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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Artifacts, Contested Histories, and Other Archaeological Hotspots

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Abstract As a contemporary act, historical archaeology must interweave past and present. This happens in a wide variety of locales, including field sites, classrooms, laboratories, and public venues. At every node of practice the charged fields of prior knowledge and archaeological expertise intersect and sometimes clash. This article explores such hotspots as they relate to the archaeology of World War II, drawing on the author's experience leading a community-engaged research project at Amache, the site of a Japanese American internment camp during the war. Such research provides the opportunity to collaborate, not just with descendants, but also with survivors, people who once lived at the site under study. Such situations energize historical archaeology, but also destabilize the discipline, calling into question some of the archaeologist's most basic tools, including terminology. Thoughtful contemporary engagements, however, can create new opportunities to expand conceptual frameworks.

Extracto Como un acto contemporáneo, la arqueología histórica debe entrelazar el pasado y el presente. Esto sucede en una amplia variedad de lugares, incluso en sitios de campo, aulas, laboratorios y lugares públicos. En cada nodo de práctica, los campos cargados de conocimiento previo y de pericia arqueológica se cruzan y algunas veces chocan. Este artículo explora dichos puntos críticos relacionados con la arqueología de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, basándose en la experiencia del autor al liderar un proyecto de investigación con participación de la comunidad en Amache, el sitio de un campo de internamiento de estadounidenses de origen japonés durante la guerra. Dicha investigación brinda la oportunidad de colaborar, no solo con los descendientes, sino también con los sobrevivientes, personas que vivieron en el sitio estudiado. Tales situaciones energizan a la arqueología histórica, pero también desestabilizan a la disciplina, al cuestionar algunas de las herramientas más básicas del arqueólogo que incluyen a la terminología. Sin embargo, participaciones contemporáneas cuidadosas, pueden crear nuevas oportunidades para expandir los marcos conceptuales.

Résumé Sur la scène contemporaine, l'archéologie historique doit amalgamer le passé et le présent, et ce, dans une multitude d'emplacements, dont sur le terrain, en classe, en laboratoire et dans les lieux publics. Les connaissances préalables et l'expertise archéologique se croisent et se butent parfois les unes aux autres à chaque détour pris par la pratique. Le présent article explore lesdites charnières dans le contexte de l'archéologie de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, en s'inspirant de l'expérience de l'auteur en tant que directeur d'un projet de recherche communautaire à Amache, le site du camp d'internement des Japonais américains durant la guerre. Une telle recherche permet de collaborer, non seulement avec les descendants des survivants, mais avec ces derniers, ayant autrefois vécu sur le site à l'étude. Ce type de situations ravive l'archéologie historique, tout en

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déstabilisant du même coup la discipline en remettant en cause certains des outils les plus fondamentaux des archéologues, notamment la terminologie. Les présents cadres de travail conceptuels peuvent toutefois être élargis grâce à des engagements contemporains réfléchis.

Keywords Amache · Japanese American internment · collaboration · contemporary archaeology · epistemology · hermeneutics

Introduction

On a sunny but cold February day in 2009, about 200 people gathered for the Denver Day of Remembrance, one of a series of events across the U.S. to commemorate 19 February 1942. On that day President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, a wartime act that paved the way for the removal of over 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast of the United States. The focus for the event was the archaeology of Amache, one of the 10 primary incarceration camps in which these displaced people had been imprisoned for much of World War II. Since 2005, I have led the University of Denver Amache Project, designed to better explore the significant tangible history preserved at the site. Because of that work, the members of my department had been invited by the local chapter of the Japanese Americans Citizens League to co-host this event. We worked with them to design the open house and formal program, which also included community speakers, one a former internee herself, to talk about the generational importance of remembering internment.

