

VITAL TOPICS FORUM

Archaeology as Bearing Witness

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DOI: 10.1111/aman.13071

INTRODUCTION

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This Vital Topics Forum looks at archaeology as a form of bearing witness. While bearing witness has been an important frame for scholarly interrogation of structural violence for some time (Agamben 1998; Butler 2016), it is perhaps Paul Farmer (2004) who popularized this way of scrutinizing structural violence. For Farmer, there are two ways to bear witness. The first is “to show the stoic suffering of the poor” (25). The second entails showing that suffering “is a consequence of structural violence that is immanent to the prevailing system and that links together apparently disconnected aspects of that system” (26). At its most general level, bearing witness is a valuable way to scrutinize violent encounters, traumatic events, dislocations, and structural inequalities. It can help obtain support from those who might feel distant from those events, diffuse pressure from communities most directly affected, and bring about change. Bearing witness can take the form of communicating traumatic personal experiences or documenting for others the dislocations, institutionalized violence, and kinds of difference-making that often escape social examination. Contributors build on these forms by arguing that bearing witness is part of an archaeological episteme. That is, as archaeologists, we produce accounts of the past. When we produce such accounts, we make choices about how they are narrated. Those choices, of course, are constrained by existing traditions, our positions in the field, and our political commitments. Most importantly, those accounts are limited by what we are trained to see as observers.

The contributions to this forum are diverse, yet they reflect some shared concerns and considerations about bearing witness. In this *American Anthropologist* forum, I have invited archaeologists who interrogate what it means to bear witness. The list of contributors is not meant to be exhaustive.

While I have included contributors from a range of backgrounds at different stages in their careers, there are important voices missing (for a few published in this journal, see Dawdy 2006; De León 2012). That being said, the contributors describe the diversity of thought on the subject, even as they explore common ground. In soliciting contributors, I was particularly interested in reflections on archaeological praxis, especially as it relates to blurring the line between public and academic debates. These essays, rather than providing a set of common goals in archaeology as bearing witness, provide a set of ordered questions. Because of the limited space, I will reflect on three: To what do we bear witness? How do we bear witness? Why do we bear witness?

In her contribution, Whitney Battle-Baptiste describes how a derelict and capsized hull found in the course of an archaeological survey bears witness to climate change and its differential effects on economically marginalized peoples. It also speaks to a US immigration policy that places economic refugees in particular positions of vulnerability. She reminds us though that such serendipitous moments are inflected with the researchers own histories and memories that in turn shape the choices that are made in creating accounts.

Koji Lau-Ozawa describes archaeological excavation at Gila River Incarceration Camp in Arizona. He has collaborated with community archaeologists and camp survivors as they document and map the gardens that incarcerated once tended. Archaeology has the ability to document those things hidden “in plain sight,” such as a child’s footprint in casted cement, which “refuses to be silenced.” Lau-Ozawa reminds us that while the results of archaeological research remain an important part of the field’s scholarly endeavors, it is also the process of engagement that archaeological research engenders that provides its ability to bear witness.

Barbara Voss, for her part, argues that archaeology is not enough to bear witness to past dislocations. She describes the role of violence in the formation of the archaeological record through a close analysis of the nineteenth-century anti-Chinese movement and the 1887 arson fire that destroyed San Jose’s Market Street Chinatown. Yet the

recovered artifacts do not speak for themselves. For Voss, it is the community of Chinese Americans facilitating this research who help shape how these remains bear witness.

Reinhard Bernbeck and Susan Pollock's contribution focuses on their work at Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics, the site of a Nazi research institute. In a context where people have traditionally argued that bearing witness is in part about bringing closure, they argue the reverse: that it is the "very lack of closure, the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing with certainty who the victims were" that should be the goal of bearing witness.

In his piece, Randall McGuire documents his long-term engagement along the US–Mexico border. McGuire highlights archaeology's role in documenting the materialization of present-day institutional forms of violence and their deadly effects, or the rhetoric and infrastructure of exclusionary politics. In Ambos, Nogales, a large metal wall separates families and delineates areas of control. As a surface, it is also subject to improvisational forms of resistance but engenders a space where "transgression is threatened with bullets."

Such engagement, as Uzma Rizvi argues, is not without ambivalence. Rizvi describes the disciplinary uncertainty of

archaeologists as they confronted the framing of the 2016 Charlottesville march by white nationalists as a project of cultural heritage. In Rizvi's analysis, debates about whether or not such monuments were worthy of protection missed the point. By making the debate about heritage rather than hate, those participating lost themselves in the comfort of the field's ambivalence.

For his contribution, Christopher Hernandez questions whether bearing witness is enough to practice an engaged and participatory archaeology. Relying on conversations with people he worked with during his research in Mensabak, Mexico, he describes the incomplete promise of archaeology and its failure to deliver for people who live in the regions where we work.

Such engagement is long and difficult, but as Sonya Atalay points out, it can be part of a process of healing. Atalay describes her work with tribal elders through NAGPRA review where she was forced to explain why the remains of 122 people are dispersed among more than 9,000 boxes. Atalay's works show us how researchers can move our efforts at collaboration with local communities beyond theory and good intentions to a sustainable practice.

