

Repatriation and the Reconstruction of Identity

Jordan Jacobs

*What follows is a post-print of a peer-reviewed article scheduled to appear in the journal *Museum Anthropology*, which is published by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of the Council for Museum Anthropology. It is posted in this repository by the author in accord with the terms of the AAA author agreement. When published it should also be found in *Museum Anthropology* volume 32, number 2, 2009, in the AnthroSource online service, and in the Wiley InterScience online service. While minor typographic changes may be introduced during the journal production process, this is the final manuscript as settled on by the author and the editor and can be taken as definitive on matters of substance.*

...

While poppies now grow in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) battlefield, recent developments have the old warriors returning to the trenches, and a new generation embracing the chance to participate in the conflict for the first time.

Over the 18 years since the passage of NAGPRA, and the 19 since the passage of its predecessor—the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Act—an era of compromise has emerged from the scorched earth of earlier battles. The repatriation process has brought museums and federally recognized tribes together as never before, and the process has resulted in a mutual exchange of ideas, informing both parties' understanding of the past. To a large degree, the fears of museums regarding the application of the repatriation statutes—NAGPRA and the

NMAI Act—have not come to pass, and the distrust of museums and archaeologists long held by many tribes have begun to subside. However, the Proposed Rule for Disposition of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains (43 CFR 10.11)—published on October 16, 2007—eviscerates the compromise the laws so carefully achieved, and opposition to its underlying tenets leads to an examination of the suppositions on which both acts are based. If adopted as currently written, this regulation will require all “culturally unidentifiable human remains”—meaning all those that have not yet been “affiliated”—to be linked to a federally recognized tribe and offered up to them for transfer.

The new regulation relies on a priority list. Museums would first have to offer the remains to the tribe “from whose tribal land, at the time of the excavation or removal, the human remains were removed.” Then—if this is not practicable, or if that tribe does not agree to the transfer—priority would shift to the “tribe or tribes that are recognized as aboriginally occupying the area from which the human remains were removed.” Next, priority would move to the tribe with “a cultural relationship to the region from which the human remains were removed.” For remains that do not have associated geographical information, museums would be forced to offer to transfer them to any tribe “with a cultural relationship to the region in which the museum . . . with control over the human remains is located.” The priority list is abandoned, however, “if it can be shown by a preponderance of the evidence that another tribe or Native Hawaiian organization has a stronger cultural relationship with the human remains.” If no tribes accept the remains, the Museum is entitled—after obtaining Federal permission—to transfer control to non-federally recognized “Indian groups” or to dispose of them in accordance with state law.

This rule is a colossal failure for many reasons—as legally flawed as it is logistically impossible.¹ What interests me here, however, are the implicit assumptions on which it is built.

The rule rests on the assertion that it is always possible to identify an extant community with the *best* connection—or “cultural relationship,” which is as yet undefined—to a past group.

Implicitly, this also necessitates assigning the deceased individual to a specific cultural unit, defined and delineated through a 21st century lens.

NAGPRA and the NMAI Act both rely on this problematic assumption of unilinear descent as well—though they acknowledge the possibility that some remains are unidentifiable to any community, past or present. This flexibility in assigning “cultural affiliation” is crucial. After weighing oral tradition and other information submitted by the claimant tribe along with archaeological and historical evidence in making their determinations, the decision has been the museum’s as to whether to affiliate material or to categorize it as “culturally unidentifiable.”

Museums have been able to honor many requests for affiliation and repatriation that seem to validate the relatively uncomplicated universe presented in the repatriation laws. This is especially true in cases where cultural identity has been unnaturally regimented through reservation systems or similar constructs. Still, this central tenet of repatriation policy, that there tends to be a “best” descendant community for all human remains in museum collections, is a fallacy—a problematic confusion of exception and rule. Going back in time, the complexities of human society—with its constant merging, shifting, and dividing—increasingly confuse links between archaeological material and cultural identities to the point where no intrinsic connection can be determined. The newly proposed regulation for NAGPRA, which strips the Act of its flexibility, relies on this assumption. The worldview that it presents is one where a deceased individual and a bounded, present-day community can be linked, objectively, in a one-to-one relationship.

It is no mystery why such emotional undercurrents run beneath discussions of repatriation, though the specific cultural and psychological mechanisms are elusive. For claimant communities, archaeological material is a matter of identity: acknowledging the truth that “I was” constitutes an integral component of “I am” (Lowenthal 1985:41). Cultural entities, especially those in transition, require continuous edification through symbols and tradition, and the material past provides valuable symbols for this purpose (Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds. 1983). A unique archaeological past allows groups to distinguish themselves from others, to demonstrate legitimacy through cultural continuity, to contribute to a sense of communal pride, and to take credit in the successes of the past through association by descent (Renfrew and Bahn 1995:510).

In repatriation, this function can be linked to an association widely recognized in the archaeological and museum literature—the link between historical archaeological collection practices and colonialism. Proclaiming that archaeology, even in its most modern form, descends from the highly institutionalized, racist, oppressive European practices of collection and categorization, has, perhaps, become a blasé allegation. Many agree that while certainly not all archaeology can be labeled as an imperial endeavor, it can still be linked to the colonialist drive to make the newly conquered world one’s own (Ames 1992; Griffiths 1996; Gathercole and Lowenthal, eds. 1990; Greenfield 1995; Lowenthal 1985; Skeates 2000; Stocking, ed. 1985). The collection and categorization of archaeological objects presupposes mastery of both the material and its meaning, and historically these dual processes combined to bring a conceptual order to an expanding world.

It is also widely accepted that acquisition, the necessary prerequisite, requires and demonstrates power. The stories surrounding early archaeological and anthropological collection

demonstrate the blatant and often horrific applications of imperial might in the name of scientific enterprise. Today, archaeologists and museum professionals are well aware of the history of their respective disciplines, and it is unnecessary to list more than a few of the most shameful examples: the pre-selection of skulls of dying Australian aborigines by British collectors in the 19th century; the abduction and display of an entire Somali village by a Yorkshire museum in the 1870's; and the American Surgeon General's 1868 order to make "complete" his office's collection of Native American crania (Griffiths 1996:18). In more typical historical scenarios, archaeologists have simply taken advantage of colonial arrangements, conducting legitimate research in colonized countries.

These past abuses contribute to a deeper current of discomfort surrounding the scientific study of the past in general, and especially human remains. These examples can be used as easy illustrations of science's variability and untrustworthiness, and to challenge science's claims of a collective benefit for all humankind. In contrast stands what is perceived to be the solemn, timeless, universal reverence for the dead, which requires their bodies to be left in peace.

To many claimant groups, repatriation represents a corrective measure for these historic exploitations. It is one of the "decolonizing methodologies" identified by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) in that it enfranchises groups with the power to form their own identity. However, there is often nothing objective in selecting which entity can benefit from this phenomenon. Because a specific lineage can rarely be identified, it often comes to a choice between a potentially endless array of possible descendants.

This problem is easily apparent in its relation to biological descent. The number of direct descendants of an individual proliferates exponentially over time. In a family where each coupling produces two offspring, for example, the number of direct descendants from the first

pair reaches over a thousand within only ten generations. When this mathematical equation is extended over hundreds or thousands of years, the number of biological descendants explodes. Furthermore, these descendants do not remain in isolation, but disperse, mixing with others.

