Common Ground
Stepping Stones to
and Archaeologists
Native Americans

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Forging a New Ancient History for Native America

Some observers fear that "repatriation" will scorch our ability to investigate the ancient past, but I am intrigued with the possibility of harnessing the flames ignited by this issue in order to shed significant new light on human history. Whatever use we choose to make of this particular fire, it is clear that the landscape of relations between Native America and the American archaeological community has undergone dramatic changes since the 1980s—changes favoring the development of what might be termed a "partnership ecology." The character of this growing national environment of interaction between Indians and archaeologists has been shaped by the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA). This federal law creates a role for native communities in asserting some administrative authority over archaeology, and, in terms of the practice of archaeology in the United States, this may well emerge as the primary result of NAGPRA's intent to foster cooperative relations. But important questions have yet to be answered. Are mutually rewarding partnerships possible, since many Native American leaders are fundamentally unsympathetic toward the discipline and some archaeologists are unsympathetic toward Indian political agendas? Is it accurate to assume that Native Americans can only serve as administrators over archaeology, and that they have no other legitimate contribution to make as partners in the quest to understand the ancient past? Until these questions are addressed, few archaeologists will be enthusiastic about the idea of becoming "partners" with Indian people in the study of ancient America. Significant answers to these questions, however, may emerge from the study of oral documents.

Interest in the contribution of oral traditions to ancient historical settings has long been an aspect of scholarship on Native America. The vast majority of academic researchers, however, reject oral traditions as a source of historical information about events dating back more than two or three centuries, and the complexity of verbal literature has served to discourage further scholarly interest. In addition, the American academic community has a well-established history of viewing the intellectual and cultural heritage of nonwhite societies as inferior. Therefore, native specialists in the preservation of oral traditions are not treated as peers, colleagues, and intellectual equals. Even when racist paradigms have been successfully challenged and defused, one lingering legacy has been that legitimate insights into the human past are viewed as the sole prerogative of Euroamerican scholarship—simply because no convincing alternative exists. Finally, scholars are hesitant to defer to Indian experts on oral traditions since most such experts are religious leaders who emphasize the spiritual aspects of oral traditions and who typically see academic analysis as inappropriate. A religious approach accepts oral texts as the source of holistic truths rather than as documents that require evaluation for historicity, and this clashes with the Euroamerican academic heritage of disqualifying religious belief as a basis for verifying constructions of human history.

The entrance of NAGPRA onto this stage has created a special problem, since it lists oral information as a permissible source of evidence in evaluating the cultural affiliations between ancient and modern Indian societies. Relying on oral information, Indians can now assert claims for the return of human remains and funerary objects dating back centuries or millennia, and academic institutions must evaluate evidence with which they have little experience. Most typically, the vast literature authored by "prehistorians" offers little convenient guidance for administrators who must decide whether oral traditions can serve as a reliable source of evidence about the past. It is therefore important to give some attention to instances in which oral traditions have been offered as evidence in repatriation negotiations. In this chapter, I discuss the reception given to Pawnee oral traditions in such settings and I suggest that the current trend in American archaeology favors changes not only in how archaeology is administered but also in creating exciting new avenues of research on ancient Indian history. First, however, it is necessary to outline my approach to
embark on a journey to explore the ancient landscapes of America. For thousands of years, the Ancestral Puebloans, a civilization of the American Southwest, constructed complex communities of dwellings, kivas, and other structures that have withstood the test of time. Their ingenious architectural designs, intricate pottery, and elaborate weaving techniques offer a glimpse into a culture that thrived in harmony with the natural world.

In the 几乎高地 of 美国, the Ancestral Puebloans left behind a legacy of ingenuity and resilience. Their communities were not only shelter but also centers of social and cultural life, where knowledge was passed down through generations. The adobe structures, with their thick walls that provided insulation against the extreme temperatures, were a testament to the ingenuity of these early architects. The kivas, which served as communal gathering places, were central to the religious and social life of the pueblo communities.