Beaches—Past and Present

Whitney Battle-Baptiste

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13072

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On a recent trip to the Bahamian island of Eleuthera, an island I have traveled to several times for archaeological research, I took some time for myself. Eleuthera has been the site of a community-based archaeological project at the Millars Plantation, on the southern part of the island. This trip was special, academically speaking. I was there to support my graduate student Elena Sesma and help with two community meetings. We were closing out Elena's dissertation research: an oral history project with the Millars Plantation descendants. Taking time for myself meant returning to Lighthouse Point/Lighthouse Beach, the point farthest south on the 120-mile island, which has been many things to many people. Lighthouse Point was at one time the center of life, commerce, and migration on the island. I first heard about this place because of an effort to save the land from development, called the "Save Lighthouse Point" campaign. It was one of my first interactions with

our now-longtime community partners, the One Eleuthera Foundation.

For full disclosure, I must admit that within the confines of my diasporic imagination, beaches of the Caribbean have never been the most relaxing places for me. As a woman of the African diaspora, my thoughts often drift to how these spaces were used in the past and the present. Throughout the Bahamas and the rest of the Caribbean, the beach marks a point of entry—for Indigenous migration, for European "explorers" and exploiters, for captive Africans kidnapped from their homeland, and for liberated Africans who would have been bound for enslavement if they were not removed from Spanish ships after the end of the transatlantic slave trade. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Bahamas and the rest of the islands of the Caribbean have been used for a new type of exploitation: cruise ships and contemporary tourism. This beach, although voted the most beautiful in the entire Bahamian archipelago, has come to symbolize a forgotten place with a forgotten history for me. This is a place I have always wanted to write about, to interpret, to bring back to life. That day, as I had many times before, I spent a great deal of time ruminating on how that would happen.



FIGURE 1. Boat washed ashore on Lighthouse Beach, Eleuthera, Bahamas. (Photograph by Whitney Battle-Baptiste) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

However, I wasn't certain how. As I thought about and analyzed the historical nuances of the place of the Bahamas and the Caribbean, I serendipitously came across an abandoned boat laying on its side (Figure 1). Its paint was worn, but its colors reminded me of the bright blue and white with red accents of the Haitian flag. I knew immediately that Haiti was the boat's place of origin.

Back in the settlement, we had just heard about a recent group of Haitian migrants aboard a boat that had capsized. Found dehydrated, disoriented, and near death a week before on Lighthouse Beach, these men and women risked their lives to migrate to another place that represented opportunity. I didn't think as I heard this story that the vessel would still be there. It was. It was painful to see this boat and know the story behind it. I felt extreme sadness. The wreck spoke loudly of its purpose even as it lay silently on its side. It was a vehicle of hope and escape that became a death trap. Items that had once been of extreme importance to the men and women aboard the boat now littered the beach: discarded clothes, empty water bottles, frayed rope, chipped paint, a tattered sail. Migration, exploitation of African diasporic peoples, criminalization of migrants, and their fates were the first things to come to my mind. These are all issues that appear and disappear across the landscapes of community-based projects. The messy stratigraphy of daily life becomes a part of our interpretive toolkit. We cannot ignore the impact of people and attitudes and uncomfortable moments. It is the honesty in our work. It is what we witness firsthand and how we understand the placement within our collaborative relationships. It is the texture of our work in Caribbean historical archaeology.

These moments, symbolized by the Haitian migrants found on the shore of the beach, eager to find a new life after superstorms like Irma and Maria and Katia, will force our connections with our partners to change. I have come to know firsthand the impact that US immigration policy has on people of Haitian descent, for it has affected my own family. I have come to understand this is not simply a border issue but is a human rights issue. From Eleuthera and Haiti to Puerto Rico and Cuba—the latter an island and nation on the cusp of radical change and movement as a result of US policy—there are real consequences to the movement of people. These are the real consequences of the way public policy impacts some communities and ignores others.

Bearing Witness to the Injustices of Mass Incarceration

Koji Lau-Ozawa

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13073

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In July 1942, the first Japanese American families arrived at the Gila River Incarceration Camp in Arizona. The

center was far from complete, with many barracks still under construction and dust storms sweeping through the empty avenues of the site. Overcrowded in the sparse accommodations, people found their way to their assigned barracks, often eight to a room, with only canvas mattresses on which to sleep. Ultimately, 120,000 Japanese

Americans would undergo similar experiences, as all people of Japanese ancestry living along the western coast of the United States were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated in ten camps across the country. The incarceration of Japanese Americans stands as an egregious violation of civil rights in the twentieth century. It has become a focal point within the Japanese American community, with people often asking: “What camp was your family in?”

Today, the ruins of the Gila River Incarceration Camp sit quietly between fields of fruit trees and the open desert. Forcibly placed on the land of the Gila River Indian Community, even the camp’s construction was a violation of tribal sovereignty. Concrete pads along the center of the residential blocks demark the placement of latrines. Still-visible ditches crisscross much of the camp, some dug for drainage and others for utility pipes. Barrack footings lay scattered across the landscape, in places still in the neat grids of their original arrangement. Perhaps most remarkably, concrete ponds stand as the last surviving mark of gardens cultivated by incarcerated people. Archaeological survey recorded over 240 garden ponds constructed by Japanese Americans at Gila River. These features reveal the innovative ways these people transformed the environment to alleviate the hardships of the desert. They also speak to the resilience and determination of incarcerated people to maintain a sense of dignity and pride.

