responsible for their deaths. Ultimately, Indigenous communities whose children were sent to these institutions must be allowed to make the decision that works for them, but at this time the legal pathways for repatriation remain unclear across the country.

Ongoing jurisdictional debates over Indigenous human remains are situated within a broader social movement toward collaboration with Native communities outside of existing legal frameworks. For instance, on August 2, 2021, the board of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) announced the publication of a formal report by the Committee on Native American Relations (CNAR) and the Committee on Repatriation (Repat) describing the creation of a new “Statement Concerning the Treatment of Human Remains.” In revising the statement, the chairs of CAR and Repat held listening sessions with representatives of sixteen Tribal Nations and the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. These conversations brought attention to the importance of educating archaeologists about sovereignty and current laws governing burials as well as the need to rebalance the statement so that Tribal concerns were equal to those of scientific researchers (Brunso and Sieg 2021, 7). The statement’s

revision reflects a broader shift within archaeology toward collaboration with descendant communities and an openness to discussing the ethical treatment of human remains.

Debates around the relationship between archaeologists, human remains, and descendant communities also came to the fore in 2021. In April 2021, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology issued a formal apology for the collection and curation of hundreds of human skulls in the Morton Collection and announced the reburial of over fifty enslaved people from their holdings (Crimmins 2021). The Penn Museum's apology is part of a larger disciplinary conversation around the ethical treatment of human remains, particularly those from historically marginalized communities. For instance, in December 2021 the American Association of Biological Anthropologists (AABA) convened a Task Force on the Ethical Study of Human Materials. In dialogue with the AABA's efforts to grapple with the discipline's problematic past of skeletal collecting, in January 2022 the *American Journal of Biological Anthropology* announced that all submissions to the publication would be required to comply with ethical standards for the treatment of human remains (Kiefer 2022).

In the midst of these disciplinary changes, public attention returned to the Penn Museum in late spring 2021 following the shocking news that the skeletal remains of an African American victim in the 1985 police bombings of the Christian Movement for Life (MOVE) compound in Philadelphia had appeared in an online course hosted by the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University. The remains, labeled "B-1," had come into the museum's collections in 1986 following the Philadelphia Police Department's violent assault on MOVE residents, leading to the deaths of eleven people and the destruction of over sixty homes (DiSanto 2021). On the heels of this highly publicized controversy, Justin Dunnivant, Delande Justinvil, and Chip Colwell published an article in *Nature* that brought critical attention to the thousands of African

American remains that have been found in unmarked graves and institutional collections across the United States. The authors propose the creation of an African American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (AHPRA), which would create a legal framework for the protection, care, and repatriation of African American human remains.

Considering what repatriation legislation might look like for African Americans draws into focus some of the problems with the current construction of “cultural affiliation” held by archaeologists and enshrined in law for Indigenous human remains. Under NAGPRA, Native communities are given the right to consult and repatriate materials based on geographical, kinship, biological, archaeological, linguistic, folkloric, oral tradition, or historical lines of evidence demonstrating a cultural relationship between the claimants and the human remains or objects in question. Sovereign Tribal Nations have often faced challenges in meeting these criteria due to a lack of what is considered definitive evidence, a problem that is also present for African American communities whose archival and genealogical records are often sparse. The lack of formal records establishing cultural affiliation for African American collections has led some scholars to promote the use of genetic research to establish the biological relatedness of human remains in museum collections.

Growing scholarly and popular interest in DNA research on African American and Native American human remains have highlighted the discipline’s problematic past of archaeological collecting and physiological research (Cortez et al. 2021; Tsosie, Fox, and Yracheta 2021). These issues came to a boiling point in April 2021 following a virtual SAA session in which Elizabeth Weiss, a physical anthropologist at San Jose State University, and James Springer, a lawyer, gave a presentation based on their coauthored book (Weiss and Springer 2020) promoting an anti-repatriation perspective. Weiss and Springer’s paper harkened