My students and I had been preparing for this event for much of the school year. Two students whose thesis research focused on women and children at Amache were featured speakers (Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013). Earlier that week, museum-studies graduate students helped put up a temporary exhibit designed by another former internee. Students in my undergraduate American Material Culture class served as docents at tables displaying artifacts recovered during our 2008 field research. That work revolved around better understanding daily life for the over 10,000 people who were for a time incarcerated at Amache during WWII (Clark, Kamp-Whittaker et al. 2008). To do this we conducted intensive surface survey of a selection of barracks blocks where Amacheans were housed and also collected a few rare items from the camp dump. Our first day of survey revealed one of the most intimate of items found that summer, an aluminum wrapper for a condom tin. Sexuality at sites of institutional confinement is often charged, e.g., Casella (2000), and conversations with former internees before the field season had alerted us to the importance of birth control in camp.

On the day of the open house, we did not display the condom wrapper. However, we did include many other intimate items used and then lost or discarded during WWII. For example, tubes of lipstick were displayed, along with advertisements from the Sears, Roebuck & Company catalog. Such American cosmetics marked more urban and Americanized displays of femininity in camp (Shew 2010). Fragmentary toys (Fig. 1), many of them, like tanks and transport trucks, ironically related to playing war (Kamp-Whittaker 2010), were contextualized by photographs of children playing in camp.

The display tables were jammed during most of the open house as students answered questions and discussed with visitors the objects and the primary materials accompanying them (Fig. 2). Attendees were encouraged to engage physically with the more sturdy objects, gaining a tangible link to an often shadowed history. The homemade sushi provided by the parishioners of a largely Japanese American congregation helped give the open house the feel of a community social.

It was, by almost all measures, an extremely successful community collaboration. At each table was a pen and pad with the heading: “Please share your thoughts.” Afterwards, the students who were docents at the table of children’s toys made sure that I took a look at what was written on their tablet. The only comment was this:

Fig. 1 Fragment of a tank-shaped glass toy recovered from Amache. Sets of these toys, filled with brightly colored candy, were sold in mail-order catalogs during WWII. (Photo courtesy University of Denver Amache Project, 2012.)

Fig. 2 Undergraduate student docents and community members at the Day of Remembrance Open House, February 2009. (Photo courtesy University of Denver Amache Project.)

"Pleasant memories—seeing items I played with as a child. Kind of disturbing to see them identified as 'interesting archaeological artifacts.'"

To say I was taken aback by this comment is an understatement indeed. It was clearly a grinding of the gears of collaboration. It was also, however, a moment of insight, where the contemporary world's engagement with archaeological practice flashed brightly, if uncomfortably.

Past Meets Present Meets Past

One of the reasons the archaeology of World War II is gaining interest within the field and among the greater public is its undeniable contemporaneity (*Archaeology* 2011). Not only are there millions who recall the war, but everyone lives with the long-term impact of this truly global conflagration. Indeed, gauging from popular histories and studies of wartime landscapes, e.g., Foot (2009), the argument could be made that archaeologists are catching up to a longstanding public interest in that era.

Doing archaeology that is so contemporary led me to explore the "contemporary" as a complex concept. The word means the "current era," but naming it also implies the era is different from others. Cultural anthropologist Paul Rabinow (2008) suggests that, while epochs such as the modern period were focused on the future, contemporary awareness relies on a mix of looking forward and backward. The contemporary is framed by, to quote Rabinow (2008:2–3), "the question of how older and newer elements are given form and worked together, either well or poorly." That is a framing with which we historical archaeologists should be concerned. We need to explore how our discipline fits into this working together of new and old, of past and present. We need to ask ourselves: Are we doing so well or poorly?

As evidenced by the new *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, archaeology's articulation with the present has become a vibrant and robust area of study. This article explores a case study of the archaeology of living memory from a decidedly anthropological point of view, as informed by the work of philosopher Miranda Fricker. It relies on the growing body of literature about community-engaged archaeological practice, e.g., Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008), Silliman (2008), and Atalay (2012). Still, it articulates with archaeological work focusing on the contemporary past, e.g., Harrison and Schofield (2010). I join those thinkers in challenging archaeologists to use their tools to question the inevitability of the present and to see the ways everyone still inhabits the past.