The study of gardens at sites like Gila River brings together archaeologists and communities seeking their past. Many Japanese Americans did not speak of their camp experiences after the war. As the number of those who can speak to their camp experiences dwindles, archaeological investigations reveal much that was left unspoken. Projects at Manzanar and Amache, incarceration camps in California and Colorado, respectively, focus heavily on community engagement (Burton and Farrell 2014; Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013). Former incarcerated people, their children, and their grandchildren participate in site surveys and outreach events.

At Gila River, archaeological work focuses on the documentation of garden features constructed by incarcerated people. In collaboration with Gila River Indian Community archaeologists, landscaping features are mapped, photographed, and recorded. Oral histories are collected from former incarcerated people, and the results of fieldwork are shared with local community groups. The mapping project helps to connect descendent communities to the location of their families’ barracks and the features constructed around them. For camp survivors, many of whom were children during their incarceration, working with these materials can elicit Proustian memories. Sustained work with these former incarcerated people also provides a forum through which their stories can be shared. Even with the passage of time, the effects of the incarceration still resonate: fear, humiliation, dignity, pride, and anger. Such sentiments are written into stories of incarceration. Community engagement in the work at Gila



FIGURE 2. *Child’s footprint in concrete next to pond feature at the Gila River Japanese American incarceration camp. (Photograph by Koji Lau-Ozawa) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]*

River takes these emotions seriously and bears witness to such testaments.

But how is this event remembered by those whose family members did not undergo incarceration? Recently, a group of about twenty people from the Japanese American Citizens League gathered at the Gila River Incarceration Camp for an annual cleanup of the monument there. After the day’s work, they ate at a restaurant about ten miles up the road. The waitress asked what everyone was gathered for. When they explained about the camp and their various connections to the history, she was stunned. She had never known about the camp’s existence or of the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII. Her experience was not unique, as the United States struggles to remember its more controversial pasts. Often, when it is brought into the limelight, the incarceration is invoked as a just action or legal precedent for the mass imprisonment of other unwanted groups.

Archaeology’s capacity to bear witness is unique in its ability to engage with the material remains of sites like the Gila River Camp. History, according to Trouillot, “begins with bodies and artifacts” (1995, 29). Understanding the lives of those incarcerated at Gila River brings the story of Japanese American incarceration closer to the present than more abstract figures and accounts. The imprint of a child’s

foot in the concrete of a garden pond stubbornly refuses silence (Figure 2). In the current moment of hyperskepticism, the physicality of archaeological materials anchors memories

and constrains the production of alternative narratives. With these testimonies, archaeology seeks to prevent the repetition of iniquities.

Archaeology Is Not Enough: Witnessing the Labor of Heritage Stakeholders

Barbara L. Voss

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13074

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On May 4, 1887, an arson fire consumed the Market Street Chinatown (Figure 3). For twenty years, this thriving community of over 1,000 residents was the primary target of the anti-Chinese movement in San Jose, California, whose supporters harassed Chinatown residents with nuisance laws, boycotts, rallies, and stone throwing. Yet only fire, the anti-Chinese agitators argued in the *San Jose Daily Herald*, could cleanse this “foul plague spot” from the city (March 9, 1887).

When the fire began, the Chinese Fire Protection Association found that its water tanks had been drained. The municipal fire department valiantly saved white-occupied buildings while letting Chinese-occupied structures burn. The *Daily Herald* proclaimed, “Chinatown is dead. It is dead forever” (May 5, 1887).

Yet the anti-Chinese movement’s confidence was mistaken. Their attempts to drive Chinese Americans out of San Jose ultimately failed. Through new partnerships between Chinese American business leaders and white landowners, the displaced Chinatown residents built two new communities: the Woolen Mills and Heinlenville Chinatowns (Yu 2001).

One hundred years later, in 1987, members of the local Chinese American Women’s Club established the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project (CHCP; see chcp.org) to challenge the persistent occlusion of San Jose’s Chinese American heritage (Lum 2007). Now, the imminent threat was archaeological. The site of the former Market Street Chinatown was being redeveloped into a luxury hotel. Initial archaeological studies dismissed the potential significance of the block’s Chinese American history. Yet as soon as construction began, workers encountered rich deposits of artifacts. Chinese American residents successfully pressured the

city to sponsor salvage excavations. However, the promised funding for analysis, publication, and display of the artifacts disappeared shortly after construction was complete.

CHCP’s initial objective was to build a museum to curate and display these and other artifacts. Since the museum opened in 1991, they have developed heritage festivals, publications, documentary films, educational curricula, and traveling exhibits. CHCP has also patiently educated local archaeologists, guiding field and laboratory projects not only so that archaeologists are aware of Chinese American history and culture but also so that archaeological interpretations do not unwittingly perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

In October 2002, when I first began collaborating with CHCP, I was compelled by the possibility of using heat-affected artifacts from the Market Street Chinatown to bear witness to the injustice and trauma of the May 4, 1887, fire. But when I presented this plan, CHCP members gently offered another perspective. Emphasizing the fire, they noted, reinforces stereotypes that the Chinese



FIGURE 3. Chinatown fire, 1887. (Courtesy History San José)

American community passively submitted to the anti-Chinese movement. These master narratives needed to be challenged by connecting archaeological studies of Chinese American history with evidence of community survival. Our collaborative exhibit, “There Was a Chinatown Here” (see <http://www.chinesemuseum.historysanjose.org/>), uses this approach by pairing nineteenth-century artifacts with video interviews of present-day community leaders.

