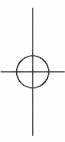


Part IV

Regional Perspectives



10

The Wind Blows Everything Off the Ground

New Provisions and New Directions in Archaeological Research in the North

Stephen Loring

For over a decade now, much of my research energies have involved the Innu and perceptions of their homeland—Nitassinan—in northern Labrador. To confront the horrific consequences of the adoption of village life—poor health, unemployment, substance abuse, violence, and suicide—Innu educators, community leaders, and archaeologists have joined forces, fighting the despair rooted in loss of traditions, independence, and self-esteem (Loring and Ashini 2000). A recent experiment in experiential education has brought older Innu knowledgeable about country values and experiences together with archaeologists and Innu educators to provide learning and training opportunities for Innu youth. This Tshikapisk Foundation initiative is centered in the heart of caribou country, in the barren lands of the Labrador plateau, adjacent to Kamestastin, a large lake situated in an ancient meteor-impact crater. In Innu-imen, *kamestastin* means “the place where the wind blows everything off the ground.” The winds have scoured the raised beaches of former lakeshores, revealing stone hearths and chipped stone projectile points that are hundreds, sometimes thousands of years old. This cold Labrador wind (“too lazy to blow around, it blows through you”) serves as a metaphor as we consider the nature of change in the practice of archaeology as it is perceived and conducted not just in Labrador but throughout the circumpolar world—indeed, everywhere where indigenous communities reside.

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Like the wind—pervasive and unrelenting—repatriation has in the last decade firmly entwined itself in the process and practice of archaeology, where it has evolved as a concept, with its own set of practices, procedures, and philosophy. It is in this latter realm that I contributed a paper to Tamara Bray's volume (Loring 2001), in which I situated the philosophy of repatriation as it applied to the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center. I saw repatriation as part of museum professionals' new commitment to community anthropology—where the barriers to collections and knowledge were removed, where authority over collections and the past they represented was shared and negotiated, and where indigenous voices and perspectives were encouraged. With the passage of NAGPRA and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Act, the practice and perception of archaeology in North America have been transformed. The philosophy of repatriation has begun to erode the previously restricted halls of the academy and the museum and is creating an archaeology and a history of North America's indigenous peoples that is more inclusive, more nuanced, and more anthropological than has previously been the case. As "stewards of the past," professional, practicing archaeologists have brought the dominant idiom of a scientific archaeology—a body of knowledge that has resolved many culture-historical relationships of the continent's indigenous peoples—into the twenty-first century. The discipline is now actively engaged in negotiating the transfer, or assimilation, of some kinds of knowledge to indigenous representatives and descendant communities, who have become (and are becoming) ever more sophisticated in their incorporation and appropriation of archaeological data. Having become empowered in part because of repatriation legislation, many indigenous groups are now seeking more active involvement with archaeology, both in the production of knowledge and the interpretation of data. There is great promise here, especially in the North, where linkages to land, language, subsistence, and access to both social and material resources are still quite apparent. With the Innu, as elsewhere, the boundary between ethnography and archaeology is blurred at best.

As a result of repatriation legislation, the practice of archaeology in North America is at—or should be at—a watershed point where established traditional or normal science confronts a paradigmatic shift. Thus we might expect the emergence of radical new ways of thinking about the past, principally that archaeologists would no longer have an exclusive prerogative to interpret the past. In becoming more accessible to a plurality of voices, archaeologists and indigenous community representatives need to ask new questions. Specifically, is there more—many more—than one way

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of knowing about the past? And since this somewhat rhetorical question is obviously answered in the affirmative, how do we weight and value alternative perspectives of the past (Lackey 2006)? This is a fundamental question that confronts museum anthropology in the post-NAGPRA world. It will be interesting to see how a repatriation philosophy might situate itself at the crossroads of Western science and indigenous systems of belief and explanation. In North America, the past of the continent's indigenous peoples, once the purview of community elders, has been increasingly controlled by self-defined professional authorities—university professors, government heritage administrators, museum anthropologists—who have asserted a knowledge of the past that is framed by the logic and paradigm of Western “science” and have usurped, in many instances, indigenous and avocational interests.