Some background history about the site on which this article is focused will help frame the issues it explores. Occupied from 1942 to 1945, Amache had a peak population of 7,318 Japanese Americans, which made it the 10th largest city in Colorado during World War II (Clark 2015). Yet, in a recent survey of 60 college freshmen enrolled at a Colorado university, none of them, not one, knew that Colorado was home to a Japanese American internment camp (Katherine Sturdevant 2010, pers. comm.). Held as prisoners without trial because of racism and wartime hysteria, the forced removal and internment of people of Japanese descent by the U.S. government is widely seen as an act of injustice. However, the fact that so few Americans know anything of substance about internment is also an injustice. Feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker points this out in her work on hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2006, 2007). Disempowered groups often find that key elements of their own experience are misrepresented or even unknown. There is, to quote Fricker, "a lacuna where the name of a distinctive social experience should be" (Fricker 2006:97). For Japanese Americans, this gap exists despite efforts by groups that specifically gear their work to public education about internment, such as Densho (<https://densho.org/>). Fricker suggests that ignorance by a dominant population can often be willful, reflecting "a positive interest in sustaining the extant misinterpretation" (Fricker 2006:98). The internment does not fit easily into the American

narrative, and so it is a story some of the public does not want to hear.

Combating this type of injustice was one of my goals when I began investigating the tangible history of Amache. Each time my students or I talk about Amache, we expand the audience for this muted narrative. Amid American nostalgia for the "Greatest Generation," we remind audiences that during WWII legal aliens and U.S. citizens were held without trial while troops fought for freedom abroad. Like me, most of my students are Caucasian, but we work together with survivors and descendants in exploring this history and telling this story (Fujita, this issue). Both inside and outside the Japanese American community, we fight for hermeneutical justice; see e.g., Clark (2016).

Yet, despite that shared mission, disciplinary epistemology clearly can undermine the collaboration that makes this work so powerful. The clash of understandings about the word "artifact," with which this article begins, is a clear example. As archaeologists, we see the term as largely unquestioned and neutral, describing a portable object made or modified by humans. And, as evidenced by this special issue of *Historical Archaeology*, artifacts play a central role in our work. Yet, this word has more than its fair share of baggage. Like many terms adopted by fields hoping to be a "science," "artifact" is a neologism made up of two Latin terms, *ars* or *artis*, meaning skill in joining, and *factum* or *facere*, something made or done (Prown 1993). The latter is also the root for the word fetish, something that should give archaeologists pause.

And, in fact, like calling something a fetish, it appears that calling something an artifact takes it out of the mainstream of life. It does this, in part, by translating it into what Rosemary Joyce (2002) terms "an archaeological dialect." Artifacts are also, in part because of their association with archaeology, considered things of the past. The first definition of "artifact" in the Merriam-Webster dictionary captures this meaning: "something created by humans usu. for a practical purpose; *esp* **:** an object remaining from a particular period" (Merriam-Webster, Inc. 2008:70).

A fellow archaeologist suggested to me that the internee who was disturbed that former childhood toys had been transformed into artifacts may have merely been reacting to a situation that made the person feel old. However, there is a deeper issue revealed here, a way that our terminological habits are "ideologically informed" (Fotiadis 1992:144). An archaeological artifact is no longer part of a shared vernacular past; it has become data. In that way it echoes the pathway followed by an ethnographic artifact, becoming so only when taken out of its cultural milieu (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991).

As explored by Jon Daehnke (2009:211), some native Hawaiians have a similar reaction to the "objectification" of burial objects as artifacts. Like the Amache case, his research suggests the term "artifact" can estrange people from their own pasts. I suspect the same thing happens with my students when they, for example, do an exercise with the "artifacts" of Amache. Despite my intention to make this history present in their lives, my words reinforce its otherness. One field-school student noted she had a conceptual breakthrough when she was able to connect her survey finds to people. "It wasn't just a marble, it was *somebody's marble*." Those connections, especially to the personal, become attenuated when items are cast as artifacts.

