Susana Ortega

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Response Five:

In this week’s readings, we see how the three articles discuss about the past and its heritage, such as the slavery in the Brown family or Van Cortlandt’s mansion or the controversy of the human bones found in Green Point. As archaeologists, it is up to us to bring forth information of the past and provide this to the people. Nick Shepherd brings us to the bigger question: who owns the past? He explains how “it must first of all be yours to give. In the second place, it implies a conception of ‘the people’. In the third place, it raises the question of the format in which the past is to be returned,” (99). Because there are many explanations of the past and its heritage, it is necessary, though difficult, to engage with our audience.

In archaeology, to understand the past we must go and investigate it first. I believe this is what the past is in terms of archaeology. It is something that should be researched and discovered. With this information we are able to bring this new discovery forth to our present and enable a better understanding of our past. This is similar when we discover about our ancestors and then we are able to understand ourselves and heritage better. Now, heritage is what gives one the rightful possession of something that is handed down from the past. It makes one the legal owner of what once belonged to someone in the past. This allows people to have a piece of the past existing with them during the present.

Though the past and heritage seem straight forward and understood, it is actually more difficult in the real world of archaeology. Due to the many interpretations of the past, no one can settle to one linear conclusion that explains our past. This causes people or the audience to take sides by what is most convenient to them. This is the problem in why there are many perspectives of the past, and it only leaves the past even more dark and confusing as it was first discovered. Heritage is also challenging, especially when something has been discovered from hundreds of years ago. Now the question is who owns this past? Does it belong to the archaeologist who found it and can continue to research for a better understanding? Or does it belong to the people of the area and have the right to decide what to do with it? This is where the problem of ownership of the past enters.

So, through publication conflicting ideas of the past and of heritage does influence on the way we engage with our audiences. These influences can be seen through this week’s readings. For one, there are so many interpretations of the past and so different conclusions that are made. For example, Banker and Winter’s article shows how they used the Van Cortlandt mansion to understand New York’s enslaved plantation workers. Now, audience is left to decide whether they accept this explanation or think of it as vague because the authors use this one mansion to explain a general case. Shepherd’s article shows the conflicting issue of ownership between the rescue archaeologists and the people of Cape Town, South Africa. Though this article demonstrates both sides, it seemed to me the author is leading the audience toward the people of Cape Town. Here, we see how publications do not only allow the audience to decide sides but persuade them as well. In *Slavery and Justice,* it explains the controversy of pro-slavery and anti-slavery between the Brown family and the students from Brown University. The debates of slavery from both sides are explained in the article. It is also interesting to see how in the end of the article it explains how the students who fought in the Confederacy are forgotten while those of the Union Army are honored and remembered. This can be used as an example of how publications can agree on one side, in this case anti-slavery, and not mention the opposing information to the audience, which leads the audience unaware and left without a choice.

In conclusion, publications dealing with conflicting issues on the past and its heritage can influence the audience. There will always be at least a hint of bias from the author because he/she is also entitled of his/her opinion. However, I believe the best way to engage with the audience is to be objective as possible and to explain all possible outcomes to leave them with a choice and an opinion.

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