Rules can be invented to manage this mess. On a small scale, wills can be drawn up; lines of monarchical succession can be laid out. But descent is far more complicated in regards to ethnic, racial, or cultural definitions. Recent scholarship has asserted that ethnic identity is constructed from the inside out, and as a result there are no specific requisites to ethnic identity (Jones 1997; Eriksen 1993). While central concepts of ethnicity creation involve perceived “collectivities,” such as language or phenotype, a general sense of solidarity, contact with—and desired distinction from—other groups, these criteria and their relative importance are constantly shifting (Hall, ed. 1979; Eriksen 1993). Such fluidity challenges both the preconceptions of traditional academics and the many groups around the world who hold cultural identity as an objective and constant whole.

To a large degree, the drafters of NAGPRA, the NMAI Act, and the new NAGPRA regulations, chose to ignore the intricate dynamics of social processes and failed to identify ethnicity for what it is: a recent social construction. Ethnicity’s formation does not find its basis in human biology, nor is it a primordial part of human behavior (Eriksen 1993). Instead, ethnic boundaries are like the invented traditions described most famously by Hobsbawm (1983:2), created in times of change to give “the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law.” When threatened by the homogenizing forces of modernization, ethnicity becomes important as a system of categorization that can create order in an expanding universe (Eriksen 1993:61). Still, the peripheries of an ethnic group may be in constant flux, and need not reflect the boundaries of language, cultural practices, or perceptions of physiological phenotype.

However, neither ethnicity's vague definitions nor its social origin weaken its immense importance as an essential determinate of human action. In many cases, ethnic identification determines access to resources, and can be employed in political struggles as well as armed conflict (Segal 1979; Eriksen 1993). More widely, however, ethnicity forms an integral part of personal identity. Possessing an ethnic assignment allows people to divide "us" from "them," to structure intricate social interactions, and to determine their place in an increasingly complicated world.

The failure to recognize this complexity is central to ethnicity's purpose. Many social processes—such as migration and intermarriage—complicate ethnic assignment, "[messing] up any neat system of classification" (Eriksen 1993:62). Histories are revised and streamlined as well: as ethnic identity "involves shared memories, but also a good deal of shared forgetting" (Eriksen 1993:93). It is in the perceived best interest of the ethnic group to present a strong, simple view of their past, and to guard against complicating factors.

The complexity of cultural lineage seems a natural battle cry for opponents of repatriation. Marta Mirazon Lahr, director of Cambridge University's Duckworth Collection, asserts that "human populations are not bounded entities through time, and biological and cultural ancestral affiliation are fluid concepts" (Jenkins 2004:16). Sebastian Payne, Chief Scientist at English Heritage, asks "why should we assume that people who historically have been sitting on their particular patch of land for the last few hundred years speak for somebody that is nine or ten thousand years old?" (Jenkins 2004:16).

However, these arguments ignore a patent truth: archaeology itself is guilty of the same simplification, and is perhaps to blame in creating this popular sentiment (Hodder 1982; Jones 1997). A residual concept of the Austro-German school of anthropological geographers, the

“culture history” approach has been carried through to the present in the work of V. Gordon Childe, David Clarke, Grahame Clark, W. H. Holmes, Alfred V. Kidder, and Louis Binford. (Hodder 1982; Jones 1997) Such is the reliance on a direct relationship between archaeology and cultural entities that certain “cultures” are identified wholly through recurring artifact assemblages: the Paleolithic Mousterian culture through a collection of certain scrapers and stone tools; the Woodbury culture through the repeated pattern of roundhouse, weaving comb, and ring-headed pin (Jones 1997:18-19). These cultures can then be monitored through time: taking new names as their assemblages are perceived to develop, from Basketmaker to Pueblo, for example, in the American Southwest.

Archaeologists have begun to rethink this approach. Ian Hodder, for instance, has likened the relationship between repeating patterns in material culture and cultural identity as overlapping discs on a map—useful in generalizations, but hopeless as the foci of research on their own (Hodder 1982). However, with the more simplistic model still commonplace in both the discipline of archaeology and the world at large, it is no surprise that repatriation legislation relies on a similar, simple model: extending links between archaeological material and cultural units from the remote past into the present day.

Because the search for the “best” link between groups past and present is so muddled and tangled that different assertions cannot be debated for their competitive merits, a new approach is needed. By mapping the way that they interrelate, it would at least be possible to characterize the problem. In an earlier work, I have put forth the “kinship” model as the most appropriate approach to the complex subjects of ownership, identity, and group definition (Jacobs n.d.). The “Ego” at the center of my model is a dual entity: it is both the biological life of the individual whose remains are at issue, and the symbolic life born out of its rediscovery and removal. The

forking ranks of Ego's ancestors are similarly superimposed, representing both the living individuals whose couplings led to Ego's biological birth and the forces of empire and contact that resulted in its second life as an archaeological entity. Ego's ranks of descendants are composed both of its biological offspring—which largely escape identification and enumeration—and those individuals, communities, and nations who can strengthen their identities in its “resurrection” as an object of symbolic significance. On a simple level, the application of a kinship model merely reveals that such a spectrum of significance should be the expected norm, and that claims of singular ownership of the past—especially of the distant past—should be held as dubious. But its true strength is in its celebration of humanity's dynamism. It rests on the fact that cultures cannot be considered as static entities, bounded by either particular practices or by racist conceptions of biology. It calls into question those who assert unique control over the material past—be they nations, museums, archaeologists, or indigenous communities. Crucially, it speaks to the chaotic situation that will erupt if NAGPRA's threshold for repatriation is diluted even further.

A case study can demonstrate the problems inherent in reinforcing the flawed theoretical framework of NAGPRA through regulatory fiat. The NMAI has long been operating with little oversight in its management of the material it holds in trust for the nation. The NMAI Act sets forth procedures for repatriation, but in practice—as in the Museum's decision to extend its repatriation policy internationally—decisions are often based on a far lower threshold for cultural affiliation than NAGPRA provides. This situation allows a glimpse of the new world order that will be brought about by the recently introduced NAGPRA regulation. The NMAI's decision to repatriate human remains excavated by an American archaeologist in the early 20th century to a small Cuban village may be the best look forward at the kinds of issues that may result from the

decision to weaken the already vague concept of “cultural affiliation” to the general, ambiguous, and malleable idea of “cultural relationship.”

A Case Study: The NMAI Repatriation to the Cuban Tainos

On a January morning in 2003, the skeletal remains of an unknown number of individuals were interred in the hillside cemetery of Caridad de los Indios, a small village nestled in the palm-forested Sierra Maestra mountains of Cuba’s Oriente Province. Some eighty-eight years after their excavation by American archaeologist Mark Raymond Harrington, their reburial was attended not only by the local community, but by officials from two hostile governments, members of the press, and the representatives of several Native North-American tribes. This ceremony represented the culmination of eight years of difficult negotiations between the NMAI, Cuban governmental organizations, and a community which—despite immense political pressures—had claimed indigenous Cuban descent. Logistically, the process had been complicated: it cross-cut established American foreign policy, orchestrated cooperation of hostile nations, circumvented transport complications, and pushed the boundaries and motivations of American law. But the many symbolic ramifications of the event were far more complicated still.

I had the opportunity to travel to Cuba—legally, fully funded by Cambridge University—a year after the reburial took place. I spoke to Cuban officials involved in the effort, and traveled as near as possible to Caridad de los Indios, which is positioned deep within a military zone above the small coastal town of Baracoa. I was also given extraordinary access to the NMAI’s Repatriation Office, speaking to its staff members and reviewing its repatriation report—which is usually held confidential. The information below draws heavily on these experiences, which

allowed me to witness, firsthand, the complexities, frustrations, and emotions that repatriation entails.