However, there are times when it is worthwhile to construct something as an artifact rather than, say, an object or a thing. "Artifact" is, for example, a conceptual tool important for students in archaeological courses. In that context it serves to distinguish certain classes of the material record from others. Likewise, some members of the Japanese American community use "artifact" themselves for objects related to internment. Indeed there was a broad use of the term recently, as community members fought against an auction of a war-era collection of internee art objects. One article about the auction was titled: "Artifacts Contain Our Cultural History—That's Why We Have to Preserve Them" (Asakawa 2015). Another quoted Greg Kimura, chief executive for the Japanese American National Museum: "Our main concern about this, regardless of the legalities or the ethics, is that the artifacts end up in cultural institutions that have the ability to preserve them for the generations" (Saillant 2015). In this instance, as with narratives such as grant proposals, the term appears to invoke the cultural capital of scholarship.

For historical archaeologists working on WWII sites or with contemporary communities, the Amache example suggests one should take care in choosing what to call portable items. Since the open house discussed at the beginning of this article, I avoid using the term "artifact" in public presentations about Amache. The term "archaeological objects," although not terribly graceful, seems to work fine as no negative feedback from its use has been received. My experience also suggests that (for audiences in the United States at least)

the term "find" has a less problematic "conceptual archive," in the sense used by Hamilton (2000), than "artifact." The more vernacular connotation of "find" is revealed in the UK, where the Portable Antiquities Scheme has a "Finds Database" that includes items discovered by metal detectorists and other members of the public.

But to stop there is to end with the pragmatic without interrogating the paradigmatic. What can this insight lend to archaeological theory? Here I turn to another relevant concept from the work of Miranda Fricker (2006), the "hermeneutical hotspot." This is a place where a group's unequal hermeneutical participation flares up. As she writes: "Hermeneutical lacunas are like holes in the ozone—it's the people who live under them who get burned" (Fricker 2006:98). For the case at hand, my authority as a scholar could lead to my words trumping those of the group under study.

The growing integration of ethnographers or ethnographic practice in archaeology, what Castañeda (2008) has termed the "ethnographic turn," provides a potential venue for paradigmatic change. Ethnographic understandings can be an important source for questioning disciplinary taken-for-granteds; see, e.g., contributors to Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos (2009). As archaeologists, turning to the systems of knowledge of our collaborators thickens our own understanding, potentially expanding our terminological and conceptual resources.

Philosopher of science Alison Wylie (2014, 2015) contends that collaborative archaeology is epistemologically sound because it does just that; it opens up the discipline to range of ideas. People with a different outlook, especially those not inculcated by years of archaeological training, provide tools for new ways of thinking about artifacts, sites, even the nature of the past itself. As Wylie (2015:206) puts it, collaborators bring to the table different types of "epistemic resources," that is, tools for knowing the world.

Sonya Atalay (2008, 2012) has done just that with the Ojibwe concept of *gikináwaabi*, a complex idea that suggests knowledge resides not in any one individual, but in the community as a whole. Such knowledge does not exist external of people, but held within and lived through daily practice (Atalay 2008:135–136). Atalay makes the argument that *gikináwaabi* is a useful conceptual tool, not just among those who might work with the Ojibwe, but for all archaeologists who strive for a de-colonial practice. It may be equally practical for anyone engaging in contemporary research. Not only does *gikináwaabi* imply that no one person can have the corner on knowledge, it suggests knowledge must be shared, or it ceases to be such.

Work with the Amache project led me (embarrassingly slowly) to the importance of "*giri*" for the Japanese American community. It can be glossed as "obligation" or "duty," but the way it plays out in social situations is often through gift giving. After the fourth community event in which a door prize had been pressed into my hand, I realized something was going on. In these settings *giri* expresses itself in small tokens, but in people's homes it is often food to take home, be it a bowl of leftovers or a plate of cookies. Woe betide the researcher who tries to leave without a doggy bag.

An understanding of *giri* informs my interactions with the Japanese American community. When visiting a community member's home or a society picnic, I always bring something to materialize my gratitude. But, it is not just in community interactions that *giri* is important; it also has application to archaeological practice. What are the physical remains at Amache if not *giri*? They are both a gift from the past and an obligation to the future. In that way the concept has a family resemblance to *kuleana*, the responsibility many native Hawaiians feel toward both heritage objects and the ancestors (Daehnke 2009).