back to earlier debates around NAGPRA within the archaeological community that portrayed repatriation as “anti-science” and racially essentialist. That such rhetoric resurfaced in 2021 is symptomatic of the persistent injustices faced by historically marginalized communities who continue to struggle to reclaim power over their ancestors from scientific researchers. Some anthropologists are reluctant to give up the power accorded to them through white supremacy and settler colonialism, as it is not scientific research that is at stake with repatriation but rather the power to choose what happens with ancestral remains. As a counterpoint to Weiss and Springer’s claim that repatriation is anti-science, the papers in the edited volume *Working with and for Ancestors: Collaboration in the Care and Study of Ancestral Remains* (Meloche, Spake, and Nichols 2020) demonstrate the wide range of possibilities when Indigenous and descendant communities are given the power to decide what happens to their ancestors.

THE “DECOLONIZING GENERATION”

While archaeology has always been political, in the past year the focus of these politics has largely centered on issues of exclusion and inclusion. There is a growing commitment in the field to making archaeology a more welcoming and inclusive space for historically marginalized groups (Dunnavant, Justinvil, and Colwell 2021; Flewellen et al. 2021; Lippert et al. 2021; Supernatant 2020). The flurry of archaeology job postings specifically targeting scholars whose research focuses on Black and/or Indigenous communities in the Americas is one manifestation of this disciplinary reorientation. In 2021, seventy-seven permanent positions in archaeology, including tenure-track assistant professors, museum curators, and NAGPRA specialists, were publicly advertised, of which thirty-six (47 percent) were specifically oriented toward candidates

specializing in collaboration with descendant communities, social difference, inequality, colonialism, and human–environment interactions, with a preference for diverse applicants (Figure 1). The remaining positions posted (n=41) did not indicate a preference for diverse applicants and advertised for a specific archaeological focus (e.g., archaeology of South America). Temporary positions (n=25) were less likely to specify, as many were teaching-focused, but some did indicate a preference for Black and Indigenous applicants.

Several of the postings that state an explicit preference for Indigenous candidates were associated with major research institutions in Canada, including the University of Toronto tri-campus system and the University of British Columbia. The recruitment and retention of Indigenous scholars by major Canadian institutions is a direct response to the TRC’s report and calls to action. In an effort to redress the legacy of residential schools, the TRC called upon the Government of Canada to address educational inequities and develop culturally relevant curricula for Indigenous peoples at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels (TRC 2015a, 1–2).