In recent years, our research has circled back to the May 4, 1887, fire. With the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, the heat-affected artifacts provide valuable touchstones for understanding the historical context of present-day discrimination. CHCP’s motto, “History is for Living ~ Learning is for Life!” emphasizes that the past is not “back there” in a distant time. Events that began in the 1880s are still unfolding today, as the laws, tactics, and rhetoric of the nineteenth-century anti-Chinese movement are mobilized anew to serve post-9/11 nativist and white supremacist agendas.

Collaboration with CHCP has shown me that the archaeological record does not function as a silent witness. Without question, archaeological discoveries have a disruptive potential. Artifacts can evoke powerful responses that draw emotional connections between the present and the past. Yet, responses to evidence of suffering are not automatic. Such emotions are produced within and through what Williams (1977) eloquently termed “structures of feeling.” The May 5, 1887, *San Jose Daily Times* reported “general rejoicing” among white San Joseans witnessing the fire that consumed the Market Street Chinatown. My initial tendency to interpret heat-affected artifacts as evidence of tragedy, rather than resilience, exemplifies how emotional responses are not independent of political, economic, and discursive structures. As CHCP engages in its ongoing work to commemorate Chinese American history, they and other heritage stakeholders are reshaping these discursive structures and creating possibilities for more meaningful accounts of the past.

Witnessing and the Right to Intransparency

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DOI: 10.1111/aman.13075

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When we think of witnessing, we generally think of an act involving persons. A witness gives an account of an event she/he has directly perceived, whether visually as an “eyewitness,” aurally as in “hearsay,” or in some other way. Witnesses also provide testimony about a specific time, as in the German understanding of *Zeitzeugen* who may, for example, act as witnesses of the Nazi period. More often than not, witnessing is an act that relates to issues of justice. This can be specific, as in legal cases, or general, as in *Zeitzeugenschaft*, which mostly involves testimony of directly observed injustices in the past.

Archaeology, in contrast, tends to be more impersonal. Does it nonetheless have the capacity to bear witness, and if so, how? On first appearance, the answer would seem to be no. Things do not observe; they do not see, hear, or taste, but are mute. Nonetheless, material remains can become

witnesses (Bernbeck 2017). This will often be a form of anonymous, collective witnessing rather than one that points to concrete persons. In this respect, archaeological witnessing is similar to the “new forensis.” In the words of one of its major proponents, the new forensis turns the gaze of traditional forensics around in order to “detect and interrupt state violations,” thereby working as a critical and “counter-hegemonic practice” (Weizman 2014, 10–11). It focuses on material witnesses. However, as archaeologists have long recognized, material remains do not speak for themselves. Rather, they must be presented in public fora (Keenan and Weizman 2012). Here, the work of interpreters (e.g., archaeologists) is key: she/he is “tasked with translating ‘the language of things’” into a convincing argument (Weizman 2014, 9).

Ruins and other material traces of the past share a basic characteristic with human witnesses: they and their potential testimony can outlast the moment in which an injustice occurs. If we accept that material remains can be witnesses, we must also accept the fundamental openness and incompleteness of the past toward the present (Benjamin 1999, 471). Past injustices and suffering still matter, whether they happened 10 or 10,000 years ago.

However, a focus on witnessing in archaeology can push us into the role of a truth-seeking investigator who forgets the

road that she/he treads to reach that goal. Witnessing forces objects out of their muteness as interpreters seek to extract their testimony. In doing so, the interpreter must also bear in mind the right to intransparency (Hoffmann 2011, 132–33). Recognition of this right is part of respecting an Other when she/he refuses to be objectified, identified, or assimilated; it implies the right to remain *un*-understandable. It may even mean that we sometimes need to cease our investigations before we have learned all that we (think we) can.

THE KAISER-WILHELM INSTITUTE FOR ANTHROPOLOGY, HUMAN HEREDITY AND EUGENICS

We briefly present a case in which the principles of witnessing as well as the right to intransparency come clearly to the fore. It stems from excavations on the former property of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics (KWIA), today part of the Free University of Berlin (Germany).

In July 2014, construction workers laying pipes next to the university library accidentally discovered a pit filled with human bones. No archaeologists were present. The police were called, and the bones were collected and taken to the city coroner. A cursory examination ensued, in which the minimum number of individuals was estimated to be fifteen. A few months later, the bones were cremated and buried anonymously (Pollock 2016).

Subsequent archaeological excavations conducted by the authors recovered large quantities of fragmentary human remains from the original pit as well as two others. The history of the property on which they were found suggests strongly that the human bones and other associated remains derive from the KWIA.

Founded in 1927, and continuing as a functioning research institute until the end of the Nazi regime in 1945, the KWIA engaged in studies of and experiments on animals and

humans, including on body parts received from Auschwitz (Nyiszli [1946] 1963; Schmuhl 2005). Researchers at the institute pursued notions of “racial hygiene” and eugenics as a basis for producing a “healthy” population, thereby laying the “scientific” foundation for the Nazi racist extermination of Jews, Roma, Sinti, and others.