The philosophy of repatriation, based on collaboration, cooperation, and inclusion, offers a way of thinking about the past and a construction of the past that can access new ways of knowing, new ways of seeing, ultimately new ways of thinking. Repatriation is fundamentally about sharing, about a bridging of perspectives and practice—between anthropologists and museum professionals and descendant communities and the public—that has the potential to broaden our awareness and understanding of human diversity and human experiences.

Until very recently, perceptions of the past for the Innu and for other northern Native peoples have been the purview of the *tshishennuat* (elders), whose knowledge and experiences were the personification of history. For Western scientists, saturated as they are in an overmediated celebration of youth culture, it is nearly impossible to understand or perceive the power, influence, prestige, awe, and respect that elders can embody. It is not something necessarily found in books (but see Brody 1981; Cruikshank 1990; Fienup-Riordan 1994, 1996, 2005; Hallendy 2002). In constructing their archaeological histories of northern peoples, researchers have usurped the authority of elders. With repatriation, recognition of the knowledge of elders has been reinvigorated both morally and with the authority of law. The future of the past and the future of archaeology as it is practiced in the North will henceforth be cooperative and negotiated.

It seems unlikely that an indigenous voice and an indigenous perspective will ever again be alienated from interpretations of past land use and occupancy. The challenge posed to the next generation of researchers, for Natives and non-Natives alike, will be to create new ways of thinking about how our knowledge of the past is constructed and to derive new ways to incorporate indigenous perspectives. Repatriation, then, becomes the

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vehicle and philosophy that profoundly reshape the discipline and the practice of archaeology in the North (and presumably elsewhere).

SCIENCE AND THE PUBLIC TRUST

The early days of northern archaeology, prior to World War II, brought pioneering adventurer scientists into the Arctic, where they were much dependent on Native assistants for food and shelter. Because of logistical constraints, researchers frequently had to overwinter with Native families, participate in subsistence activities, and learn their hosts' languages. Archaeological interpretations were strongly influenced by ethnography and participant observation (Fitzhugh and Loring 2002). In the earlier, pioneering stage, archaeology and interpretations of the past in the North were deeply influenced by insights derived from Native colleagues. However, the postwar practice of northern archaeology, fostered in part by an increase in the number of researchers and in part by vastly improved logistics that enabled researchers to conduct their summer excavations and return to sponsoring universities and museums in the fall, shifted the construction of knowledge about the past away from its earlier cooperative—or at least informed—perspective toward a more exclusive, professional, “scientific” knowledge base. To some degree, this situation parallels directions that archaeology has taken in the United States, where amateur and avocational interests in the past have been eclipsed by academic and cultural resource management paradigms, for the most part devoid of the insight and participation of descendant communities. It is not just in the North that archaeology has distanced itself from other stakeholders with interest in the past (e.g. Rowlands 1994; Schmidt and Patterson 1995; Shackel and Chambers 2004).

In empowering First Nations and Inuit communities, the philosophy of repatriation has begun to exert a profound influence on the practice and perception of archaeology in American museums and universities. It has established the precedent that tribal groups and descendant communities have a legitimate interest in ancient human remains and artifacts and in the stories and interpretations those materials convey. Professional archaeologists and museum personnel have long claimed control over the material correlates of the past by claiming that their stewardship of objects and collections was a manifestation of the “public trust.” With NAGPRA legislation and the resulting increase in indigenous community involvement in all aspects of archaeology, the self-ascribed authority of archaeologists to be the sole arbitrators of the past is coming under challenge. The concept of the public trust has been a bulwark that museum professionals could hide

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behind in defending their control over heritage and collections. As Julie Hollowell points out, such assumptions by archaeologists raise the larger question as to what degree knowledge about the past can be considered the exclusive intellectual property of a special interest group or stakeholders, or whether it is ultimately a human legacy of benefit to all and transcending special interests (those of scientists or indigenous communities). She writes, “The idea that archaeologists are the specially appointed stewards of the archaeological record ‘for the benefit of all people’ comes with an implicit presumption of privilege justified by appeals to the transcendent value of intellectual and scientific authority” (Hollowell 2004).