Positions Posted by Focus

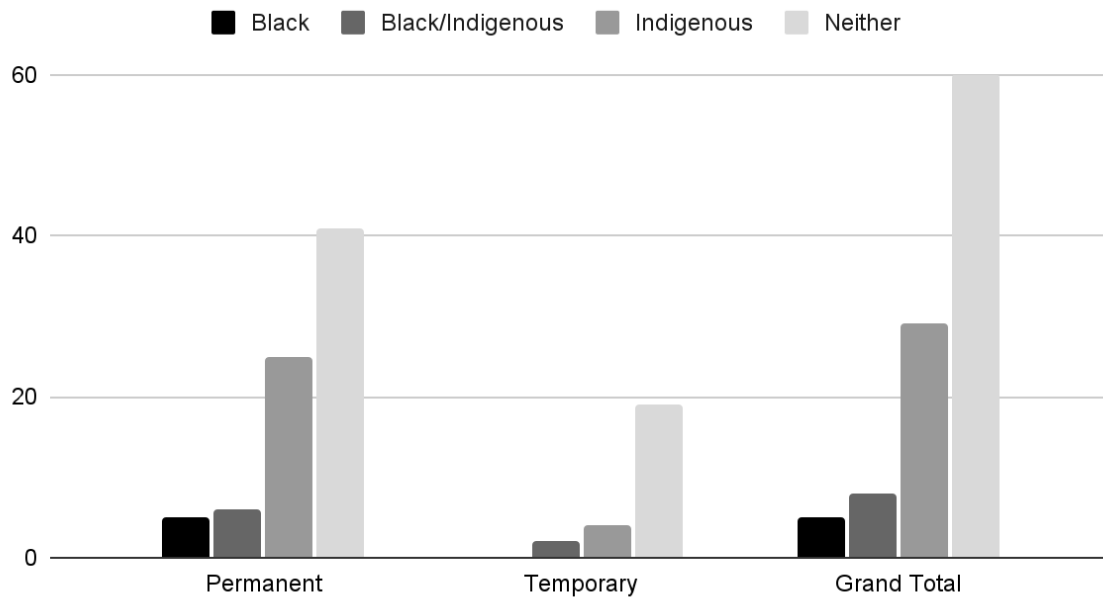


Figure 1. Archaeology Positions Posted in 2021 Based on Candidate Preference. Data compiled by Elizabeth (Libby) Goldberg.

While in the Canadian context, initiatives to hire Indigenous faculty have been couched within a politics of reconciliation, in the United States, recent diversity-oriented hiring initiatives have largely been galvanized by the shocking police murder of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter activism. In response to broad-based activism around anti-Black racism, US institutions have reinvested in recruiting and retaining faculty from historically marginalized communities, particularly African Americans.

Such institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) operations are not in and of themselves new. Spurred by the civil rights protests and affirmative action legislation of the 1960s and 1970s, universities and colleges have committed resources to admit or hire historically underrepresented and marginalized populations. The same sorts of social activism around racism, structural violence, and persistent injustice that inspired earlier waves of diversity policies have spurred contemporary reinvestments in hiring Black and Indigenous faculty. However, there are

several things that feel different about these DEI efforts in 2021. First, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted large-scale shifts to online classes and created heightened levels of economic insecurity, revealing clear gaps in institutional support for marginalized populations. This crisis has lent a new sense of urgency to the slow but steady progress of diversifying academic spaces.

Second, within anthropology in particular, DEI approaches have increasingly been framed using the language of “antiracism” and “decolonization.” Two recently published pieces explicitly lay out a commitment to shifting the power dynamics of the discipline in line with antiracist and decolonizing frameworks. In response to the civil unrest around racial injustice in 2020, Ayana O. Flewellen et al. (2021) published a now well-cited piece in *American Antiquity* titled “The Future of Archaeology Is Anti-Racist.” Drawing on Black feminist principles of intersectionality and critiques of power, the authors outline concrete steps that the field of archaeology can take to incorporate Black experiences and practices. One month later, the Task Force on Decolonization published an article in the *SAA Archaeological Record* outlining the organization’s new commitment to promoting decolonization in the organization and in the profession of archaeology more broadly. Echoing the goals of Flewellen and her colleagues, the task force is working to identify and propose alternatives to existing colonial ideologies within the discipline that maintain the power and privilege of Western thoughts and values. These coalitions of scholars seek to address what Schneider and Hayes (2020, 139) identify as “epistemic colonialism” in the discipline.

Archaeology’s embrace of antiracist and decolonial politics around Black and Indigenous peoples is reflected in several impactful lecture series and publications from the past year. The SAPIENS-sponsored webinar series “From the Margins to the Mainstream: Black and Indigenous Futures in Archaeology,” which began in 2020 and continued into 2021, is indicative

of an emerging intersectional approach to disciplinary critique and transformation. Collaboration as a form of decolonial and liberatory praxis was a key theme throughout the four webinars that aired in 2021.

The radicalization of the discipline is also captured in Akhil Gupta's (2021) official apology on behalf of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to Indigenous communities. In a statement published on the AAA website, Gupta acknowledged and apologized for the extractive and traumatic practices of anthropologists and the ongoing impacts of those actions on contemporary Indigenous peoples. Gupta elaborated on his call to address systemic power imbalances between Indigenous communities and anthropologists in his presidential lecture at the 2021 annual meeting of the AAA, titled "Decolonizing U.S. Anthropology." In response to this address, Herbert Lewis, a senior AAA member, penned a letter rejecting the notion that the discipline has caused harm to Indigenous peoples, extolling the virtues of cultural relativism and levying a defense of the anthropologists who "thanklessly" preserved Native languages and traditions for future generations. Like the antirepatriation paper given by Weiss and Springer, Lewis and the signatories to his letter express alarm at contemporary critiques of anthropological practices by the discipline's traditional "subjects" and draw on apolitical language to advocate for the maintenance of historic power imbalances.