By the time of the Cuba repatriation, fourteen years had passed since the NMAI Act had been signed into law, marking the entrance of the federal government into what had been chiefly an academic debate and creating precedence for the passage of the wider-reaching NAGPRA the following year. The NMAI Act's Section 9 required the identification and repatriation of human remains and associated grave goods in the Museum's founding collection, amassed by George Gustav Heye and his successors at the Museum of the American Indian in New York City. Prior to the Cuba repatriation, the NMAI had already carried out several similar efforts across the United States. While the NMAI Act had been limited to the approximately 600 federally recognized tribes within American territory, the Museum had voluntarily adopted an official International Repatriation Guideline in order to extend the "spirit of the legislation" to communities outside of the United States (Pepper Henry, interview by author, April 10, 2001). The policy had been applied abroad in countries such as Ecuador and Peru in the years leading up to the Cuba repatriation (Pepper Henry, interview by author, August 2, 2004).

The Cuba repatriation began in 1997, when an examination of the museum's storage facility encountered the Harrington collection among the remains of the tens of thousands of individuals that needed to be processed and returned: ideally before the opening of the new facility on the National Mall in Washington, DC in autumn 2004 (Pepper Henry, interview by author, April 10, 2001). NMAI Repatriation Director Betty White immediately contacted Jose Barreiro—a Cornell professor and a Cuban-American who claims indigenous descent and who maintains many connections with the small communities in Cuba's Oriente province, including those in which Harrington conducted his research (Barreiro, interview by author, May 7, 2004;

Pepper Henry, interview by author, April 10, 2001). In 1997, Barreiro gained the assent of the *cacique* of Caridad de Los Indios—“Panchito” Francisco Ramirez Rojas—to begin the process.

In April 1998, the Repatriation Department submitted its report to the Museum’s Curatorial Council and Board of Trustees, recommending repatriation. The report was accepted, and though they remained in the Museum’s possession, the bones were officially deaccessioned later that summer (NMAI 2001). In May 2000, Barreiro, new NMAI Repatriation Director Jim Pepper Henry and staff members Nancy Vickery and Niki Sandoval, met with Angel Graña of the Antonio Jiménez Foundation, a Cuban governmental heritage management institution. Contact was also made with the Cuban Ministry of Culture, which formalized relations with the NMAI and named the Jiménez Foundation as the official representative of the Cuban government for the duration of the effort. Alejandro Hartman, Director of Baracoa’s Matachin Museum, was also engaged, and became another point of contact between the NMAI and Caridad de los Indios (NMAI 2001). NMAI staffers also visited the village themselves, under military escort, and met with Ramirez and other villagers to discuss the repatriation and its logistics (NMAI 2001). The U.S. State Department was informed of the project, as well as the Cuban Interests Section in Washington and its American equivalent in Havana. The penultimate step, the transportation of the remains to Cuba, took place on June 19, 2002, when the NMAI signed the “Release and Receipt” document, depositing the remains in the temporary possession of the Jiménez Foundation, until final deposition of the remains in Caridad de los Indios could be arranged (NMAI 1998). Finally, in a large ceremony in the village cemetery, the remains were buried, and the process seemed to have reached its end.

But in my research the following year, it was apparent that not all of Ego's descendants had been served by this action, and that the complexity of their conflicting motives had proven too unwieldy for a unilinear model to hold.

Identifying Ego

Traditional histories and the scope of Cuban archaeology can contextualize the biological existence of those whose bones made up the NMAI repatriation, but only archaeological study of the remains themselves can shed even the weakest light on the lives of each individual. And the light is weak indeed. In 1997, the NMAI's Dr. Ramiro Matos attempted to glean what little information he could from the thirteen or more individuals through a "superficial" inspection of the remains. Catalog number 04/6050, a disc cut from a cranium, and 04/5494, another skull fragment, both came from the skulls of elderly adults. 04/5576 represents the incomplete skull of an infant, while 04/5785 is the charred jaw of an adult male. 04/5631 is composed of the legs, teeth, fingers, toes, and scapulae of at least two adult individuals. 08/1746 consists of a long bone and hand bone fragments of indeterminate maturity, while 04/5535 is the single scapula of an adult. Catalog number 08/1751 is made up of the bones of at least three individuals: teeth of an elderly adult, to whom Matos attributes a diet heavy in seafood; the incomplete skeleton of a young child; and the assorted bones of another adult (NMAI 1998:2-6).

Ego's symbolic life is much more apparent. The creator of this new life was Harrington. Had he not pried their skeletons from cave floors or wrestled them from sealed rock shelters, the individuals whose remains have been subject to NMAI's repatriation would have left, at most, a biological legacy: scattered and concealed in the mixed population of Cuba and elsewhere.

Through his work Harrington became Ego's necromancer: the unwitting embodiment of a weighty theoretical ancestry, and an awkward paterfamilias of diverse and adverse descendants.

Harrington's name is known throughout Cuba, likely due to his profound contribution to the island's archaeology (Barreiro, interview by author, May 7, 2004; Graña, interview by author, March 23, 2004). Though Harrington was one of several to conduct research on the island in the early years of the 20th century, he was the first to meticulously publish his findings (NMAI 1998:7-8). Harrington's Spanish and Cubano-Spanish predecessors—such as Miguel Rodríguez-Ferrer, Luis Montané, and Carlos de la Torre y Huerta—were emblems of early archaeology, focusing on the spectacular and bizarre often at the expense of systematic scientific analysis (Harrington 1921; NMAI 1998). Harrington's comparatively thorough approach—no doubt honed by his upbringing by academic parents on the campuses of Michigan, Seattle, and Columbia Universities, his childhood spent collecting projectile points, stone tools, and potsherds for F.W. Putnam at the American Museum of Natural History, and his degree work at Columbia, where he studied under Franz Boas—can also be traced to the obsessive qualities of his financier and employer, Standard Oil banker George Gustav Heye (Harrington 1966). Heye's collection of ethnographic material spans the entirety of the Western Hemisphere, and by 1915, one year before he founded the Museum of the American Indian (MAI), the effort to amass artifacts was already underway (Force 2000). Heye's privately employed archaeologists scoured the hemisphere and documented their finds to aid in the classification of his exploding personal collection. Harrington's previous research caught Heye's attention, and he was quickly added to the payroll (Force 2000). A 1914 survey of Cuba's archaeological resources by future MAI employee Theodoor de Booy piqued Heye's interest in the island, and Harrington—who had

proven himself by recovering a set of ancient duck decoys in Nevada's Lovelock Cave—was sent to Cuba to “make a more thorough exploration” (Harrington 1921:23).

Harrington's research goals were unspecific, and he began his work in the region where his predecessor had left off. Arriving in Havana in January 1915, he quickly made his way to the southeastern tip of the island. Over a period of several months, he explored the region, stopping for periods outside the small villages that dotted the rocky, heavily forested countryside. Beginning his work just outside Santiago, Harrington traveled east along Cuba's southern coast, and then explored and excavated the northern coast from Baracoa to Punta Maísi (Harrington 1921). Graves, and the caves in which they were often situated, formed the nucleus of his study, and Harrington excavated, collected, and shipped to New York the bones of several individuals, as well as their associated funerary objects. Local Cubans were employed to lead Harrington and his small team to a variety of sites, and the region's inhabitants rushed to sell him artifacts from nearby, but usually unrecorded, locations (Harrington 1921). Harrington left the island in December 1915, for a period of four years. When he returned, he changed his focus to Cuba's western extreme: the pastoral landscape of Pinar del Rio. There, though his expedition was quite short, Harrington uncovered several more burial sites, and shipped their excavated contents to New York as well (Harrington 1921).