In addition to body parts sent from Auschwitz, the KWIA also housed skeletal remains from the collections of the physical anthropologist Felix von Luschan, which he brought to Berlin from former German colonies and collecting trips all over the world. Von Luschan and his contemporaries incorporated into their collections skeletal remains from archaeological excavations as well (Kunst and Creutz 2013). In other words, the excavated human remains on the former KWIA property could be from one or more sources separated widely in time and space.

The archaeological excavations on the former property of the KWIA have stirred discussion and controversy, standing as they do as mute witness of unspecified violence and suffering connected to the KWIA. An open question is how far investigations should go in trying to identify specific victims. Does use of the full array of modern (invasive) scientific techniques risk repeating the ways in which victims of the Nazis—or perhaps of colonialists—were treated (Pollock 2016)? Or do we have the duty to analyze such remains in the interest of a potential repatriation of body parts and/or an appropriate burial of human remains?

In cases such as this one, perhaps a lack of closure, the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing with certainty who the victims were whose remains were found on the campus of our university, accompanied by material testimony that points to crimes committed, might be more appropriate than the goal of maximal witnessing. In this way, one would leave the victims their right to intransparency while still shining a light on the perpetrators.

Bearing Witness on the US–Mexico Border

Randall H. McGuire

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13076

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In 1985, Mexican archaeologist Elisa Villalpando and I began a project (still ongoing) in northern Sonora near the international border. Doing archaeology, we witnessed the

transformation of the border from an international gateway for commerce and cultural exchange to a militarized killing field. Bearing witness, we analyzed the violent encounters, traumatic events, and structural inequalities of the contemporary border.

During the 1980s, most undocumented crossers passed through the border city of Nogales, Arizona. Only the heartiest would walk through the Sonoran Desert to avoid US

Border Patrol agents. They would climb a barbed wire fence, walk overnight, and be picked up by labor contractors in Arizona. All of this changed when the US adopted the policy of “Prevention Through Deterrence.”

In 1994, the US government materialized this policy by constructing walls in urban areas to deter undocumented crossings. The new walls force would-be migrants into the desert (De León 2015). The US built a wall ten to fifteen feet tall made of military surplus landing mats through Nogales. The new wall did little to stop undocumented crossings; rather, it turned the Sonoran Desert into a killing field. Before 1998, migrant deaths in the desert averaged fourteen a year. Between 1998 and 2017, more than 7,000 migrants perished in the deserts (Border Patrol 2017).

Prevention Through Deterrence transformed the cultural landscape. In 2006, we found the town of Altar crammed with prospective crossers, and we bore witness to what was happening. We traveled with migrants to the border (but did not cross), talked to migrants in the streets, and contributed food and money to the Catholic Church’s relief efforts. When we left the field, we did public talks and published op-eds in the US and Mexico to raise consciousness. In 2008, I began working with the humanitarian group No More Deaths to provide aid to migrants deported to Nogales, Sonora. The border wall loomed over our aid station. In 2011, the US tore down the landing-mat wall and erected a new thirty-foot-high barrier through Nogales. The new wall consists of concrete-filled steel tubes called bollards, placed four inches apart so that agents in the US can see potential crossers on the Mexican side.

I also began studying the material border as an archaeologist (McGuire 2013, 2015). I dug in the archives to learn the

life history of the Nogales physical border. I systematically photographed the changing forms of the wall and the things that people placed on it. I walked the wall on both sides of the border, crossing at all of the ports of entry, and observed how others interacted with it. This research revealed a material dialectic of fortification and transgression. The United States materialized the border to control crossings and to assert sovereignty. People who live in the borderlands, by contrast, emphasize crossing the border, the creation of community, and the transgression of national agendas. The material border facilitates and restricts the agency of the people of Ambos Nogales, and they rematerialize the border in ways that contravene the interests of the nation-state. This, in turn, leads the nation-state to rematerialize the border to counter this transgression.

Walls are surfaces and symbols as well as barriers. The landing-mat wall provided a flat surface that people could exploit by installing art, writing graffiti, and using the flat panels to shield illicit activities. The new bollard wall inhibited these activities but facilitated new transgressions. Families divided by the border meet at the wall to talk, picnic, and share children’s school work through the bars. Violence can also be more easily committed through the barrier. In October 2012, a border patrol agent on the US side of the wall shot and killed a Mexican teenager who was on a Mexican street. On April 1, 2014, members of the US Conference of Bishops said mass at the border wall, passing the host through the bars to communicants on the Mexican side. In July 2017, the Border Patrol put up steel mesh to stop the passing of items through the bars. The dialectic continues as people seek new ways to express their shared humanity despite the state’s imposition of a barrier that violently impacts so many people.