Giri is a particularly powerful notion for the students and volunteers of the Amache field school. Each session begins with a tour of the site. Although some eolian deposition has occurred in the 70 years since the incarceration camp was dismantled and abandoned, significant remains are visible directly on the site surface (Fig. 3). I

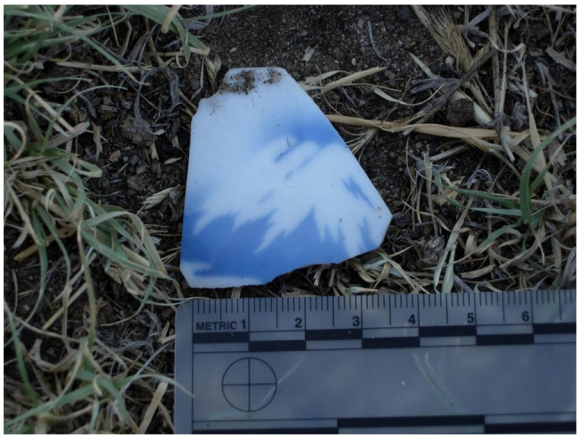

Fig. 3 Artifact or *giri*? Japanese ceramic found on the surface of the site in 2010. (Photo courtesy University of Denver Amache Project.)

inform the crew we will be engaging in intensive pedestrian survey. Contrary to most of their expectations, however, the vast majority of what we find will not be collected, but rather documented in the field. We do this, in no small part, for the benefit of future visitors. They too should experience the power of the fragmentary remains we find there, the shattered bits that evoke the shattered lives of those who left them. The notion that the physical remains of the site are *giri* provides a rationale for this field methodology. It also imbues our practice with the respect appropriate for a site that many see as sacred (Hanes 2013).

Similar to Atalay's position on *gikináwaabi*, I believe that *giri* is a concept that could profitably be employed by a variety of historical archaeologists. The relationship with collaborators should involve *giri*. We archaeologists ask for something from them, be it a place to house our crew, their time for consultation, or access to historical documents. We certainly should not show up empty handed. The sense of obligation inherent in *giri* also comes into play. Archaeology as a contemporary practice—in the here and now—means that relationships are formed as a consequence of our work. These partnerships can be incredibly productive and emotionally satisfying. They can also lead to commitments that were not anticipated when the work plan was outlined or the grant application written. Learning how to balance obligations is a challenge all archaeologists face.

Hotspots in the Field

By 2010, the second year of the Amache field school, the crew roster included two high-school interns, undergraduate and graduate students, and former Amache internees. As was true in 2008, work in that year was driven in part by my research on the cultural landscape of the site, as well as by thesis research (Clark, Garrison et al. 2012). One of the master's students was focusing on the gardens in front of individual internee barracks (Garrison 2015). Entryway gardens have a deep tradition in Japan (Helphand 2006) and are often an important feature of the current Japanese American landscape (Ikagawa 1994). In camp they were one of the most powerful ways that internees managed their militarized environment, transforming it into something more hospitable, more like home.

During intensive surface survey, crews discovered an entryway garden that ingeniously employed a broken water pipe as a planter. The collar of the pipe stuck out of the ground, looking like a ceramic pot, while the broken end was disguised, buried in the ground (Fig. 4). This finding coincided with a second thesis project taking place that summer, which focused on the reuse and repurposing of objects in the camp (Swader 2015). So this was a natural place to undertake test excavations. During the first day of digging, much to everyone's delight, the crew discovered a second planter in the garden. They also discovered that crumbled eggshell was common in the sediment in the garden and in the planters. From the onset of research at Amache, I have been interested in soil amendment as an expression of internee expertise in horticulture (Clark 2011). The eggshell confirmed that, at least in this garden, gardeners had purposely improved the nutrient-poor native soil. Those results have since been confirmed by soil-chemistry analysis, which suggests a distinctive chemical signature in the garden strata of the camp (Marín-Spiotta and Eggleston 2011).