Even the NMAI Repatriation Report credits the merits of Harrington's work (NMAI 1998:7-8). However, though something of an archaeological innovator, his methods do not withstand modern codes of practice. In his publication, he reports with some gusto on his efforts to wrench bones from sealed cave chambers, or, in a particularly noteworthy instance, to remove an enormous, intricately carved stalagmite from a cave floor—a task that “was finally solved by sawing it into five pieces with the aid of a two-man lumber saw” (Harrington 1921:271). In his

published work, Harrington skimps on detailed stratigraphic analyses in favor of stories of encountering large scorpions, clinging from cliff faces over pools of hammerhead sharks, and wading through belly-deep mud. Such emphasis does little to aid Harrington's reputation. The NMAI's Repatriation Report is quick to condemn Harrington's methodology, arguing that his inaccurate practices greatly diminished the research potential of his collected material and that the artifact's contextual information, as well as the relationship between one site and the next, have been lost forever due to his imprecision (NMAI 1998:8-10).

But it is not only Harrington's activities that interest us here. He has become a symbol, the point at which forking ranks of symbolic ancestors and descendants converge.

Ego's Ancestors

A search for Ego's biological ancestors would be confounded from the start. The superficial analysis of the NMAI remains does not even provide the approximate dates of each of the component lives and consequently, the *ante quem* for Ego's forebears. We must, instead, rely on a more general knowledge of Cuba's prehistoric and early historical past.

Since centuries before the Spanish Conquest, Cuba has been inhabited by dynamic and shifting cultural entities with their own religions and languages (Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996:20). The overwhelming universal tendency of cultural entities to split, mix, divide, and merge yields any description how these cultures were defined unsatisfactory. In Cuba, suggested points of migration of the island's first human settlers range from Venezuela, to Colombia, Honduras, or Nicaragua, and the existence of several separate influxes from diverse origins over several centuries is a distinct possibility (Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996). While scant evidence from Spanish records indicates a linguistic connection between the peoples who met

Columbus and the Arawak speakers of northern South America, other, unrelated languages were also discernable among some of those encountered by Spanish chroniclers (Rouse 1992). It is therefore prohibitively difficult in Cuba, as in most other areas, to fix firm boundaries on what constituted one cultural identity as opposed to another.

Archaeological shorthand, however, has grouped Cuba's indigenous population into two main cultural units: the Ciboneys and the Tainos. Though Spanish chroniclers record that the Tainos distinguished themselves from the Ciboney, it is impossible to determine the time depth or significance of that distinction. It is also apparent that new cultural elements continued to reach Cuba from the mainland, as well as other islands, until the arrival of the Spanish (Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996:20).

The term "Taino" has been applied to the Arawak speakers encountered by the Spanish conquistadores throughout the Greater Antilles, concentrated on Hispaniola (Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996). On Cuba, the greatest concentration of Taino sites is in the far east, near Maísi and Puerto Principe, and dates from sites in central Cuba indicate that Taino influence was spreading westward at the time of the Spanish invasion (Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996:22). Buffered by their neighbors to the east, the Cuban Tainos enjoyed relative security from another Caribbean cultural entity, the Island-Caribs, whose prowess in warfare is credited for denying the Spanish a full monopoly of the region (Rouse 1992:25). According to Irving Rouse, this buffer resulted in stunted cultural development of the Cuban Tainos, as evidenced by the absence of elaborate ball courts and religious structures in Cuba. He uses this somewhat arbitrary distinction to divide the Taino population into "Western" and "Classical" subgroups (Rouse 1992:18). Still, Tainos throughout the Greater Antilles demonstrated similar horticultural and settlement

patterns, and most relevant to this report, engaged in cranial modification—today a common determinate of Taino sites (Rouse 1992; Guanache 1996; Harrington 1921).

Spanish chroniclers recorded a highly stratified class structure within Taino society. At the top was the cacique, who ruled a specific region and managed all of its affairs. Successively below the cacique, the *nitainos*, *behiques*, and *nabories* served as advisors, religious leaders, and workers respectively (Suchliki 1990). At the bottom of the hierarchy, a slave class may have existed as well. To the explorers who recorded it, this structure seemed highly rigid and defined, and seems to have been repeated throughout the extent of Taino lands (Suchliki 1990).

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that a separate cultural entity existed in Cuba for several centuries prior to the arrival of Arawak peoples, and ran concurrently until the arrival of the Spanish. These were the Ciboney—a term used to describe the hunter-gatherers whose middens, pictographs, and settlements have been found over the entire island, and under which modern scholars include the Guanahatabeys named in Spanish chronicles (Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996). Pathological analyses indicate that the Ciboney suffered from high incidence of arthritis, malnutrition, and jaw infections relative to their Taino contemporaries (Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996:20). Burial sites, which constitute the sheer majority of their extant archaeological evidence, indicate that skulls were not flattened—an attribute which has often been used to distinguish Ciboney from Taino burials.

By the time of the Spanish arrival, the Tainos were fully aware of their hunter-gatherer contemporaries and mutual interaction took place on a consistent basis. According to Columbus's Taino interpreter, Ciboneys were “savages having neither house nor farms, subsisting on game captured in mountains, or on turtles and fish.” (Rouse 1992:20) But the relationship was not necessarily one of passive coexistence: Pané recorded Guanahatabeys

within the Taino slave class (Suchliki 1990). It is not implausible that Tainos and Ciboneys intermarried, or that they adopted or adapted each other's cultural practices.

Therefore, the Cuba that met the first Spanish ships was not a simple one and little can be said with any certainty regarding Ego's biological ancestry. Though a division of two general cultural entities is apparent in the archaeological and historical record, it does not tell all, and the modern identification of two groups can be considered as having simply symbolic significance, however powerful.

Meanwhile, the Spanish conquistadors who terrorized Cuba's indigenous population in the first centuries after European contact also hold a symbolic place among Ego's ancestors in a kinship model of archaeological material. It is, obviously, an uncomfortable designation: putting the forces responsible for the unimaginable horror of the conquest in a powerful, seemingly privileged, conceptual position. It is also awkward in a chronological sense, as those whose bones constitute the Ego discussed in this report very likely predated their symbolic predecessors. However, the arrival of Spanish soldiers in Baracoa in the 15th century sparked a crucial sequence of events, which eventually made possible Harrington's expedition in 1915, and therefore, Ego's symbolic life.

Nine years after the first Spanish arrival, they returned to Baracoa to establish their first permanent colony, and their systematized and brutal regime began. The effects were devastating. The indigenous population of Cuba, estimated by modern scholars as approximately 500,000 at the time of European discovery, registered only 5,000 in the systematic, though methodologically suspect, Spanish census of 1544 (Rouse 1992; Suchliki 1990:30). The causes of this staggering devastation were horrific—involving both pandemic disease and brutal genocide. Famously, though possibly exaggerated by political motivations, Bartolome de las

Casas' *Devastation of the Indies* describes, in great detail, the rape and murder of the Indo-Cubans and touches on, more generally, the fragmentation of Indo-Cuban culture.