The Ancestral Puebloans' reliance on agriculture and herding allowed them to support large populations and maintain complex social structures. The evidence of their agricultural practices, including the cultivation of corn, beans, and squash, speaks to their adaptability and the rich biodiversity of the region. The art forms produced by the Ancestral Puebloans, such as pottery and weaving, not only served practical purposes but also held deep cultural significance. The intricate designs and motifs found on their ceramics and textiles reflect a sophisticated understanding of form and symbolism.

As we explore the 几乎高地 of 美国, we are inspired by the resilience and creativity of the Ancestral Puebloans. Their stories remind us of the importance of preserving our cultural heritage and the value of learning from the past to inform our present. This journey is an invitation to wander, to wonder, and to wonder how the skills and knowledge of these ancient peoples can continue to enrich our understanding of the world. The 几乎高地 of 美国 is a place where history is not just a collection of facts but a living, breathing legacy that continues to shape our collective identity.
Battlefields of Ancient Indian History

There is a permanent condition in my view, however, this is an argument that I haven't been able to add to my objection. Before the publication of my essay, I wanted to contribute to the discussion on the conditions of ancient Indian history—our "ancient Indian history." Now, I believe it is important to know that ancient Indian history has been influenced by the history of the modern world. The events of my essay, however, I believe they are important to know that ancient Indian history has been influenced by the history of the modern world.

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This response included letters solicited during the fall of 1990 from various scholars, several of whom commented on my affidavit. One archaeologist expressed the view that connecting Pawnee oral traditions "to the specifics of the available archeological record is impossible" (Peter Bleed to Terry Steinacher, September 13, 1990, correspondence appended to Ludwickson et al. 1991). The National Park Service's Midwest Archeological Center weighed in with a letter expressing amuse ment at my credentials as an "expert witness" and wondering whether I had "lifted" the list of sources attached to my affidavit (F. A. Calabrese to Terry Steinacher, September 7, 1990). This letter from a federal agency advised the NSHS that my professors at the University of Colorado should be informed of my misdeeds, presumably to encourage that institution to silence me through academic censure. I am uncertain as to why such stark hostility emerged from the NPS Midwest Archeological Center, but it is clear that this form of academic critique is not designed to promote productive and informed discussion. For Indians who see archaeologists in terms of a homogenous, oppressive stereotype, it is relevant to note at this point that letters provided to the NSHS by several other archaeologists contained brief comments responding more favorably to my affidavit, but all of these responses—both pro and con—were formulated before the release of "Ancient Pawnee History."

The NSHS archaeologists prepared a reply to "Ancient Pawnee History" and contacted Melburn Thurman, an ethnologist, for an additional assessment of my work. Both appraisals rejected my approach. Thurman characterized my paper as an "ideosyncratic" [sic] expression of "belief" and claimed that "few Plain [sic] anthropologist specialists, whether archaeologists or ethnologists, would dare to argue that Indian traditions provide any kind of useful historical information beyond the living memory" (evaluation by Thurman dated December 31, 1990). The NSHS archaeologists adopted a more sophisticated strategy. They argued that reconciliation of the archaeological record with written documents and Pawnee oral traditions favors a scenario in which the Spanish drove the Pawnees out of the Southwest into the Central Plains sometime around A.D. 1600. Whether or not these scholars actually supported this theory, their fundamental point was to question oral traditions as a source of useful information, and their views have since received wide and influential circulation among other specialists in Plains archaeology.

None of my suggestions on connecting specific oral documents to the archaeological record were directly refuted by any of these appraisals; rather, their strategies centered on efforts to cast doubt on my basic assumption that oral records can be reliably integrated with archaeological evidence. This approach was remarkably effective in undermining serious consideration of my work. Up to this point, I had occasionally indulged a naïve expectation that the NSHS archaeologists would be intrigued at the implications of my research, and I looked forward to the possibility of working with and learning from these experts on Central Plains archaeology. I recall thinking that by working together, we could more effectively address questions surrounding Pawnee ancestry on the basis of cooperative scholarship; but as it turned out, the mediation of lawyers, judges, legislators, the attorney general of Nebraska, the governor of Nebraska, and the president of the United States proved far more essential to Pawnee repatriation efforts than any of my ideas on oral traditions.