Ambivalent Fields: On the Work of Negative Monuments

Uzma Z. Rizvi

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13077

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Within postcolonial studies, colonial ambivalence highlights a psychological dissonance within the colonial/colonized subject while destabilizing the singularity of a position of authority (Bhabha 1994). Not to be confused with cultural relativism, ambivalence indexes the ways in which desire and repulsion, authority and resistance, and all of the possible

iterations in between, exist as negotiated modes of being within colonial subjects. Archaeology, as a colonial product, produces an ambivalent relationship to power and is ontologically constitutive of the multiple selves produced by the field. The insidious nature of coloniality within archaeological practice is clear when practitioners find themselves uncertain about how to engage with the call for pulling down monuments (Joyce 2017). This ambivalence complicates archaeology’s capacity to “bear witness” because such witnessing relates to narratives of human rights that the materiality of the past contests within a colonial framework.

As archaeologists, we are taught and take seriously our stewardship of the material past and understand this as our public responsibility. I have written elsewhere about the colonial relationship between how we treat objects/art in comparison to people, so I will not reproduce that here (see Rizvi 2015). But what I will reiterate is a recognition of how we allow ourselves to be held in place within systems of archaeological control and knowledge production (in these systems, I include all forms of archaeological practice, including CRM and the academy). When we find ourselves vacillating between not wanting to promote hate through these violent monuments and what we consider our “jobs” to be as archaeologists, we should really take stock of why we are holding on to certain ways of thinking and being.

Public discussions about negative monuments bring into relief our complicity as archaeologists in maintaining visual fields of violence (Zimmerman 2007). Discussions about colonial monuments in the postcolony and their varied impacts illustrate the many ways that some monuments are repurposed, others appropriated, and still others pulled down (Flood 2002; Meskell 2002). The responses by the global archaeological community are fraught with discord as monuments are brought down, shot through, and dismantled. In each of these discussions, it is contemporary politics that we focus on, and we consider these monuments as silent, unable to take care of themselves, and somehow innocent of what reactions they engender.

Confederate monuments are negative monuments that index racist, colonial, and violent pasts, and they reiterate

those narratives in the contemporary moment for people whose own histories and presents continue to be marked by such hate. The power vested in these monuments is clear in their ability to isolate some and to embolden others into certain ways of being. I make this distinction about negative monuments because I am not arguing that all monuments or all forms of protection of monuments or landscapes should be eradicated. I am arguing that monuments or spaces of continued activation of hate should be considered removable. The moment an artifact has the ability to illicit violence, it moves from being something to protect as a matter of principle to something that is harmful to our collective lives and bodies. The US-specific complications around such regulation are due to our own settler-colonial occupation and related ambivalence. Our ethical commitments to science behoove us to document the monument and its impact, but we need not extend that to its maintenance if it conflicts with the ethics of our practice (Gnecco and Lippert 2015; Haber and Shepherd 2015). Our conflicted standpoint as a field is a reminder and residue of colonial ambivalence.

A decolonizing archaeology insists coloniality be unraveled and desires a clarity of ethical practice to be established in which our commitments as a field are no longer ambivalent, thus holding an explicit possibility to bear witness. There are many ways to imagine a new future for our discipline; perhaps most important is recognizing the work of negative monuments and how their removal might signal a new future for all of us, not just some of us.

Is Bearing Witness Enough?

Christopher Hernandez

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13078

Christopher Hernandez

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Archaeology provides a material-based understanding of the human experience that can transcend documentary and personal accounts of events. Although archaeological investigations can contribute to debates on inequality and injustice, the path from research to civic engagement is not seamless (Atalay et al. 2014; Battle-Baptiste 2011; Little and Shackel 2008; Stottman 2010). To provide more than a rich account of how contemporary groups became oppressed, archaeology as bearing witness must connect with people who are ready and willing to act.

Bearing witness guides my collaborative fieldwork with the Maya peoples of Mensabak. As local community members relate to me the conditions of their lives and plans for the future, I find ways that I can employ my academic training to address their contemporary concerns. My Indigenous colleague Armando Valenzuela Gómez often tells me, “You as a foreigner have connections. You need to work with people you know back home to promote tourism and development here in Mensabak.” His statement highlights that, as a researcher from the United States, I am in a privileged position. In the Mexican context, local Maya see me as a person with the power to alleviate socioeconomic struggles.

Within Chiapas, the poorest state in Mexico, the Maya of Mensabak are working to relieve local poverty by, for example, building a sustainable tourist economy. Mensabak

is within a UNESCO biosphere reserve, and Maya peoples already patrol the region to protect local ecology. Documenting archaeological sites promotes tourism and conservation. Through the collaborative documentation of sites, locals and foreign researchers have a record to prevent looting, monitor the forest, and attract tourists from the nearby town of Palenque. Palenque is a commercial and tourist hub that is home to a UNESCO World Heritage archaeological site. The people of Mensabak understand that tourism can be problematic in terms of conservation and autonomy. Therefore, locals work with me and other researchers to craft plans for promoting tourism that respect local autonomy and preserve the region's archaeology and ecology.

Collaborations with academics afford the people of Mensabak greater access to resources and global networks. Armando clearly stated, "Being a PhD or researcher from a United States university can help us. We can petition local groups [i.e., NGOs] and the government for funds. You probably speak in a language funding agencies want to hear

and can help us with proposals." Structural violence prevents disenfranchised communities around the world from accessing higher education and learning the culture of academia. Through community-based collaboration, archaeologists can share the power of their craft and become better partners to disenfranchised groups (Atalay 2012; McGuire 2008).