Similarly, when the University of California, Berkeley, chose to rename Kroeber Hall after discussion and consultation with Native Americans (Kelly 2021), some anthropologists expressed concern that Alfred Kroeber was falling victim to "cancel culture" because his work with Native Californians was well-intentioned at the time (Scheper-Hughes 2020). Others noted that unnamings is not the same as forgetting, but naming has power, as "it raises up the person commemorated as a model in some way" (Joyce 2021, 474). In response to the renaming debate,

Peter Nelson, a Miwok scholar and archaeologist at UC Berkeley, articulates why the ethnographers of an older generation, however well-intentioned, should not be celebrated as heroes of anthropology. Nelson argues that the writings of late-nineteenth-century ethnographers like Kroeber, subsume Indigenous voices and have

laid claim to our intellectual territory, forced us to cite their publications of our stories to validate and legitimate this knowledge as authentic, and portrayed us as broken, divorced, and relocated from our history and knowledge. It has stolen our authority to tell our own story, even in our most intimate spaces. (Nelson 2021, 472)

These recent controversies mirror political tensions outside of the discipline between a vocal contingent of right-wing populists who are speaking out in response to perceived attacks on Western patriarchal heteronormative values by an increasingly radicalized left protesting against status-quo politics. These controversies center on power—specifically, who has the power to speak and who has the power to tell the stories of the past. Much of the impactful archaeology in 2021 challenges the rights of anthropologists and archaeologists to speak for or on behalf of marginalized peoples, past, present, and future.

Despite pushback from some sectors of archaeology, ongoing critiques of archaeology by Indigenous and Black scholars have helped to create more space within the discipline for other marginalized voices. In 2021, there was an ongoing focus on histories of Japanese Americans, especially histories of anti-Asian racism and incarceration in internment camps (Kamp-Whittaker 2021). For instance, a special issue of the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* focused on the rise of Japanese diaspora archaeology throughout North America (Camp 2016; Lau-Ozawa and Ross 2021; Ross 2021). This growing focus on hidden stories, violent histories, and community empowerment has had important methodological implications, leading to a growth in publications exploring how noninvasive and low-impact methods can support

Indigenous, Black, and other descendant communities (Chenoweth, Bossio, and Salvatore 2021; Davis, Seeber, and Sanger 2021; Friberg et al. 2021; Lafferty et al. 2021; Lim and Jones 2021; Sanger and Barnett 2021; Spivey-Faulkner 2021; Wadsworth, Supernant, and Dersch 2021; Wadsworth, Supernatant, and Kravchinsky 2021).

The reverberations of the #MeToo movement in archaeology also continue to be felt. Barbara Voss published two related articles in *American Antiquity* last year that synthesize the explosion of research on the cultures of harassment in archaeology (Voss 2021a) and provide a path forward to meaningful disciplinary transformation (Voss 2021b). Documenting how pervasive harassment, discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation are throughout the discipline has brought attention to the need for significant change (2021b, 448), but Voss also notes five major obstacles to that change—“normalization, exclusionary practices, fraternization, gatekeeping, and obstacles to reporting” (449). These barriers need to be addressed through clear adjustments to archaeological culture, including fieldwork (Davis et al. 2021; Emerson 2021), publication practices (Heath-Stout 2020), funding and career progression (Overholtzer and Jalbert 2021), and a greater understanding of holistic well-being within the discipline (Eifling 2021; Klehm, Hildebrand, and Meyers 2021), including making meaningful change to remove barriers and increase accessibility.