As of 1996, not a single set of human remains had been repatriated and reburied as a result of my work on oral traditions. This is an important symbolic victory for those scholars and institutions who have conscientiously labored as a matter of academic politics to protect their prerogatives in the practice of traditional American archaeology. It is, moreover, a source of amazement to me that some scholars unself-consciously deplore Indian repatriation efforts as politically motivated, particularly since my experiences in dealing with archaeopoliticians have starkly clarified for me some of the personal costs that my research might entail—including the unambiguous threat to destroy any aspirations I might have for an academic career. Though my efforts to investigate oral documents in the context of repatriation claims have borne discouraging results, I am convinced, nevertheless, that many Indians and archaeologists are open to these explorations, and I am encouraged by the favorable interest that I have received from individuals in both communities. My experiences with the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) underscore this point.

The Pawnee Tribe discovered that the NMNH also held Central Plains tradition human remains, and in 1992 the tribal attorneys submitted various research papers supporting a Pawnee claim for these persons. A meeting in 1994 with the NMNH Repatriation Office produced a somewhat dismaying result. In the course of this meeting I mentioned some of my ideas on oral traditions and was invited to prepare a report containing this evidence. The Smithsonian representatives were surprised to hear that this information had already been provided in the form of two reports: my 1990 paper and a more detailed 1992 version (Echo-Hawk 1990, 1992). Unfortunately, neither paper had been circulated to two scholars—Donna Roper and Richard Jantz—who had been hired by the Smithsonian to help evaluate the Pawnee claim.

Roper's subsequent report (1993) on archaeological evidence offered some consideration of evidence from oral traditions, but it simply responded to a conference paper presenting the views of the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) archaeologists. Though she took a position that challenged their perspective, she made little effort to assess the oral traditions for relevant information. Physical anthropologist Richard Jantz took pains in his report to emphasize research results that he believed contradicted the "Pawnee position" (Jantz 1993). Nevertheless, Roper and Jantz both provided research conclusions that conformed in very
interesting ways to my evidence from oral traditions, but this circumstance did little to attract the curiosity of the NMNH Repatriation Office.

Roper's treatment of oral traditions illustrates the fact that even when the findings of archaeologists support Indian repatriation efforts, such support need not reflect any sympathy for investigating the contribution of verbal literature to ancient historical settings. In Roper's case, the difficulty of assessing the contribution of Pawnee oral traditions may have been unnecessarily magnified by her ignorance of my research. For this reason, I volunteered to assist the NMNH in assessing the oral evidence, but I was given no opportunity to contribute to this process, and though the NMNH ultimately affirmed a cultural affiliation between the Pawnee Tribe and the Central Plains tradition, oral traditions were dismissed as a factor. William Billeck, the NMNH case officer who handled the Pawnee claim, later defended his approach with the assertion that he saw no need to assess oral documents since the archaeological and biological evidence proved sufficient. It is notable, however, that the NMNH cited and relied on the NSHS position on Pawnee oral traditions in declining to accept such evidence (Billeck et al. 1995:17).

The Pawnee Tribe continued negotiations with the Smithsonian for the repatriation of human remains associated with the Steed-Kisker phase—contemporary neighbors of the Central Plains tradition. This effort led to a stalemate of conflicting opinions in 1995, and the matter was brought before the Smithsonian's Native American Repatriation Review Committee for resolution. In a hearing held in September 1995, I was given an opportunity to discuss at some length the contribution of Pawnee oral traditions to the question of Steed-Kisker cultural affiliations. The committee subsequently issued findings that favored the position of the Pawnee Tribe, giving credence to Pawnee oral traditions as a source of historical information about the ancient past (Thornton et al. 1995). It is also highly significant that in two separate publications in 1995, one NSHS archaeologist has acknowledged that Pawnee oral traditions might be of some use to archaeologists studying the ancient Central Plains (Bozell 1995a, 1995b). These recent developments offer important and encouraging signs of change.