Repatriation is fundamentally human rights legislation in its affirming that historically disenfranchised Native Americans have rights pertaining to the disposition of ancestral human remains, associated artifacts, and certain classes of ceremonial and spiritual significance (Hutt and McKeown 1999). In the North, as elsewhere in Indian Country, much “recent” history—from a Native perspective—is adversarial. It is about confronting the authority of the state, which controls land and resources; the material circumstances of indigenous groups; and confronting the authority of southern-based researchers—anthropologists, historians, archaeologists—who seek to control the intellectual landscape. NAGPRA is significant legislation in its recognition of the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge and oral traditions. It undermines the authority behind the assertion of public trust in calling on the academy to negotiate and share, to work cooperatively with indigenous interests and concerns to construct notions of the past that are mutually derived. Instead of a stance predicated on notions of authority and control, repatriation is about respect, about recognizing the legitimacy and value in other ways of thinking about the past. In the country, camp life with the notoriously independent Innu is governed by a simple adage, “Don’t be bossy, don’t be greedy.” It seems an appropriate and viable position from which to think about the acquisition and sharing of knowledge about the past, as much as about the acquisition and distribution of caribou and other game.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

The anthropologist I have become is a result of the time I have spent in the North, specifically in Labrador with Innu colleagues, students, and families. For over a decade now, I have conducted a variety of field schools and archaeological training programs with Innu youth. These programs were developed and have emerged in direct response to the pervasive social and economic ills that characterize contemporary Innu village life.

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Divorced from their former subsistence-based lifestyles in the country and relocated to government-sponsored towns, where unemployment is staggering, Innu communities have been decimated by malnutrition, substance abuse, violence, and suicide (every bit as destructive as the devastation caused by the introduction of exotic pathogens and disease in the wake of European contact). Having erected a professional career on the intellectual interpretation of Innu culture and history, I felt compelled to try a course of action that might, in some small way, contribute to ameliorating the decline in awareness and appreciation of country-based Innu knowledge, experiences, and pride. The despair and sense of powerlessness that are endemic in the community evaporate in the country, where Innu history is revered, Innu values are upheld, and country knowledge and skills gain relevance. Since 1994 I have been involved in a variety of land-based, experiential programs in archaeology with Innu young people that have been an extraordinary catalyst for initiating awareness of and interest in aspects of Innu heritage (Loring 1998; Loring and Ashini 2000). Richard Nuna (an Innu colleague) and I presented facets of this work at the 1999 Chacmool Conference, whose theme that year was “Indigenous People and Archaeology.” At those meetings we proposed that “indigenous archaeology”—whatever that is and may become—shouldn’t necessarily have to aspire to the goals and practices of academic, or even applied, archaeology; that there could be different ways of thinking about the past, explaining the past. This idea seemed to me a basic operating assumption predicated on respect for the cultures and traditions of the people on whose land the work was conducted. Surprisingly (for me), this position met with an opposition (including some First Nations participants), which argued that there were well-established ways of doing archaeology and questioned why archaeological standards should, or would, be different when the archaeology was conducted by First Nations archaeologists. Indigenous archaeology should be more than the laudable post-processual commitment to multivocality in pondering our commitment to paradigms and practices securely rooted in nineteenth-century natural history. In encouraging new ways to think about the past, we need to confront the hegemony of a Western intellectual tradition in which, with a “preponderance of evidence”—to use the NAGPRA euphemism—“science” often trumps oral histories, stories, and other ways of thinking, even though NAGPRA itself is explicit that the standard for determinations of cultural affiliation need not be a scientific certainty. This attitude is especially problematic in the North, where subsistence-based lifestyles, language, and land use still invest indigenous communities with an intellectual authority and

