

ARCH1900: Archaeology of College Hill
J. Cindy Oh
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Critical Response #6

Much like the writers from last week's readings, the three authors of the papers we read this week discussed the issues of ownership, nationalism and ethics, and their roles in the interpretation and communication of archaeological records to wider audiences.

In his paper 'Toward a Global Politics of the Past', Ian Hodder discusses the involvement of 'ownership' in the archaeological process and the conflicts that arise over ownership, especially when local and ethnic identities are involved. He emphasizes that it is necessary to convey the notion that archaeology 'involves more than digging' and that in regards to ownership, it's 'not enough to say 'x' owns the site and should curate it'. He argues that with increasing globalization, it's not practical to assign the ownership of the past to any one individual and that a better alternative would be to 'say that no one owns a site - rather we all pass through as travelers or tourists' because then responsibility would be placed on all those passing through and in particular force archaeologists to examine the consequences of their work on the communities among whom they work.

Additionally, Hodder claims that when archaeologists evaluate the interests and sensitivities of the stakeholder groups, it is crucial for them to understand the needs of

the local groups and that local people should be somewhat involved in the decision making process because the locals are the ones who travel through the site the most and the archaeologists need to minimize their 'intervention'. He points out that the agendas of the archaeologists tend to have 'no resonance' among the people who travel through the site the most and that this needs to change if we are to move towards 'collective responsibility'.

Neil Silberman advocates similar beliefs as Hodder in his paper 'Virtual Viewpoints: Multivocality in the Marketed Past?' and he terms it 'multivocality', an expression also used by Hodder in another paper of his titled 'Multivocality and Social Archaeology' and a concept Silberman explains to be one that attempts to create 'spaces and structures at heritage sites that will promote the coexistence of potentially conflicting approaches and perceptions of the site's significance'. Essentially, he states that to help shape the audience's perspective of the historical site, we need to engage them with presentations that have taken into account the various perspectives of the stakeholders involved with the site. Silberman also suggests that we could turn to multimedia presentations with 'interactive screens that can summon up a colorful range of historical perspectives' to highlight multivocality. He discusses how museums, including the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, have already adopted this use but he warns that the line between 'compelling historical representation and entertainment' is very thin and that these museum narratives try to captivate the 'widest possible audience', something true multivocality is not able to do.

The concerns raised by Hodder and Silberman – the latter particularly so - are all relevant issues I have to carefully think about when producing my final project, especially considering the fact that it is a multimedia presentation of our findings. Not only do I have to recognize that there are multiple stakeholders involved, including the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Joukowsky Institute, the descendents of John Brown and Marsden Perry, the students of our class, the Brown community and the Rhode Island public, I also have to make sure to take into account all the different perspectives when crafting my narrative of the site if I am to fulfill the aims of true multivocality.

Works Cited

Hodder, Ian. 2003 Sustainable Time Travel: Toward a Global Politics of the Past. In S. Kane, ed., *The Politics of Archaeology and Identity in a Global Contest*, 139-147.

McManamon, Francis P. 2003 Archaeology, Nationalism, and Ancient America. In S. Kane, ed., *The Politics of Archaeology and Identity in a Global Contest*, 115-138.

Silberman, Neil A. 2008 Virtual Viewpoints: Multivocality in the Marketed Past? In J. Habu, C. Fawcett, and J. Matsunaga, eds, *Evaluating Multiple Narratives: Beyond Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist Archaeologies*. New York: Springer, pgs. 138-143.