Animal Architects

It may be useful to suggest how it is possible to integrate oral traditions and archaeology in an effort to clarify cultural affiliations between the Pawnee people and the Central Plains tradition. As mentioned earlier, I have identified a variety of Caddoan oral traditions concerning ancient historical settings, and in my opinion some of these stories can be connected to the time of the Central Plains tradition (A.D. 950 to 1400). A particularly strong area for productive analysis is found in the topic of architecture.

At least three separate statements and stories concerning the origins of earthlodge architectural structures were collected and recorded by James R. Murie and George Dorsey from Pawnees alive at the end of the nineteenth century (Dorsey and Murie 1906:19–21; Linton 1923; Murie 1981:158–162). This group of statements and stories was told as historical observations, rather than as fictional tales or speculation, and I presume that these stories are not only derived from actual historical circumstances, but that they concern a variety of separate events. One South Band Pawnee story begins with the statement that the first people were placed near Nemaha, Nebraska, where they constructed an earthlodge facing west (Dorsey and Murie 1906:19–21). This story—told by a Kitkahahki Pawnee about the Kawarakis ancestors of the South Band Pawnees—is not a detailed narrative about earthlodges, but it conveys the impression that the first use of such structures occurred while the Kawarakis Caddoans dwelt in southeastern Nebraska at some point in time prior to extensive reliance on corn cultivation and bison hunting.

Two Skidi Pawnee narratives contain detailed information about the circumstances under which the ancestors of the Skidi first adopted earthlodge architecture. One story (Murie 1981:158–162) is set on the Elkhorn River in northeastern Nebraska and concerns the development of earthlodges with circular floor plans, implying that circular earthlodges first appeared in some region beyond the central Nebraska Loup River homeland of the Skidi Pawnees. According to the narrative, this architectural innovation is associated with animal lodge ceremonialism.

The second Skidi oral tradition (Linton 1923) differs in significant ways from the Elkhorn River story and makes no mention of the earthlodge floor plan shape. This narrative describes the origin of the Skidi "Medicine Lodge"—a formal expression of lodge ceremonialism. The story reports that a "man who lived alone, and did not mingle with the rest of the tribe" traveled "for many days" to the east until he arrived at the Missouri River, where he was inducted into an animal lodge beneath the water. Speaking for these animals, a "water monster" explained that he had been sent by Tirawahut from the "Big Waters" in order to "tell these animals to instruct you in their mysteries." After a time, the man returned home, and sometime later, he was told to embark on another journey eastward "to the place where Freemont [sic], Nebraska, now is." At an animal lodge located on an island in the Platte River, the man received instructions on building "a new kind of house," which was to be a gift to the Skidi people; the animals then took the man to a nearby hill where they constructed the first earthlodge for him. Until this time, "the Skidi did not know how to build earth lodges." Though such a structure is associated with animal lodge ceremonialism, it is also clear that earthlodges were intended to have both ceremonial and residential purposes.

Available literature on the archaeology of the Central Plains often touches on earthlodge architecture but typically makes no mention of these Pawnee oral
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The Klamath story shows in no uncertain terms the extent of the federal's

The current federal government, which has ignored the Klamath tribes for decades, is now attempting to exploit the Klamath River for its own purposes. The Klamath tribes have been fighting to protect their way of life and their culture, but they have been met with resistance at every turn.

The Klamath tribes have been fighting to protect their way of life and their culture, but they have been met with resistance at every turn. The federal government has ignored their concerns and has instead focused on exploiting the resources of the Klamath River for its own purposes. The Klamath tribes have been fighting to protect their way of life and their culture, but they have been met with resistance at every turn.
3. Oral traditions point to the appearance of lifeways utilizing earthlodges in the eastern Central Plains and a subsequent diffusion westward, and this is compatible with archaeological evidence.

4. The archaeological record for the Central Plains and adjacent regions should be reviewed to identify sites that date to the general period of A.D. 1300–1600 and feature both square and circular earthlodges.

5. The modern Pawnee people have cultural roots extending very unambiguously into the period of the Central Plains tradition, and this connection is effectively clarified through the integration of the archaeological record with oral traditions.