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knowledge based on generations of relations with land, animals, a spiritual world, and other human beings. Innu and Inuit families, the Inumariit (knowledgeable Inuit who have lived in the country in the manner of the ancestors), and the Tsheniu Mantushiu Kantuat (old Innu with special powers) have knowledge that is vastly more interesting and more germane to life in the boreal forest and adjacent tundra than that generated by archaeologists, who live in the South, don't speak the language, don't produce their own food (to say nothing of their own shelter and clothes), and have never been hungry in their lives. That this is a contentious stance as far as many archaeologists are concerned is not surprising. The inroads of a repatriation philosophy carry a challenge: can the practice of archaeology expand to include an indigenous perspective that is viewed as legitimate by the profession (Bray 1996; D. Cooper 2006; Echo-Hawk 2000; Ferguson 1996; Swidler et al. 1997)?

NOTIONS OF ANCESTRY IN DESCENDANT COMMUNITIES

The practice of repatriation, the federal legislation that mandates the return of human remains and certain classes of cultural patrimony, hinges on definitions and interpretations of the ancestry of descendant communities. As far as the Smithsonian's Repatriation Office in the National Museum of Natural History is concerned, the relationship between the bones and the artifacts in the museum and the claimants from indigenous communities is a matter of perceived cultural continuities in language, genealogy, biology, and residency as viewed through a rigorously ground, objectified scientific lens. The notion that people might have a sense of belonging, a spiritual attachment, or some other equally fuzzy, out-of-focus, and difficult-to-quantify notion does not usually carry equivalent weight when considering the "preponderance of evidence." In contrast to this practice, the philosophy of repatriation would recognize ancestral claims to places and property that remain despite the passage of time and geographical dislocation (Basso 1996; Lippert 2006; Singleton and Orser 2003). Is it possible that notions of a people's ancestry, their attachment and sense of belonging to a place, be broadened to include beliefs and values that do not necessarily have a material, archaeological manifestation? The climate of repatriation has created an opportunity, a forum and platform, for indigenous peoples to reevaluate the significance and meaning of objects and places, empowering them to advance claims and develop positions not necessarily grounded in notions of Western science. The challenge for archaeology, especially when dealing with descendant communities, is to develop

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theory and practice that validate as well as substantiate these less-tangible symbolic ways of thinking about heritage and ethnicity—ways that include religious and spiritual perspectives (ways of knowing) and that recognize the significance of “place,” as well as intellectual property rights and indigenous perceptions of history and tradition. What is called for is new theory and practice that recognize indigenous expertise and the validity of claims that address material as well as immaterial relationships between people, places, and things. An emerging direction in the evolution of the repatriation process is in the realm of intellectual property rights (Nicholas and Bannister 2004; Nicholas and Hollowell 2004). Rights and controls over intellectual property seem a logical and legitimate extension of indigenous self-determination and sovereignty stemming from earlier (and ongoing) claims to land. The relationships that groups construct between themselves, between the present and the past, between artifact and site, lie at the heart of identity and claims of significance and meaning. While explanations and interpretations of an indigenous past have long been the purview of scientists, now, in the climate of repatriation, they have become contested ground. Scientific and legal precedents frequently disregard cultural claims derived from positions of heritage and ethnicity, so-called cultural capital. Such indigenous perspectives put forward to legitimate claims have not proven very successful in either legal courts or courts of public opinion. The intellectual climate encouraged by repatriation legislation has fostered the emergence of an archaeological practice that is more informed by and sensitive to the social implications of research. The emergence of community archaeology initiatives (Nicholas and Andrews 1997a; Loring 1998) and indigenous archaeology (Smith and Wobst 2005a; Watkins 2000) has broadened the discipline, contributing to the construction of knowledge and legitimizing archaeology as an agent of change and a vehicle for social justice (Smith and Wobst 2005b).