Accompanying efforts to make the discipline more reflexive and responsive to historically excluded groups, particularly Black and Indigenous peoples, have been critical conversations about the rhetoric of “decolonization” itself. Almost a decade after Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s (2012) pivotal critique of decolonization, the article has reappeared in archaeological circles, prompting the discipline to think critically about what decolonization means in terms of the field’s traditional power over the representation and control of Indigenous

peoples, bodies, histories, and objects. Two facets of Tuck and Yang's critical review of decolonization have surfaced in archaeological conversations over the past year: (1) the relationship between decolonization and the land, and (2) tensions surrounding Indigenous and settler identities. A growing number of Indigenous scholars have argued that decolonization fundamentally involves the return of lands and land-based resources to Indigenous peoples (Pieratos, Manning, and Tilsen 2020; Simpson 2016; Tuck and Yang 2012).

Recently, land acknowledgments have been called out as empty rhetoric: gestures toward decolonization without following through with institutional efforts to return lands or resources to Indigenous communities. In an article published in *The Conversation* (a similar version was later published in *Anthropology News*), Elisa Sobo, Michael Lambert, and Valerie Lambert (2021) argue that while land acknowledgments can start conversations about Indigenous sovereignty and repatriation, they often gloss over the violence of colonization and its ongoing impacts on Indigenous communities. This provocative editorial has galvanized interest in creating concrete institutional change rather than performative feel-good politics but has also prompted discussions about Indigenous identity in North America, which is both a socio-political affiliation determined by Tribal Nations and an ethnic identity that has sometimes been appropriated by settlers.

The challenges around achieving meaningful transformative change are evident when looking at the types of archaeologically oriented articles published over the last year. Even as conversations about collaboration, decolonization, and antiracism are deepening and the hiring landscape around diversity and representation are shifting, an overview of the publications on archaeology in North America in 2021 reveals that more-traditional archaeological scholarship continues apace. Many of the articles published about the archaeological histories of Indigenous

places have no mention of collaboration or involvement of Indigenous peoples in the work itself (e.g., Arkush and Arkush 2021; Barkwill Love 2021; Capps and Jones 2021; Dolan and Shackley 2021; Farnsworth, Emerson, and Hughes 2021). What remains unclear in these publications is whether collaboration existed and is not mentioned or no collaboration was present, suggesting that journal editors need to explore how to ensure that collaborative methods and relationships are integrated into publications. Either way, many of the voices that are telling Indigenous histories in archaeology remain non-Indigenous.

The dearth of engagement with Indigenous peoples is clearest in scholarship on the first peopling of the lands now known as North America, where debates continue about the precise dating of various sites (e.g., Araujo et al. 2021; Boulanger et al. 2021; Bourgeon 2021; Eren, Meltzer, and Andrews 2021; Fiedel et al. 2021) and the routes of arrival (Cassidy 2021; Easton, Moore, and Mason 2021). There is also an ongoing focus on ancient DNA analyses to help explain human movement, change, and interaction through time (Liu et al. 2021), while ethical challenges remain in working with ancestors (Cortez et al. 2021; Supernatant 2020; Tsotie, Fox, and Yracheta 2021) that have not yet been adequately addressed. Despite growing calls for Indigenous representation in North American archaeology, the Indigenous peoples of these ancient lands are rarely mentioned in this line of research. The importance of including Indigenous perspectives in discussions of the First Peoples of the Americas is demonstrated by the publication of Cree-Métis scholar Paulette Steeves's (2021) *Indigenous Paleolithic of the Western Hemisphere*. Steeves's book is a wide-ranging critique of the ongoing practice of many non-Indigenous archaeologists to dismiss or overlook sites that predate 15,000 years ago. Steeves's provocative work challenges the archaeological narrative about first arrivals, arguing that settler-colonial knowledge frameworks and non-Indigenous archaeologists' unwillingness to

deeply consider earlier sites have led to the dismissal of a very deep Indigenous history in the lands now known as the Americas.