Sharing the archaeological process highlights two points of action: collaboration and presenting research to people who are willing to act. Archaeologists can build and join a movement to alleviate social struggles. Researchers can also speak to people with the power to combat the issues we hope to address. Unless bearing witness connects with powerful groups who are ready and willing to bring reform, nuanced accounts of social struggle will likely fail to resolve a majority of societal problems. In other words, understanding a problem is not the same as developing a solution. If bearing witness does not reach an audience with the power and motivation to act, then our accounts will remain academic talking points.

Repatriation and Bearing Witness

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DOI: 10.1111/aman.13079

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Boxes and numbers. Both are part of my visual memory and soundscape of bearing witness to repatriation.

Standing with my elders in a university museum's lab, we tried to fathom what we were seeing. An endless number of boxes, stacked one atop the other. Why did the remains of 122 of our ancestors require more than 9,000 storage boxes? We inquired, searched, questioned, and researched. Eventually, we learned that a soil block containing intact burials had been dug out and stored off campus. The block remained in someone's sewing-room closet for two decades, after which it was transported to the museum and excavated by a class of undergrads. These violations caused extreme fragmentation, and rather than working to keep remains of one individual together, the museum stored each fragment separately, organized by body part. Nine thousand boxes, each holding small, fragmented portions of our ancestors.

Afterward, I recall hearing thousands and thousands of numbers. These were softly read aloud as we worked in pairs, one reading inventory numbers scrawled in black ink across the bone fragments, the other checking off the

corresponding number on the printed inventories. We worked for three days, wanting to ensure that every fragment of each individual was present. Later, we read their inventory numbers aloud again as we worked to bring together all fragments of each individual so we could respectfully rebury our ancestors in as complete a state as possible.

Bearing witness in repatriation requires carrying many of these visual memories and moments of quiet violence.

In following the ethical mandate of stewardship, archaeologists claimed authority to disturb, unearth, exhume, analyze, display, and trade Indigenous peoples' ancestral remains and the places and materials of Indigenous cultural heritage. The impact on Native peoples has been well documented: sadness, pain, anger, and trauma. In reclaiming Indigenous ancestral remains, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony through NAGPRA, Native Americans bear witness in multiple ways. In NAGPRA consultations, written claims, and NAGPRA Review Committee meetings, Native peoples braid archaeological data together with oral histories, kinship information, linguistic details, and other cultural knowledge. Beyond administrative documentation, these are acts of proclaiming their relationship with homelands and ancestors. These are forms of bearing witness, and they are acts of *survivance*, in Billy J. Stratton's (2015)

words: “that combination of persistence, resistance, and survival that Gerald Vizenor has championed in his work, to create within the ether . . . a sense of Native presence and actuality over absence, nihility, and victimry.”

It is difficult to witness firsthand the way ancestral remains have been treated—sorted into trays by body part; permanently marked and labeled with numbers, offensive words, or the university’s name; wired together or encased in plaster for hanging or easy display. Yet there is also something incredibly powerful in witnessing such things, then working in a meticulous, loving way to care for those ancestors and assist in bringing them home for reburial. Such is the difficult work of bearing witness in repatriation—carrying these visual memories, soundscapes, and past practices while working in partnership to bring repatriations and reburials to completion.

Archaeologists and museum professionals also have opportunities to bear witness through their repatriation work. Whether through written words in NAGPRA notices, spoken testimony before the NAGPRA Review Committee, or active engagement in one’s home department or campus museum, scholars can acknowledge archaeology’s colonial and racist history, and the harm caused by collecting and studying Native peoples’ bodies and objects. Let’s consider, for example, archival documents and excavation field notes: these can be disturbing and difficult to read because they detail the horrible indignities to which ancestral remains were subjected and the lengths to which collectors, Indian agents, and museums went to build their “collections.”

Archaeologists and museum staff must utilize those documents productively, working in partnership with Native nations to turn the documentation of disconnection and

separation into claims that result in the return of ancestors, their cultural items, and sacred objects. Speaking and writing about how ancestral remains came to be in collections are significant forms of bearing witness, particularly when such truth-telling appears in publications or in official government documents (for example, NAGPRA Review Committee meetings) in support of Native nations’ claims for their ancestors.

Working with John Swogger and Jen Shannon in partnership with Anishinabe elders and the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways, I’ve started using another, perhaps unexpected, way of bearing witness to the experiences of repatriation: comics. We launched our first repatriation comic, *Journeys to Complete the Work*, at Indigenous Comic Con in November 2017 (<https://blogs.umass.edu/satalay/repatriation-comic/>).

We use storytelling and colorful visuals to explain NAGPRA law, show where it sometimes falls short, and describe how Native communities engage in activism to urge institutions into compliance. Our comic is a teaching tool for students, community members, museum professionals, historical societies, and international organizations. It allows community members to engage in truth-telling, powerful story work, and acts of bearing witness.

These and other written, visual, and spoken acts of bearing witness are a necessary part of the long-term protection and care of ancestral remains and cultural places. Through these, and in many other ways, come opportunities for us all to bear witness to difficult and painful histories. In doing this work of bearing witness, we contribute to spaces where people care for each other, their ancestors, and the land once again.