It is unfortunate that my research, forged in the fires of bitter disputes over repatriation, has moved some very powerful Central Plains archaeopoliticians to attempt to extinguish rather than encourage the light that "ancient Pawnee history" can shed on the prehistory of the Central Plains. In terms of my personal aspirations for an academic career, mine is certainly not a glowing success story; but my research has enabled me to assure the leaders of the Pawnee Tribe that in reburying Central Plains tradition human remains, they are laying to rest the bones of persons who are ancestors of the Pawnee and Atikara people. It is also important to observe that the Pawnee Tribe has relied on the advice and hard work of archaeologists like Larry Zimmerman and Tom Witty in seeking (and accomplishing) the reburial of nearly 400 persons who lived and died during the Central Plains tradition period.

The End of Conquest Anthropology

If the spirit of NAGPRA is to ever have a reasonable chance for fulfillment, then attitudes must change on the part of both archaeologists and Indians. For archaeologists, the building of partnerships can focus on the contribution of Indian knowledge to our understanding of human history. For Indians, the opportunity to address long-standing grievances from a position of power should create new settings in which the contribution of archaeology to Indian historical self-awareness can be explored and embraced. The successful integration of oral evidence with evidence from archaeology and physical anthropology holds forth great potential for reshaping the essential character of academic constructions of ancient human history.

The circumstances under which my research first became available in 1990 offered fertile ground for hostility on the part of archaeologists intent on defending important collections of human remains from repatriation, and it is understandable that my work was not simply rejected, but effectively quashed. From this inauspicious beginning, we need to move forward into more productive interactions. Although I cannot ignore the personal costs of these experiences, I have little sympathy for Indians who may seek to extract from my story some justification for dismissing archaeology as a tool for understanding ancient Native America.

Despite the current trend favoring a new "partnership ecology," some Indians will continue to advocate the view that it is reasonable to dispense with archaeology and elevate oral traditions as the only source of legitimate information about ancient human history, but such advocacy will find no support in NAGPRA. This advocacy is not simply an expression of cultural pride, since—as I have touched on earlier—the politics of polarity are also useful in bringing together like-minded persons whose unified opinions can serve as a basis for the wielding of power. While I personally support Indian efforts to control the quality of Indian lifeways through the manipulation of social power, I am unwilling to conduct inquiry into ancient human history on the basis of a racist paradigm that treats "Indian" knowledge (oral traditions) as inherently superior to "white" knowledge (archaeology).

NAGPRA gives no standing to religious belief as a source of evidence about the past, and many Indian religious leaders will be hesitant to submit their knowledge to analysis for historical content. In dealing with the concerns of Indian religious leaders, it is the responsibility of scholars to find a course offering maximum sensitivity to religious perspectives while conducting research that meets acceptable standards of academic scholarship. Even in those cases where tribal authorities support such research, few Indian communities have the financial resources to take advantage of the opportunity under NAGPRA to explore the use of oral evidence in elucidating the cultural affiliations of persons who lived and died long ago. As a practical matter, these conditions therefore shift the burden for conducting this research onto the academic community.

Not every archaeologist will be interested in pursuing partnerships with Indians. At least some archaeologists and physical anthropologists will continue to promote their spheres of inquiry as the only valid means of investigating the ancient past. At present, the assertion that archaeology and physical anthropology together hold an inviolable intellectual copyright to the ancient past pervades anthropological literature and is frequently pressed into service as a powerful tool for uniting scholars who are opposed to Indian repatriation efforts. An implication of my research is that such claims will become increasingly recognized as questionable, narcissistic, and as diagnostic artifacts of a time when paternalistic scholars felt that only they held the power to open windows on so-called prehistoric Native America.

As one result of my experiences, I have learned that archaeopolitics, rather than any interest in scholarship, can dominate the responses of some archaeologists to claims for historicity in oral traditions. The current interest of archaeologists in the contribution of oral traditions to the study of ancient Native America is a matter of some guesswork, but no major archaeology journal has yet made such inquiry a prominent (or even minor) topic of research. I am doubtful that change in this area will come swiftly. I have little doubt, however, that what I call "ancient Indian