TOWARD A HOPEFUL FUTURE

In 2021, we have seen a growing number of scholars reinvest in a politicized archaeology that engages with the troubled pasts of historically marginalized communities and their contemporary struggles for reconciliation, repatriation, and reclamation. At the same time, we have also witnessed a counter-discourse that reinvests in traditional notions of archaeological stewardship, purportedly neutral politics, and scientific supremacy. This disciplinary polarization reflects a broader tension between Black and Indigenous futurity and settler futurity. “Futurity” refers to how “the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e., calculation, imagination, and performance) and, in turn intervenes upon the present through three anticipatory logics (i.e., precaution, pre-emption, and preparedness)” (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013, 80). Settler futurity employs these anticipatory logics in order to maintain the pillars of settler colonialism as a structure: white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, ableism, and capitalism. While settler futurity seeks to constrain or eliminate Black and Indigenous futures, Black and Indigenous futurity seeks to ensure the survival and resurgence of these communities.

The growing body of archaeological research focused on collaborating with and elevating the voices of historically marginalized communities directly challenges settler futurity by presencing these communities and publicly archiving past wrongs. Archaeologists, particularly historical archaeologists, are well positioned to work with the material, documentary, and oral historical records to archive traumatic events and eras in the past. The historical archives created by archaeologists open up new futures for descendant communities through multiple pathways.

These archives de-center settlers and disrupt settler narratives by uncovering untold or hidden stories and elevating marginalized voices. Archaeological archives are also being used by marginalized communities to reclaim sites of memory, like boarding and residential schools, massacre sites, mental institutions, and plantations, as well as broader landscapes. Repatriation, whether through formal federal legislation or more informal mechanisms, is another way in which communities are reclaiming their ancestors, healing from historical trauma, and ensuring their collective futurity. Finally, archaeologies of reconciliation create alternative futures by revealing structural inequalities and epistemic forms of colonialism that can be addressed through decolonizing and antiracist policymaking.

In addition to documenting past wrongs in order to reclaim sites, redress injustice, and foster reconciliation, we see archaeology as a pathway to creating healthy communities in the present and future. We are particularly struck by the growing importance of meaningful collaboration between descendant communities and archaeologists. While this trend reflects a much longer movement toward the incorporation of marginalized perspectives and goals into the discipline, contemporary efforts to de-center the traditional power and roles of archaeologists are transforming archaeological practice. This new era of collaboration is oriented particularly around social justice, healing, and capacity-building within historically marginalized communities. Despite some outspoken advocacy for status-quo archaeology, there appears to be a growing consensus around the importance of collaborative approaches to research in North America, which represents a significant shift in the discipline. The combination of a growing body of scholarship where marginalized voices are speaking, the renewed attention to the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the emphasis on hiring diverse academics into

permanent positions demonstrates that archaeology is transforming; there is no turning back now.

The documentary efforts of archaeologists have prompted important discussions around how the discipline and broader civil society can reckon with historical injustices and their ongoing impacts on contemporary communities. Within the field, such discussions have spurred renewed efforts to recruit historically underrepresented scholars and to center the study of marginalized, often violent, pasts in academia. These hiring initiatives have the potential to foster Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) futurity by creating a space for alternative perspectives, ethics, and methods within the field. While diversifying the discipline of archaeology represents an important step toward redressing the marginalization of BIPOC scholars, our review of job postings from 2021 also indicates that these DEI efforts, especially in the U.S., have a long way to go.

Despite these ongoing challenges, in reviewing the archaeological literature published in 2021, we are left with a feeling of hope. The speculative nature of hope is an important facet of futurity; to hope is an imaginative act that creates new possibilities for historically marginalized communities. We are hopeful that the growing attention around boarding schools in Canada and the United States, both within the public sphere and within historical archaeology, will create opportunities for Indigenous communities to reclaim their ancestors, document their hidden histories, and heal. We are also hopeful that the growing discourse around decolonization and antiracism will lead to actionable policies that will transform power dynamics within the field of archaeology. Finally, we are hopeful that the collaborative turn will continue to grow as a central feature of archaeological research with descendant and Indigenous communities in North America, leading to a future where archaeology is increasingly community-driven. When

archaeologists work deeply and meaningfully with communities to serve their needs, the work that emerges is both ethical and innovative. As two Indigenous archaeologists, this is the future we want for the discipline, for our communities, and for the world.

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