In Cuba, the link between the imperialism and the collection of integral cultural material began immediately. The actual rape and murder of the indigenous population coincided with its symbolic cultural equivalent. Within months of wading up the Baracoa beachhead and fanning out westward across the island, Spanish occupiers began a campaign of cultural warfare, taking advantage of their powerful position to forcibly remove objects that were often still functioning as religious items. Columbus himself both recorded and participated in these seizures. Writing in his log during his second voyage to Cuba, Columbus (Cohen 1969:192) describes how the Tainos

conceal their visits to the *zemis* [religious figurines] from the Christians and do not let them enter the image house. If they think a Christian is coming they pick up the *zemis* and conceal them in the woods, fearing that the Christians will take them from them.

Zemis became the valuable spoils of a holy war, for which Columbus, in a letter to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, claimed the boasting rights: "I have sent your Highnesses three of these stones by Antonio de Torres, and will bring another three myself" (Cohen 1969:193).

During the next several centuries, other European empires turned their eyes towards Cuba. The 16th and 17th centuries brought French raids on Cuban coastal towns, and in 1762 the British invaded Havana. As the United States grew, less than ninety miles across the Straits of Florida, it expressed its colonial ambitions southward, and in the final years of the 19th century, declared war on the Spanish crown.

When American forces were triumphant in 1898, the pillaging of Cuba's tangible past shifted to the new occupiers. In the months immediately following the war, for instance, raids of

Havana's Necrópolis Colón by American soldiers were commonplace. The cemetery was a sacred symbol of Cuban history, and according to a 1900 guidebook of Havana, "some American soldiers were accustomed to take skulls from the boneyard and to drive around the streets of Havana with them" (Norton 1900:98). These acts constituted a flagrant boasting of imperial might, and their transformation into symbols is easily made.

These soldiers were not academics, and it would be unfair to compare the work of archaeologists to the actions of soldiers on leave. Still, the historical link between colonialism and the removal or destruction of Cuba's physical past can also be seen in Harrington's work, and today both can be seen as having deprived a wide spectrum of descendant communities of involvement in the disposition of their physical past. Furthermore, while the American General Brooke put an end to his soldiers' grave desecrations, two decades later ships laden with Harrington's finds would travel unhindered from Havana to New York City (Norton 1900:98).

Ego's Descendants

In 2004, I met with Angel Graña—who represented the Cuban government in the repatriation effort—at the Antonio Jiménez Foundation in Miramar, Havana.

"There are no indigenous people in Cuba," he explained, when I asked him what the repatriation would do for Cuba's indigenous population. "But this is a victory for their memory; a victory for all of Cuba against the Yankee blockade."

The position of the Cuban government after the completion of the repatriation—as expressed in Graña's rhetoric—frustrates NMAI staff members. Despite the Museum's efforts to name a true, legitimate heir, the parties involved had not arrived at a single, symbolic resolution. Indeed, the repatriation has been formed into ammunition to suit a variety of causes: from hushed

assertions of cultural survival to brash rallying cries in the entrenched conflicts of global politics. Ego's networks of descendants, like its forking ranks of ancestors, form a conflicted set. It is in presenting these many descendants that the strength of the kinship model is shown.

Caridad de los Indios, like many villages in Oriente's Sierra Maestra Mountains, carries on many cultural practices of considerable temporal depth. Barreiro (1989) has written on the villagers' continued practices of covering graves with shells to protect their inhabitants from bothersome spirits, burning tobacco to communicate with the dead, and invoking the sun and moon to aid crops (Barreiro 1989). In addition, zemis are still used to protect pregnant women, and are still buried in agricultural ceremonies (Barreiro 1989). But these practices do not, by themselves, constitute an ethnic survival. In his research, Harrington identified some of them as simply the standard rural customs of the Oriente region, not limited to the areas indigenous communities (Harrington 1921). Elsewhere, across the extent of the island, words of Arawak origin have been incorporated into everyday use (Graña, interview by author, March 23, 2004; Hartmann, interview by author, March 30, 2004; Harrington 1921).

The decision of Caridad de los Indios, and its cacique "Panchito" Francisco Ramirez Rojas, to participate in the NMAI repatriation represents a symbolic and unprecedented ethnic assertion. To apply Michael Moerman's conclusions concerning his study of Lue ethnicity in Northern Thailand, ethnic determination requires not only carrying out specific cultural actions, but an assertion of self-identification (1965). During Barreiro's 1989 visit to an elementary school, some twenty-five students identified themselves as "indios," and adults such as Pedro Hernandez also claimed Indian identity, saying: "Indians or descendants, it's the same thing. They, the old Tainos, were here. Now, we, my generation, we are here. We don't live exactly like they did, but we are still here" (Barreiro 1989).

Thomas Eriksen argues that assertions of ethnic identity usually come from groups that are impoverished and that lack access to resources relative to those outside the group (Eriksen 1993). However, the Cuba example suggests that there is something deeper at work. According to Alejandro Hartmann, the people of Caridad de los Indios have everything that all other Cuban communities are provided with: electricity, televisions, schools (interview by author, March 30, 2004). Barreiro, too, describes the community as “doing very well,” with a small but thriving wool industry. The repatriation will not be used to validate land claims or to petition the government for special protections (Barreiro, interview by author, May 7, 2004). Instead, its significance may lie in the assertion of cultural identity itself, on the deeper need for a “we were” to validate “we are.”

There is no way, however, to test the objective merits of this claim. One reason for this is straightforward: by 1514, following Spanish mandate, over forty percent of the Spanish settlers had taken indigenous wives (Rouse 1992:162). This intermarriage—compounded with horrific genocide, widespread disease, and the fragmentation of indigenous islands between colonial powers—greatly reduced the possibility of a simple, unilinear descent from the ethnic conglomerate that met Columbus to individuals who are alive today.

Some scholars, like Cuban academic Francisco Ortiz, point to the high level of immediate interaction between the Spanish conquerors and the Indo-Cubans as the means by which “the Indians were extinguished” (Ortiz 1991). Rouse laments that “the Tainos became extinct” before they could be duly studied (Rouse 1992:37). Other writers claim that they were “exterminated,” “supplanted,” “annihilated . . . [or] died out” rapidly within the first years of contact (Novas 1994:20; Suchliki 1990:8,11; Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996:20).

But these characterizations constitute oversimplification, at best. Evidence for the existence of an indigenous identity in Cuba is traceable in what Barreiro calls the “deep literature” (Barreiro, interview by author, March 15, 2001). For example, references to the founding of “Indian towns” on the outskirts of Spanish settlements after the Conquest, the 1803 execution of an “Indian Brave,” and petitions in 1820 and 1843 to allow Indians to visit traditional healers and attend ceremonies each speak to some level of cultural survival (Pichardo 1945:56; Barreiro 1989). Cuban heroes such as José Martí and Antonio Maceo reported encounters with Indian villages in Cuba’s eastern provinces, as did archaeologists Rodríguez-Ferrer, Stewart Culin, and Harrington himself (Barreiro, interview by author, March 15, 2001). In 1936, a government map of Oriente Province showed Indian villages at Tiguabas—between Baracoa and Santiago (Barreiro 1989). Additionally, a study conducted in 1973 by Manuel Rivero de la Calle of the University of Havana’s Biological Sciences Department compared 223 men and women from the eastern village of Yateras “against typical features of Amer-Indians,” and found them to match (1978:161). Such methods, with their heavy reliance on a biological designation, are no longer held to be valid, as “race” itself is now seen as possessing dubious descriptive value (Eriksen 1993; Hall, ed. 1979; and many others). Still, those descendants of Ego with vested interests in Indo-Cuban continued existence invoke Rivero de la Calle’s questionable findings (Barreiro 1989). Even the NMAI Repatriation Report refers generally to this study, though it is vague on the specifics (NMAI 1998:25).