On the last two days of work in this garden, crews were joined by quite different archaeological stakeholders. During a site open house, a former internee, her daughter, and her granddaughter came to visit. Mrs. Uno was 10 when she was imprisoned at Amache. A conversation about the work that summer turned to the discovery of eggshell in the tested garden. She recalled that both eggshell and spent tea leaves were used to

Fig. 4 Broken water pipe used as a planter in an Amache garden. (Photo courtesy University of Denver Amache Project, 2010.)

amend garden soils in the camp. But, she went on, not everyone had access to food remains. You needed to know someone who worked in the mess hall.

This is an example of the synergy of the archaeology of the WWII home front. As an archaeologist, I know how to recover eggshell and something of how it might function chemically in a garden. But Mrs. Uno recalled that it had been used this way, and, perhaps more importantly, that it was a valued commodity, one accessed only through connections to the right people. This changed my thinking about the other trash employed in this garden, the water pipes. As building material, access to them would also have been restricted. The location of the dump outside of the patrolled barbed-wire camp perimeter fence suggests the pipe fragments were not scavenged after they were thrown away. Rather, someone knew somebody with access to building materials. Suddenly, my vision of this garden shifted from individual expertise, which had been my focus, to evidence of social networks. The whole camp was revealed in a little garden plot.

The next day, which was also our last day of excavation, the crew and I were trying to finish up the test unit. I was enjoying actually getting to dig for a change, when a local resident walked up and asked what we were doing. I explained our research design and why this garden was so important. He countered, saying that he did not understand why we did not just leave the site alone. Bad things happened during the war, and it was time to move on. This site was in the past, and it should be left there.

In a manner that I hoped was at least moderately polite, I told him I thoroughly disagreed. This site, I contended, is very much in the present. The camp is especially alive for former Amache internees and their families (Fujita, this issue). I proceeded to tell him about the visit the previous week by 13 members of the Tademaru family, three generations who travelled to the site from all over the U.S. (Tanaka 2010). Three of them had lived there at the camp, but had never before returned, despite the fact that one of them was born at Amache. I was able to take them back to the exact location of their family's barrack. The youngest sibling proceeded to show his family and me the scar on his leg where he had been burned by crawling into the room's pot-belly stove. All 13 of them then crowded into the 20 × 20 ft. space that once housed the family for a contemporary family photograph.

Preserving this site makes such journeys possible. How would he feel, I asked the site visitor, if he could never return to his place of birth? He did not respond.

It is hard to say how much of an impact this archaeological hotspot and the conversation that took place there might have had. Was this an example of archaeology encouraging civil discourse in the vein of Little and Shackel (2007)? If so, not a very good one. Mostly each party merely stated its case. Sometime in the course of the conversation the gentleman revealed that he was the owner of the cattle whose impact on the site crews cursed almost daily. He had a vested interest in maintaining their access to the site, an interest served by underplaying its historical significance. The incident serves as an illustration of Fricker's (2007) contention that hermeneutical injustice is structurally bound into other systems of power relations.

A Conclusion and a Challenge

It is not just those of us working on WWII-era sites or other sites with survivors who face these issues. Many of the field's most important topics, such as the archaeology of African captives, the working class, or colonial subjects, require grappling with hermeneutical hotspots and epistemic justice. In doing so we archaeologists confront many intellectual intimacies, ideas held so close they are unquestioned. It might be our collaborators who provide the epistemic resources, as when community members identify new avenues of research. For those of us who teach, students are also fantastic at identifying the questions we have not actually answered, although we think we have. Likewise, when the general public takes an interest in a particular history, like that of WWII, we should be paying attention.

As archaeologists we must rise to Rabinow's challenge of the contemporary—giving form to older and newer elements of our world and fitting them together well. Although it would seem that historical archaeologists are ideally suited to such a task, we share a genealogy with our prehistorian siblings. Like the term "artifact," many of our theoretical, epistemological, and interpretive tools were forged without much thought for the present. That is one of the reasons we need to learn from our hermeneutical hotspots. They act like conceptual shovel probes, revealing often unexplored disciplinary stratigraphy.

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