CLAIMING THE PAST: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF DESCENDANT COMMUNITIES

In a recent article, Joe Watkins (2005b) summarizes a critique of North American archaeology, citing Trigger (1980, 1986), Kehoe (1998), and D. Fowler (1987) to consider how the discipline has both explicitly and complacently served to alienate and disenfranchise Native North Americans from their history and patrimony by disconnecting the past from the present. Archaeology under its science mandate has historically distanced itself from a realization of its social and political implications. This has

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been made abundantly clear in both repatriation legislation and the contested nature of claims pertaining to ancient remains, as so dramatically revealed through resolution of the fate of Kennewick Man, the Ancient One (Stapp and Longenecker 2005; Thomas 2000; Watkins 2005a, this volume), and played out as much in the media as in the courtroom. In seeking to reverse the Department of the Interior's decision to offer the Kennewick remains (discovered in 1996 and subsequently determined to be over nine thousand years old) to tribal representatives for reburial (acknowledging the validity of Native American geographical and oral traditions), a group of eight archaeologists and physical anthropologists sued in court for the right to conduct detailed scientific investigations, arguing in part that the antiquity of the remains abrogated tribal claims based on perceptions of lineal descent and land usufruct and tenure. The ensuing lengthy legal process eventually culminated in 2004 with a decision by the Ninth U.S. District Court. The court ruled in favor of the rights of the litigant scientists to conduct additional research, asserting the primacy of scientific methodology over indigenous paradigms based on ethnicity and identity deeply rooted in time and place. First Nations and Inuit groups are not always opposed to archaeological research. Indeed, there is now a significant literature attesting to Native support for archaeology (e.g., Davidson, et al. 1995; Dixon 2000b; Ferguson 1984; Swidler et al. 1997; Warner and Baldwin 2004). The contentiousness of the Kennewick case has evolved in part from the realization that research on indigenous North Americans is no longer business as usual; the climate of repatriation has empowered indigenous communities to participate in the determination of the fate of ancestral remains. Archaeologists and physical anthropologists, having long considered the antiquity of North America their exclusive intellectual domain, are understandably nervous about the assertion of competing interest groups and competing interpretations of culture-history. The philosophy of repatriation encourages new ways of thinking about archaeology, including the recognition of ancestral relationships between indigenous communities, land, and resources that might not be predicated solely on genetics, radiocarbon dating, and population discontinuities evidenced by stylistic changes in stone tools and pottery over time. Resolving the discrepancy between definitions of descent and group identity is at the heart of the debate that repatriation has spurred between members of indigenous communities and scientific investigators (Julien, Bernard, and Rosenmeier n.d., Irimoto 2004; Pullar 1994) and is one arena into which the post-NAGPRA evolution of the discipline might extend.

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Case Study: The Birnirk Period Remains from Point Barrow, Alaska

The Smithsonian Institution has a long history of research in Alaska, predating the acquisition of the territory from Russia in 1867 (Fitzhugh 1988; Fitzhugh and Selig 1981). Smithsonian naturalists attached to the International Polar Year Expedition to Point Barrow under Lieutenant Patrick Ray were among the first scientific investigators to visit the region. Between 1881 and 1883, they assembled an impressive collection of natural history specimens as well as human remains and associated funerary objects from nearby sites. Subsequent archaeological investigations at Point Barrow by William Van Valin in 1917 and James Ford in 1931 swelled the Smithsonian's holdings to at least 269 sets of human remains (Hollinger, Eubanks, and Ousley 2004). In 1993 the Inupiat History, Language and Culture Commission of the North Slope Borough Planning Department initiated a request for repatriation of all human remains from the North Slope, including those from the vicinity of the present-day community at Barrow. Eventually, the Smithsonian's Repatriation Office consented to the return of 184 sets that the office interpreted as being derived from Late Thule/ Historic Period (A.D. 1500–1900) contexts. To the dismay of Barrow community residents, an additional eighty-five individuals and their accompanying grave goods, derived from earlier Birnirk Period components (A.D. 500–1000), were not repatriated on the grounds that the "preponderance of evidence" led Smithsonian researchers to conclude that Birnirk people had abandoned the North Slope of Alaska, leaving no lineal descendants behind. In declining to repatriate the remains of the individuals from the Birnirk culture components, the Smithsonian Repatriation Office interpreted the archaeological and historical records to indicate a four-hundred-year period during which the region was essentially abandoned. In defense of the Repatriation Office position, the archaeology of Barrow is replete with many of the problems that can plague archaeological interpretations: much of the research on which the prehistory is based was conducted many years ago, before the advent of modern methods and techniques; it relies on relatively uncritical radiocarbon dating sequences and a poorly understood awareness of coastal geomorphology and its impact on site distribution and preservation. While the basic culture-history sequence in northern Alaska has been defined (Ford 1959; Stanford 1976), the exact chronology and the nature of regional social interaction have yet to be completely resolved (O. Mason 1998, 2000). At the heart of the debate over the fate of the Birnirk remains is the issue of the "preponderance of evidence." To the degree that the archae-