Despite all of these shreds of evidence, the lack of a standard that must be met to determine whether an ethnic group has persisted through centuries of dynamic cultural interaction and change confounds objective identification. Ethnicity is primarily an “emic” construction, though it relies on legitimization from outsiders for its long term survival (Eriksen

1993). Because we will never know how an Indo-Cuban of the pre-Contact period or the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, or 19th centuries defined the boundaries of his or her people, we are left only with the viewpoints of outsiders, and those in modern times who claim descent. All descent from Ego must accordingly be viewed as symbolic, and choosing between descendants becomes a subjective act.

In the Cuba example, Ego's most obvious symbolic descendant may be the institution in which its remains were housed for almost a century. Unlike the fluid and hazy identities of Ego's other descendants, the Museum has undergone a single, documented change since the skeletal remains were excavated in 1915: its transformation into a federal institution in 1989. Formed by the American Congress, scrutinized and reorganized in committee meetings, it is an entity well aware of its history, and of the profound significance of its collections for the many others who claim descent through its collections.

Neither the NMAI's agenda nor its practices are veiled in secrecy. Its mission is blatantly pan-indigenous. Though it actively seeks consultation with the full spectrum of tribes affiliated with its collection, many of its goals are described in a way to bind all indigenous peoples together. According to a 2004 posting on the Museum's website, for example, one of its primary purposes is "empowering the Indian voice" (West 2004).² This is not surprising. It is, after all, the National Museum of the American Indian—a name that masses innumerable cultural identities under a general title.

However, this generalization is even evident in the Museum's repatriation policy, and the Cuba repatriation effort provides a striking example. One set of remains in the Harrington collection, 08/1751, was excavated in 1919 during the archaeologist's second visit to the island—when he traveled not to Oriente, but to Pinar del Rio, in Cuba's western extreme (NMAI

1998). By Harrington's estimation, and in the opinion of several subsequent scholars, sites in this region represented the Ciboney culture, not the Taino, and the peoples of relevance may have even been enslaved by the Tainos from the east (Harrington 1921; Rouse 1992; Dacal and Rivero de la Calle 1996). And yet still, 08/1751 was included in the repatriation to Caridad de los Indios: a community which the NMAI identifies as of Taino descent.

The Repatriation Department stands by their actions, and invokes the NMAI's belief in a Pan-Indian identity. According to Vickery, despite the cultural difference, "there was an understanding that the Caridad community was representative of the entire Cuban native population" (email to author, May 25, 2004). Pepper Henry expresses his regret that the Cuban government did not allow consultation to be done with multiple groups, but believes that Caridad de los Indios represented a satisfactory depository for all of the remains (interview by author, August 2, 2004). Furthermore, the NMAI effort relied heavily on Barreiro, whose connections were limited to Oriente. Still, the NMAI's actions simplified and streamlined Ego's ranks of descendants, and their selection of a single recipient as the legitimate heir disallowed access by other communities across the island who may claim—or may one day claim—descent.

"We are all, all of us Cubans, are Tainos," Graña told me. And indeed, in the application of the kinship system to the Harrington collection, the wider Cuba—represented by its government—composes the most forceful of Ego's progeny, manipulating its relationship to Cuba's indigenous antecedents for nationalistic endeavors. The existence of an extant indigenous population in Cuba would threaten a cohesive national identity, and would disrupt the vital symbolic role assigned to Cuba's Indians. For the Cuban state, the Indo-Cubans must be extinct for the sake of a unified Cuban identity: one wracked with the confusion of hostile international relationships and threatened from within by poverty and unrest.

Today, Cuba is undergoing a period of significant difficulty. Due primarily to the American economic blockade, the glory days of the Revolution have degenerated into a time when people spend much of their time trying to acquire the most basic goods (Moses 2000:69). Staple foods, shoes, and other items are hard to come by. Leptospirosis, a disease carried in rat feces, is at an all-time high (Moses 2000:69). But Cuba is also experiencing difficulties of a less tangible nature: an identity crisis that can be traced some ninety miles off its northern shores.

Since the 19th century, ties to the United States have profoundly influenced Cuban identity. As a stopover en route to the California gold fields, and as a key player in the sugar industry, Cuba hosted thousands of Americans a year (Perez 1999:23). The desire to distinguish itself from Spain brought Cuba closer to the United States, as Cuban dissidents fled to the north and planned their uprisings from New York. Soon many American institutions and traditions took hold in Cuba, and by the late 19th century, Cubans had begun to exchange “bullfighting for baseball” (Perez 1999:46). When the United States invaded Cuba in 1898, American influence on Cuban identity became manifest. Over the next few decades, the United States installed a series of puppet presidencies, intermittently occupied the island with troops, and provided and received the overwhelming majority of Cuba’s imports and exports (Suchlicki 1990:136).

These intrusions have left a lasting mark, and have formed a formidable obstacle for the Revolutionary government in its drive for a uniquely Cuban identity. Since the earliest years of the Revolution, as Cuban-American relations began to sour, the Fidel Castro (now Raúl Castro) regime has sought to exchange its old, “Yankee”-influenced identity for one that is purely Cuban. The use of English words for everyday things is ridiculed in Castro’s speeches, as is the national obsession with Cadillacs, a highly coveted item in modern Cuba (Perez 1999). Hostility has intensified between the two nations over the last two decades, as the American passage of the

Cuban Democracy (Toricelli) Act in 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act in 1996 strengthened and internationalized the economic embargo of the island. In Castro's philosophy, "the key to victory [is] national unity" and now, more than ever, Cuba is trying to distinguish itself from its powerful neighbor, and to present a front united through both its politics and culture (Brenner 1989:xviii).

Castro's campaign for a united front relies on the elimination of diversity. His attempts to eliminate cultural diversity have crosscut all levels of Cuban society. The social, religious, and ethnic groups that flourished in pre-Revolutionary Cuba have all been affected by the regime's belief that their existence harbors a counter-revolutionary threat (Moses 2000:75). In 1996, Raul Castro, Fidel's brother and then leader of Cuba's intelligence agency, delivered a speech in which he chastised those who "form groups that are divorced from the state [as they are] breeding grounds for the subversive work of the enemy (Moses 2000:160)." To combat this perceived threat, all clubs and organizations must now be licensed. A Harley-Davidson Club and a yoga club have both been rejected in the licensing process (Moses 2000:93). When the Cuban Masons attempted to establish contacts with Masons in the U.S. through the United States Interest Section, their headquarters were raided and their leaders arrested (Moses 2000:93). The Committee for the Defense of the Revolution, Cuba's secret police, monitors all organizations and, according to Fidel Castro, had infiltrated 300 of them by the late 1980's (Lox 1987:194).

Cuba's elimination of subnational identities extends to ethnicity and race. Marxist philosophy casts these categorizations as distractions to society's true, economic division between bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeois, and proletariat (Eriksen 1993:6). Officially a Marxist state until the fall of the Soviet Union, and still Marxist in its principles, Cuba will not recognize the racial and ethnic subgroups that formed the basic cleavage in pre-Revolutionary Cuban society

(Martinez-Alier 1989:2; Guancho 1996:6). In June of 1989, the Cuban state officially made this philosophy explicit to those who would claim a specific indigenous descent. In that month, Cuba's state newspaper, *Granma*, published an article by eminent Cuban historian Marta Rey, who stated that, in Cuba, "there are no legitimate Indians left" (Barreiro 1989). Her words, scoured and certified by government censors, amounted to an official mandate.

