

COLLABORATING ON COLLABORATION

RESULTS OF THE 2005 AMERIND SEMINAR ON INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY

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When we convened in early October 2005, we came from many parts of North America, many career paths, and many backgrounds, but we realized after four days of working, talking, laughing, debating, and dining together in the magnificent beauty of the southeastern Arizona desert that we shared something fundamental. We shared a commitment to making collaborative indigenous archaeology front and center in North American archaeology. This topic first brought us together at the 70th Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, where we were awarded the “outstanding symposium” for our session on collaborative indigenous archaeology. This topic brought us back together again at the Amerind Foundation in Dagoon, Arizona, to participate in an advanced seminar. With John Ware as our gracious host, 12 participants discussed collaborative indigenous archaeology in the context of past, present, and future. Participants traveled from the corners of the continent to present a variety of regional approaches. Participants also offered us a chance to see how collaborative archaeological projects look after only a few years and how they look after more than a decade.

Representing one of three projects from New England, Jeffrey Bendremer and Elaine Thomas from the Mohegan Tribe Historic Preservation Department reported on more than 10 years of a tribally sponsored field school in Connecticut where control of the archaeology rests in the hands of tribal members. Russell Handsman elaborated on the collaborative National Science Foundation (NSF) project that he and Kevin McBride, both at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, have developed that ties together youth from Mashantucket, Hopi, and Zuni communities to explore science learning. The third New England project was the Eastern Pequot Archaeological Field School that Kathy Sebastian of the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation and I, from the University of Massachusetts–Boston, have been conducting, which couples the historical archaeology of colonialism with experiments in collaborative learning and research. The Northeast also had a showing with two projects from New York. Jack Rossen from Ithaca College discussed his role in developing a community-based project with the Cayuga (Haudenosaunee) involving archaeology, cultural and economic sustainability, and negotiations of volatile political terrain in upstate New York. Jordan Kerber of Colgate University detailed the ways that his multiyear project with local Oneida youth helped to transform the ways that local people thought about the past and tested the waters of political relationships between universities and tribal governments.

Southwestern projects at the seminar should come as no surprise because of the many Native American communities and archaeologists in the area. Representing a project involving Mark Altaha (White Mountain Apache Tribe), T. J. Ferguson (Anthropological Research, LLC), and John Welch (Simon Fraser University), Barbara Mills of the University of Arizona detailed her collaborative NSF-funded project with the White Mountain Apache. The venture melded archaeology with heritage preservation and ethics to provide an enriching activity for tribal members, students, and archaeologists alike. Davina Two Bears outlined the successes of the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department–Northern Arizona University Student Training Program and revealed the ways that collaborative and indigenous archaeology has taken place on Navajo lands with Navajo participation. Kent Lightfoot of UC-Berkeley rounded out the geographical coverage “out West” by discussing some of the past successes and future directions of his long-term collaboration with the Kashaya Pomo in northern California.

Two participants served as discussants. George Nicholas from Simon Fraser University shared insights regarding the nature of indigenous archaeology with First Nations communities in Canada, a prediction about upcoming debates on intellectual property rights, and ways to decolonize archaeological methodology. Michael Wilcox from Stanford University offered his thoughts on collaborative indigenous archaeologies by calling for a new dialogue with ethnography and historical anthropology, emphasizing contextual and personal narratives, and warning that we need to think about exit strategies and sustainability.

Several themes emerged during the seminar:

- *Pedagogy*: How does one teach indigenous collaborative archaeology, and how does that differ from “regular” archaeology? What is the impact on traditional archaeological field schools?
- *Methodology*: How does one do collaborative indigenous archaeology at the so-called “trowel’s edge”? Are new field, laboratory, and analytical methods required? Between whom exactly does collaboration take place?
- *Ethics*: How do we incorporate discussions of ethics in our fieldwork and in our field schools, in particular? What does an ethical indigenous archaeology look like?
- *Historic and cultural preservation*: What role does archaeology play in Native American efforts at cultural and historic preservation? How are projects founded on these indigenous initiatives different than those founded solely on “research” or on “consultation”?
- *Ethnography*: Why do archaeologists seem to have such difficulty being anthropologists—that is, talking to and working with living people? Shouldn’t we try to document the process of collaboration and indigenous archaeology rather than wait on a final product?
- *Sovereignty*: Should an ultimate goal be to turn over all projects to Native archaeologists, or does indigenous archaeology actually thrive on multiple voices? How do the politics of federal recognition and land play into this?

Thankfully, given participants’ commitments to making collaborations work, we handled our differences and disagreements with remarkable amicability. Tackling these questions revealed another key characteristic of collaborative indigenous archaeologies: they must remain flexible, contextual, and diverse. We must allow collaborative indigenous archaeological projects to adjust to local circumstances, to draw structure from community needs, to mature as personal and professional relationships do, and, if necessary, to conclude when participants have reached satisfactory goals. We left Dragoon with renewed commitments to making collaborative indigenous archaeology a key topic in American archaeology. One way is through the edited volume scheduled for debut in late Spring 2007. Another way is through vigilance back home—with our collaborators, our students, and our colleagues—to constantly re-examine the theory, method, and practice of archaeology so that it becomes better attuned, simultaneously, to the rigors of quality research, the histories of disenfranchisement, the needs of communities, and the prospects of a bright and vibrant future.



Figure 1: Amerind Seminar Participants, October 2005. Front row, l–r: Davina Two Bears, Barbara Mills, Katherine Sebastian, Michael Wilcox, Elaine Thomas. Back row, l–r: Stephen Silliman, Kent Lightfoot, George Nicholas, Russell Handsman, Jack Rossen, Jeffrey Bendremer, Jordan Kerber.



Figure 2: Impromptu discussions held during field trip. Pictured, l–r: Jack Rossen, Barbara Mills, Michael Wilcox.