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ology (and physical anthropology) community defines the categories and criteria that frame the discussion, it seems likely that this community will determine the outcome. Archaeological interpretations are always based on incomplete knowledge, so it seems reasonable to be cautious in presenting interpretations as unassailable facts. In considering the community of Barrow's ongoing claim for the Birnirk remains, it would be responsible to create a discourse that ascribed authority to oral histories and testimony on par with the authority of the scientific stance. Through a process of negotiation and consensus building, interpretations of a community's history are more likely to be better informed than interpretations derived from a scientific paradigm alone. I think this recognition is a likely outcome of the intellectual climate of repatriation.

Case Study: Innu Land Stewardship and Innu Archaeology in Nitassinan

Prior to the beginnings of archaeological fieldwork in Labrador in the early 1970s, Innu history, for the most part, was the purview of Innu elders and was intimately linked to life lived and lessons learned in the country. A decade earlier, in the mid-1960s, the last Innu families to live year-round in the country had been relocated to villages, lured by the prospects of schooling, health care, and social services. Unforeseen at the time, the adoption of village life has had terrible social and economic consequences. Village poverty, unemployment, and the erosion of "traditional"—country—values have devastated Innu communities (Samson 2003; Samson, Wilson, and Mazower 1999). In the country, the spiritual dimension of hunting was distilled in elders, who, by dint of having killed and processed thousands of animals, had acquired practical skills and spiritual powers that were revered by younger generations. Village life undermined the authority of elders, devalued country knowledge, and severely eroded Innu perceptions of self-esteem and pride. The arrogant, confident, "tiresomely independent" Innu of the ethnohistorical record (Cabot 1920; Cooke 1979), whose specialized caribou-hunting, subsistence lifestyle afforded them a high degree of self-sufficiency and independence, were subsumed by village life.

It is ironic that while Innu youth in Labrador receive little schooling about their history, as derived from either oral traditions or from nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographies, Innu culture is widely revered elsewhere—in anthropological circles for the insight it provides into models of early human hunting societies (Loring 1997) and in other First Nations communities whose languages and land bases have been lost

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or severely compromised. At the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Connecticut (a tribally owned and operated cultural facility opened in 1998), a life-size diorama of late Pleistocene paleo-Indian caribou hunters is directly modeled on early twentieth-century depictions of Innu life in Labrador. Essentially, the Innu serve as the intellectual bedrock on which the antiquity and continuity of Native American Indian identity in the eastern portion of North America is predicated.

