

## Roadside Ruins

### Does America Still Need Archaeology Museums?

David Hurst Thomas

My views are heavily colored by a quarter century working as a museum-based archaeologist. Museums like the one where I work have been around a long time, and they still offer an important way for us to take our archaeology to the American public. Perhaps it is worth looking more deeply at the museum world to see what works and what does not.

Consider the following: "We find ourselves as a country in an emergency. . . . Those who seek to find among the American people the enthusiasm for national ends . . . find that again and again they are faced with cynicism and apathy, in people who feel they have been over-propagandized, over-sold. . . . Dishearteningly suspicious they are—except of Museums." These words sum up my own thoughts about the public benefits of archaeology fairly well. As I see it, the country is in something of a predicament (perhaps even an emergency). The American people are cynical and apathetic; there is a crisis of confidence in public institutions and a fragmentation into special-interest groups. Yet there is something about the museum world that retains great public appeal—holding the public interest and, more important, the public trust. If we substitute "world of archaeology" for "museum world," this statement might even define the baseline of archaeologists' belief in the public benefits of their discipline.

Isn't it amazing, then, that these timely words were actually written six decades ago—in 1941 by Margaret Mead, who certainly knew a thing or two about taking anthropology to an interested American public. Her advice still resonates today.

During her fifty-year career as curator of ethnology at the American Museum of Natural History, Mead pushed the museum world to do a bet-

ter job of bringing the fruits of research to the public. This was not a popular view with her anthropological colleagues, and despite her international reputation, Mead's scientific career was held back to some extent by her insistence on popularizing. Although things have changed somewhat today, it remains true that scientists who popularize their science are penalized by their peers. Carl Sagan and Stephen Jay Gould are two recent examples.

In the quoted text, the emergency of which Mead speaks was World War II. I was not around at the time, and elsewhere in Mead's article, I was surprised to see her concern with "tricks of the propagandist" and "machinations of the advertiser"—way back then? We do not read much today about such attitudes during World War II; I thought cynicism and apathy came along during the Vietnam era, but obviously I was wrong. Apparently we Americans have been a suspicious lot for a long time now, even when facing such a clear-cut peril as Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Mead also wrote about a second crisis, one in the museum world within which she worked. In her 1941 article, she noted that even then, museums were accused of being old-fashioned, out of date, and out of touch—"lacking in verve and splash and modernity." But while expressing a certain sympathy with the critics, Mead urged the museum world to stick to its guns, to recognize the value of using traditional methods for presenting anthropology to the public: "Museums, almost alone among the various means of communication that have been exploited to push and prod people about, to make them feel, or want, or buy, have remained uncontaminated. Because the staffs of Museums have insisted on saying: 'Is this true?' instead of asking: 'Will this make a hit?'—they have kept the people's trust" (Mead 1941: 67).

To Mead, museums remained a place where people were not manipulated by seductive exhibition techniques and Madison Avenue-style advertising gimmicks. Museum visitors of the 1940s, Mead tells us, were "able to trust their eyes and let their minds rove over materials which have not been arranged to impress, to convert, to push them around, but merely to tell them as much of the truth as is now known, and that quietly" (1941: 67).

Why is this so? What is it about the museum exhibit that continues to fascinate without embellishment? Margaret Mead answered the question three decades later. She argued (Mead 1970) that museums—like no other institution—are about real things: the real sled that Perry used to reach the North Pole, a real dinosaur egg from the Gobi Desert, a real spear point

made 10,000 years ago. For both children and adults, museums have always drawn the line between the authentic and the imitation. The museum can show you the reality of evolution, the reality of life in different cultures, the reality of our own human past. Real objects can say, as no other form can say: *this is it, itself*. To the extent that this authenticity is sacrificed to showmanship and competition with world's fairs and other fabricated exhibits, museums lose.

During her long career as a museum anthropologist, Mead continually emphasized the importance of simplicity and, above all, reality in museum exhibitions. To her, the mission of the modern anthropology museum in this country was simple: to show the American public what is real. Unembellished anthropological "things," explained clearly, anchor us culturally to the rest of the world and to our own past. This is what Mead thought museums were all about.