Having eliminated the possibility of localized claims to indigenous ancestry, the Cuban state has cast itself as the sole heir of the indigenous population. Graña, as well as Hartmann, curator of Baracoa's state museum, assert respectively that "all Cubans are Tainos" and that "all Cubans can claim Indian descent" (Graña, interview by author, March 23, 2004; Hartmann, interview by author, March 30, 2004). Both concede that some segments of the population have perhaps retained more "sangre indio" than others, and that some traditional customs—such as worship of the Four Directions—are stronger in the regions near Baracoa. Still, each claims that Cuba's indigenous community, as a distinct entity, is extinct. With these as the prevalent sentiments in Castro's government, Cuba is left with a legacy that, in the words of Jim Pepper Henry, can be mined as a "natural resource" through the actions Cuban state (interview by author, April 10, 2001).

This legacy is in active political use, and constitutes an essential component of what scholars have identified as the Cuban government's consistent politicization of its own historical interpretations (Flikke 2007; Suchliki 1990:200). The manner in which Cuba employs its indigenous identity requires the perception of extinction. The Indians are Cuba's martyrs, who provide a demonstration of the horrors of capitalistic empire. Political figures and academics in Cuba refer to the people who met Columbus' ships as a gracious, friendly people, robbed and murdered out of their peaceful lifestyles by the viciousness of the European colonizers (Graña,

interview by author, March 23, 2004; Hartmann, interview by author, March 30, 2004; Ortiz 1991).

Some scholars have even gone so far as to say that the Indo-Cubans embodied a Communist ideal. Despite the highly stratified and slave-owning society described by Spanish explorers, Ortiz claims that “the economy of the Ciboney and the Taino was basically communist. All of their work required collective force: building, agriculture, hunting, fishing and war were executed by all, with common tasks and privileges (Ortiz 1991:41).” Special veneration is given to the Taino warriors Atabey, Hatuey, and Guama, who waged effective, yet ultimately unsuccessful rebellions against the Spanish governments in Cuba and Hispaniola: the names of these early rebels have lent their names to military regiments; tourists can view life-size sculptures of Tainos at work between the air-conditioned huts of the Hotel Villa Guama; and an imposing bust of Hatuey now glares across Baracoa’s central plaza. The Museo de la Revolución, which was founded with the sixth act of the new republic in Havana’s former presidential palace, devotes a room to Cuba’s “earliest revolutionaries.” These uses of indigenous identity echo a tendency noted by David Lowenthal: “revolutionaries exorcise recent evils by appealing to older exemplars, and end by resuscitating what they once rejected” (1985:35).

Extinction plays an important role in the official conception of its indigenous antecedents. Just as, “with the eradication of the Amerindians the Europeans could consider themselves the legitimate inheritors of their lands,” so, too, can the post-Revolutionary Cubans consider themselves their legitimate avengers (Thompson 1997:75). Where the Tainos failed in destroying the imperial threat, the Revolution succeeded. Cubans can look to the destruction of

Spanish rule and American oppression as the righteous punishment of any power that seeks to eliminate an ideal state.

Given this context, Graña's belief that the repatriation represents a victory for all of Cuba does not come as a surprise. After all, it does represent the transfer of American governmental property to a hostile regime (Hartmann, interview by author, March 30, 2004; Barreiro, interview by author May 7, 2004). Though it was a minor event, its symbolic significance is profound. The process that bound Cuba to the material in the first place—its removal by an American researcher—has been reversed, and through its assertions of extinction, the regime's effective control over native identity ensures that the significance cannot be diverted to specific subgroups.

Conclusions

In this work, I have aimed to demonstrate the complexity of relationships surrounding archaeological material: a truth conspicuously absent from current debates on repatriation. Employing a non-linear system provides a more realistic and helpful framework to show how these relationships merge, divide, and relate to one another. Just as the individuals whose bones make up the NMAI's Harrington collection were themselves the result of a web of human couplings, stretching into the distant past, so they are, as archaeological objects, the product of layers of complicated cultural couplings, as well—merging to a single point. Similarly, just as the individuals whose graves came under Harrington's shovel may have produced biological offspring, so too did they produce a mesh of symbolic descendants—taking the form of peoples, institutions, and governments. Accordingly, in many cases, repatriation can be more accurately viewed as “patriation,” granting a single claimant the ability to construct an identity around its new custodianship of the ancient material. One descendant is privileged over all others and, with physical control over the object, can interpret it, display it, or rebury it to suit its own ends.

In applying the kinship model to the Cuba example, any of Ego's descendants could make a convincing claim for the remains—each under a banner of human rights and justice. Do not the people of Caridad de los Indios have a right to assert their Indian identities by respectfully reburying the remains of those who they feel are their ancestors? Is not the government of Cuba entitled to tell the Cuban story, in the face of looming outside threats to its national identity? Is it not the responsibility of the NMAI—which charges no admission, and enjoys an international clientele—to speak to a little known facet of our shared human past? Similarly conflicting arguments could be made for the transfer or withholding of archaeological material in museum collections all over the world.

The newly proposed regulation for NAGPRA will silence all but one of these voices, removing the ability of museums to set aside cases of complicated descent by determining some remains to be “culturally unidentifiable.” The worldview the regulation presents is one of strict, unilinear descent—where any deceased individual in the past can be linked, objectively, to a bounded community in the present.

However, the kinship model also shows there to be no neutral ground when it comes to the ownership of archaeological material, whether or not repatriation is on the table. To identify museums and archaeology as apolitical defaults is to ignore their place in the kinship model, and the accompanying inexorable bias of their displays and interpretations. Viewed through the curator's lens, archaeological material is always political, a fact increasingly recognized in the museum literature (Ames 1992; Skeates 2000; Shanks and Tilley 1992). Maintaining an object in a museum collection will not spare it from political distortion or partisan interpretation. The museum is just one of Ego's symbolic progeny, and projects its own political views by interpreting and presenting the material past that it controls and from which it descends.

Increasingly, however, museums have begun to democratize—allowing parallel stories to be told alongside its own. The NMAI—as well as the American Museum of Natural History and the

Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History—allow greater and greater access to their collections. Visiting tribal delegations can handle material, and can use them ceremonially in rooms prepared specially for that function. As such policies become the norm, museums have begun to elevate themselves above other descendants of Ego as the appropriate keepers of archaeological material, since their policies do not preclude the involvement of their symbolic cousins.

The Cuba repatriation—and the Cuban state's interception of its meaning— demonstrates the potential ramifications of lowering the standard for repatriation. When relationships between archaeological material and both past and present communities cannot be delineated definitively—as is the norm—the exaltation of one, symbolic relationship above all others can imbue the material with new, antagonistic significance. Rather than opening human remains collections around the country to such subjective determinations, the Department of Interior should withdraw its proposed regulations and refocus its efforts on solutions that benefit all of Ego's diverse descendants.