Archaeology is a relatively recent practice in Labrador. Aside from a few scattered early investigations (Bird 1945; Strong 1930) and the collections of nineteenth-century antiquarians and missionaries, research addressing the pre-European human occupation of the Labrador Peninsula began only in the early 1970s with the exploratory research of William Fitzhugh (1972, 1976, 1980), James Tuck (1975; Tuck and McGhee 1975), and others (Cox 1977; Jordan 1977; Kaplan 1983; Loring 1992). Yet little of this burgeoning awareness of the long tenure of human occupation in the region ever percolated down to the community level. With few exceptions (one being reports archaeologists prepared for land-claim negotiations, e.g., Fitzhugh 1977), archaeology results were produced and consumed far to the south. However, this situation has changed somewhat in the last decade. The climate of repatriation can be invoked as contributing to a sentiment and a sense of social consciousness that has encouraged archaeologists to recognize the sociopolitical roots of their practice and the responsibility they have to ensure their host communities' participation in the production and dissemination of knowledge about their history. To a significant degree, it has been the consciousness brought about by the repatriation debate that has led to the emergence of community archaeology programs throughout the North (Loring and Rosenmeier 2005; Nicholas and Andrews 1997a; Rowley 2002) and elsewhere. In Labrador, archaeologists, Innu educators and administrators, and older Innu knowledgeable about life in the country have worked together to create country-based experiential archaeology programs that provide opportunities for Innu youth to learn about their heritage while actively unearthing it (Loring and Ashini 2002; Loring et al. 2003). This activity ensures not only that knowledge of the past remains anchored in local contexts but also that the interpretation of the past is better informed by the contingencies and experiences of subsistence-based economies.

Community archaeology with the Innu seeks not only to provide training for a generation of land managers able to articulate Innu needs to governmental bureaucracies and administration but also to instill in young people knowledge about the past accomplishments of the Innu and to fos-

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ter Innu pride. An essential feature of the programs has been the integration of professional, academic instruction on Labrador and Innu prehistory and training about archaeology, and the knowledge, wisdom, and skills of participating elders. Expanding the purview of archaeology to include the perspectives, interests, and needs of previously disenfranchised stakeholders, indigenous groups, and community members creates a knowledge about the past that is both more inclusive and more informed (Armitage and Ashini 1998).

CONCLUSION

I began this essay with wind as a metaphor for change. The winds of repatriation, having been stirred up, will not likely die away anytime soon. Despite protestations to the contrary, archaeology is fundamentally about the authority (the hegemony) of certain interest groups to own, control, interpret, and “know” the past. To confront dominant history is a political act that repatriation legislation has aptly borne out. In addition to providing the profession with new ways of knowing, repatriation challenges normative science by critiquing the assumptions and methods that have been used to address the notion of just about every facet of archaeological interpretation, including land tenure. In this respect, repatriation is a much bigger issue than one limited to a discussion of human remains and objects of sacred patrimony.

NAGPRA has set the bar for minimal legal obligations between archaeologists and museums and Native Americans, but not the ethical bar. Repatriation is fundamentally about human rights. Archaeologists and anthropologists especially should be cognizant of this and of their primary responsibilities to the descendants of the ancient societies they study (as stipulated in the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics).

Much of the language appropriate to a discussion of repatriation can be found in the Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Center for World Indigenous Studies 2007). Article 8 states, “Indigenous peoples have the collective and individual right to maintain and develop their distinct identities and characteristics, including the right to identify themselves as indigenous and to be recognized as such.” Article 12 reads, in part, “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature, as well as the right to the restitution of cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free and informed consent.”

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Ratification of the UN declaration seems unlikely, given the resistance of the US government. Still, the draft declaration is some indication of the pervasiveness of the climate of repatriation, as is the draft resolution before Congress (proposed by senators Brownback, Nighthorse Campbell, and Inouye in May 2004 but as of this date still languishing in committee) proposing an official apology from the federal government of the United States to American Indians, acknowledging the “long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies” and the “violence, maltreatment and neglect” inflicted upon tribes for centuries (New York Times 2004).

Repatriation need not be seen as adversarial but as an opportunity to make the discipline more nuanced, more inclusive, and better informed.

Note

The chapter has benefited enormously from the insightful comments of Leah Rosenmeier and two anonymous reviewers. Whatever merit it might possess is due in large part to conversations with and inspiration from Leah Rosenmeier, Tom Killion, Tamara Bray, Anne Jensen, and Joan Gero, while the shortcomings are fully my own. I am responsible for the opinions presented here; they should not be construed as representing those of my Smithsonian colleagues.