Concluding Thoughts

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DOI: 10.1111/aman.13082

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James Baldwin, in a 1984 *New York Times* interview with Julius Lester, stated, “I am a witness. In the church in which I was raised you were supposed to bear witness to the truth. Now, later on, you wonder what in the world the truth is, but you do know what a lie is” (Lester 1984). The contributions to this forum are diverse, yet they reflect some shared concerns and considerations about bearing witness. These essays, rather

than providing a set of common goals in archaeology as bearing witness, provide a set of ordered questions. Because of the limited space, I will reflect on three: To what do we bear witness? How do we bear witness? Why do we bear witness?

The first question is a deceptively difficult one to answer. On the one hand, archaeologists are bearing witness to a form of material culture—a child’s footprint cast in concrete during the construction of an internment camp (Lau-Ozawa), a surface through which a citizen of one nation standing on that nation’s sovereign territory was shot by an armed border guard of another nation (McGuire), or

a capsized boat that once carried economic refugees (Battle-Baptiste). The material culture described above does not speak in and of itself to dislocations, violence, or traumas in which they are such important agents. Yet they are a crucial element in the story, as they are durable prompts to raise questions. On the other hand, scholars are bearing witness to the limits of bearing witness. Echoing Giorgio Agamben's (1998) reflection on the role of witnessing and the Holocaust, we are reminded that part of bearing witness in the name of those written out of history is that our narrative "contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority" (88). While cognizant of such limitations, scholars have underscored the continuing urgency of bearing witness, pointing to the links that bind the past and the present. McGuire's long-term engagement along the US–Mexico border allowed him to document the shifting political and economic conditions surrounding the border and the deadly effects of the wall's materialization. In her survey of contraband and slavery in the Bahamas, Battle-Baptiste found evidence of the political vulnerability of Haitians in the twenty-first century—connecting the past to the present. Archaeologists base their analyses on their own empirical research. They employ their knowledge about political and economic constellations in the past, their materializations in the archaeological record, and how those arrangements inform the present.

The second question brought out by the essays—how do we bear witness?—is an equally important one to reflect on. Authors seem to agree that community is central to answering this question. Whether it is reflecting on the polyphony of the past and its material record, the need to consider unintended implications of bearing witness for the community, or the way in which bearing witness is not just an exercise of documenting an "Other," authors demand a certain kind of specificity in its practice. Voss asks, for example, the important question: Is archaeology enough? The short answer is simple. "No." But in asking it she reveals the centrality of the community group that trains archaeologists to look at their past and in so doing arms them with the vocabulary and analytical skill to witness the past. Her essay prompts us to think critically about what we mean when we use the word "public" and about the role it plays in facilitating archaeologists in "bearing witness." At the same time, we have to recognize our own privilege to bear witness. As Rizvi points out, exclusionary politics don't just happen "out there." Charlottesville and the ensuing debate over monuments and their place in public spaces conflated histories, positions, and subjects into a simplistic antinomy—to protect monuments or to hide them. By accepting the terms of the debate without considering what monuments do can make those professional commitments archaeologists share, such as stewardship, complicit in a kind of silencing. Part of the practice of bearing witness is also to know when not to document, or what Bernbeck and Pollock refer to as intransparency. For them, "maximal witnessing" is not the goal of bearing witness. Rather, they argue for a lack

of closure, where witnessing means reinforcing the victims' "right to intransparency while nonetheless shining a light on the perpetrators."

The third question—why do we bear witness?—is perhaps the most challenging question addressed here. This question gets at another tension found throughout the collection. On the one hand, there is a critical reflection on bearing witness—that is, it is the stuff borne out of good intentions with unforeseen consequences. Hernandez, for example, asks what it means to be a critically engaged archaeologist. Members of the Mensabak community with whom he works challenged him on this very point. For them, archaeology is a mechanism through which to attract tourists. Archaeologists speak the language of funding agencies who can advocate for their agendas. Rather than challenging the primacy of economic growth as an outcome of archaeological engagement, Hernandez argues that archaeological research should create usable pasts and sustainable presents. On the other hand, bearing witness is also part of a process of taking deliberate action borne out of critical reflection. Atalay points out that we should be encouraged to bear witness to difficult histories, and that NAGPRA review committees are one such space for doing so. For Atalay, bearing witness is part of a process of healing. When confronted with 9,000 boxes containing the remains of 122 ancestors, there were three acts of bearing witness. First, there was the act of demystifying the archaeological process, reconciling to elders why archaeologists did this. She also bore witness by documenting how collections came to be. In doing this, archaeologists can create powerful spaces for truth telling. The third act of bearing witness was through the reassembling of the remains so that each individual could be respectfully reburied.

There is a tension among many of the contributions between two poles: (1) archaeologists as witnesses to something that is evident but occluded; and (2) archaeologists as conditioned by and struggling within the biases that shape both archaeological and public views of the past and present. The tension is that the first pole takes reality as given, and the second takes reality (or at least our observations of it) as socially shaped. Interpretation of the material record is *not* self-evident; artifacts *do not* speak. Yet, we are making truth claims that are stronger than they would be without engagement with the material record. The "hardness" of material evidence seems to be one of the things that allow us to witness the past. Yet, just as heat-affected artifacts seem to be "proof" that the Market Street Chinatown burned, they are not proof of the cause of the fire or the motives of those who set it.

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