Acknowledgements

This work was made possible with the help, friendship, and support of several individuals. The central concept—the “kinship approach”—stems from conversations between myself, my supervisor Christopher Chippindale, and Fred Baker. My deep gratitude also goes to those who took time out of their very busy schedules to talk to me about the Cuba repatriation and its significance, including Jim Pepper Henry, Nancy Vickery, and Nicolosa Sandoval of the National Museum of the American Indian; Jose Barreiro of Cornell University; Angel Graña of the Antonio Jiminez Foundation in Havana; and Alejandro Hartmann of Baracoa’s Museo Matachin. Thanks also to John Rick, of Stanford University. Final thanks to my wife, Lindsay Pollak, and to the rest of my family for their encouragement.

Notes

1. As characterized by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) in their November 10, 2007 public statement, the new regulations far exceed the Department of Interior’s authority. The Department’s mandate does not extend to culturally unidentified human remains, nor to nonfederally recognized tribes— who have no standing under the Act. Under the law, cultural affiliation—a distinct relationship of shared identity between an earlier group and a federally recognized tribe—and lineal descent are the sole bases for repatriation. Only Congress itself would have the authority to require such a near universal transfer of remains that have no affiliation or known lineal descendants, thereby changing the very substance of the law. NAGPRA’s legislative history clearly demonstrates that the Act’s authors worked hard to achieve a balance between interested parties. Not only do the new regulations obliterate this interest, but they ignore the wishes of those tribes who, at this time, choose not to pursue the repatriation of human remains.

2. At the time that this article was being readied for publication this phrase was still used on the NMAI website but it was no longer attributed to Richard West. As of October 6, 2008 it could be found at <http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=visitor&second=about&third=about>.

References Cited

Ames, Michael

1992 *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Barreiro, Jose

1989 *Indians in Cuba*. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13(3):56-60.

Brenner, Phillip

1989 *The Cuba Reader*. New York: Grove Press.

Cohen, John

1969 *Christopher Columbus: The Four Voyages*. London: Penguin.

Dacal, Ramon and Manuel Rivero de la Calle

1996 *Art and Archaeology of Pre-Columbian Cuba*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland

1993 *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press.

Flikke, Michelle Tisdell

2007 Review Essay: The Museum of the Battle of Ideas. Cardenas, Cuba. *Museum Anthropology Review* 1(1):5-22. Electronic document, <http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/mar/issue/view/1>, accessed October 6, 2008.

Force, Roland

2000 *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian: The Heye and the Mighty*. Honolulu, HI: Mechas Press.

Gathercole, P. W. and David Lowenthal, eds.

1990 *The Politics of the Past*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Greenfield, Jeanette

1995 *The Return of Cultural Treasures*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Griffiths, Tom

1996 *Hunters and Collectors*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Guanche, Jesus

1996 *Componentes Etnicos de la Nacion Cubana*. Havana: Coleccion de la Fuente Viva.

Hall, Raymond, ed.

1979 *Ethnic Autonomy—Comparative Dynamics*. New York: Pergamon Policy

Studies.

Harrington, Mark

1921 Cuba Before Columbus. *Indian Notes and Monographs*. New York: Heye Foundation.

Harrington, Marie

1966 The Life and Times of M.R. Harrington. *In* *Westerners Brand Book XII*. LeRoy R. Hafen, ed. Pp. 177-185. Los Angeles, CA: Westerners, Los Angeles Corral.

Hobsbawm, Eric

1983 Introduction: Inventing Tradition. *In* *The Invention of Tradition*. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. Pp. 1-14. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds.

1983 *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hodder, Ian

1982 *Symbols in Action*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Jacobs, Jordan

N.d. Repatriation and the Reconstruction of Identity. Unpublished MS, Faculty of Archaeology, University of Cambridge.

Jenkins, Tiffany

2004 Human Remains: Objects to Study or Ancestors to Bury? London: Academy of Ideas.

Jones, Sian

1997 The Archaeology of Ethnicity. London: Routledge.

Lowenthal, David

1985 The Past is a Foreign Country. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lox, Harvey

1987 Fidel and Religion. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Martinez-Alier, Verena

1989 Marriage, Class and Color in Nineteenth Century Cuba. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Moerman, Michael

1965 Ethnic Identity in a Complex Civilization: Who Are the Lue? *American Anthropologist* 67(5):1215-1230.

Moses, Catharine

2000 Real Life in Castro's Cuba. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc.

National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI)

1998 Cuba: Human Remains Catalog. Repatriation Report, 04/5494, 04/5535, 04/5576, 04/5631, 04/5785, 04/6050, 08/1746, 08/1751. Suitland, MD: National Museum of the American Indian Repatriation Department.

2001 Cuba: Human Remains Catalog. Amendment to Repatriation Report, 04/5494, 04/5535, 04/5576, 04/5631, 04/5785, 04/6050, 08/1746, 08/1751. Suitland, MD: National Museum of the American Indian Repatriation Department.

Norton, Albert

1900 Norton's Complete Handbook of Havana and Cuba. Chicago: Rand, McNally and Company.

Novas, Himilice

1994 Everything You Need to Know About Latino History. New York: Alpine Books.

Ortiz, Fernando

1991 Estudios Etnosociologicos. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.

Perez, Louis

1999 On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Pichardo, Moya

1945 Los Indios de Cuba en sus Tiempos Historicos. Havana, Cuba: Academia de la Historia de Cuba.

Renfrew, Colin and Paul Bahn

1995 Archaeology: Theory, Methods, and Practice. 2nd Edition. London: Duckworth.

Rivero de la Calle, Manuel

1978 Supervivencia de Descendientes de Indoamericanos en la Zona de Yateras, Oriente. Havana: University of Havana.

Rouse, Irving

1992 The Tainos. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Segal, Bernard E.

1979 Ethnicity: Where the Present is the Past. *In* Ethnic Autonomy—Comparative Dynamics. Raymond Hall, ed. Pp. 7-12. New York: Pergamon Policy Studies.

Shanks, Michael and Christopher Tilley

1992 Re-Constructing Archaeology. London: Routledge.

Skeates, Robin

2000 Debating the Archaeological Heritage. London: Duckworth.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai

1999 Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. London: Zed Books.

Society for American Archaeology

2007 Statement on Department of Interior Proposed Rule for the Disposition of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains and Funerary Objects. Washington, DC: Society for American Archaeology.

Stocking, George, ed.

1985 Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Suchliki, Jaime

1990 Cuba: From Columbus to Castro. 3rd edition. Washington: Brassey's.

Thompson, Alvin O.

1997 The Haunting Past. London: M.E. Sharpe.

West, Richard

2004 Director's Welcome. Electronic document,

<http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=visitor&second=about&third=>

director, accessed ca. 2007. See also

[http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=visitor&second=about&third=about,](http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=visitor&second=about&third=about)

accessed October 6, 2008.

Jordan Jacobs is the Special Projects Manager in the American Museum of Natural History's Cultural Resource Office, and a former intern and contractor for the repatriation program of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. The views expressed in this article are his own, and in no way purport to represent the views of either institution.

Abstract

A proposed change to American repatriation law provides an opportunity to reexamine the assumptions on which the original statute was built. For their justification, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the National Museum of the American Indian Act rely on the supposition that bounded communities proceed through time along a unilinear path—a misconception stemming from both universal, identity-forming processes and the discipline of archaeology itself. A case study involving the National Museum of the American Indian's 2003 repatriation of human remains to a rural village in Cuba demonstrates how various identities can manipulate the transfer of archaeological material to fit their own symbolic needs. [Key words: NAGPRA, repatriation, Cuba, Taino, kinship]