### American Archaeology as a Museum

I take a pretty broad view of what a museum is. To me, an archaeology museum is anything that publicly presents something important from the past. America contains thousands of such museums, from the largest urban natural history museums to major archaeological sites like Cahokia and Chaco Canyon. But we cannot forget those small roadside attractions signaled by a fading roadside sign saying simply: "Point of Historical Interest, 1/2 mile ahead." These are archaeology museums as well.

This is, of course, an expansive definition of *museum*—a place where the public can see objects of import. Sometimes those objects are ancient and precious. Sometimes they are paltry and plebeian. Sometimes, the artifacts are secondary to the place itself.

America is, in effect, one immense outdoor museum, telling a story that covers 9 million square miles and 25,000 years. America is a land of hands-on historians, people who want to get out and see the real thing. And this is what museums have traditionally always offered—a chance to experience the real thing.

But the key question is this: To what extent does Margaret Mead's advice still work? Is reality still the key?

Let us look at a couple of America's premier outdoor museums, two sites with extraordinary intrinsic appeal, both to professional archaeologists and to the American public at large. Each site, I think, has something to say about our efforts to "take archaeology public."

### Encountering the Medicine Wheel

Wyoming's renowned Bighorn Medicine Wheel is one of American archaeology's most celebrated sites. Standing there, you are confronted by simplicity itself: a stone circle—the "wheel"—nearly ninety feet in diameter, astride an isolated peak 9,640 feet above sea level. Inside the circle are twenty-eight unevenly spaced stone "spokes" radiating out from the central "hub," a stone cairn about fifteen feet across. Five smaller cairns dot the periphery.

For nearly a century, archaeologists have puzzled over why anybody would build this high-altitude rock alignment. Here are some of the more widely discussed ideas, none of which is universally accepted:

- Some suggest that the rock cairns were originally constructed as grave markers, each a memorial to the war deeds of a dead leader. The rock piles at the end of each rock line may represent enemies killed in battle.
- Others draw upon the rich ethnohistoric record of the Northern Plains and relate the alignment to the widespread and ancient practice of the vision quest, in which a solitary individual seeks communication with the spirit world. Although the specifics varied widely, participants were usually sequestered in remote sacred places, without food or water, praying for spiritual guidance. Some modern Indian people use the Medicine Wheel this way.
- John Eddy (1974) set out the most highly publicized hypothesis more than two decades ago, suggesting that the Medicine Wheel was an outdoor astronomical observatory. Noting that selected stone cairns might once have held wooden poles, Eddy concluded that simply by observing the sunrise over these cairns, aboriginal astronomers could have predicted the timing of the summer solstice.
- It has been suggested that the Medicine Wheel was built to aid travel, the rock piles left as directional aids to newcomers.
- To some, the plan view of the Medicine Wheel suggests a two-dimensional imitation of the twenty-eight-raftered lodge built as part of the Sun Dance ceremony.
- Other hypotheses hold that the Medicine Wheel may have been a boundary marker, a depiction of a stone turtle, or an enduring stone marker demonstrating geometrical expertise.

Here then, played out in Wyoming's windswept Bighorn Mountains, at times dramatically, are the diverse objectives of modern science, archaeoastronomy, cognitive archaeology, and traditional Native American religion (for which the Medicine Wheel continues to be an important sacred site). Like so many elements of the human past, the Medicine Wheel means many different things to many different people. Today, at least in academic America, there is an overarching sense of theoretical pluralism, a feeling that no grand synthesis is likely to emerge any time soon.

But if we agree that it is important to take our archaeology to a broader American audience, several big questions arise: Where is Mead's "truth as is now known?" Where is the consensus of scientific opinion? Who has the authority to tell the story? Can that public learn to live with mutually irreconcilable views about the past? Will our public lose respect for an archaeology that can't seem to make up its mind about the past? In short, where is reality?

### Multiple Realities at the Alamo

Before exploring these important questions more deeply, let us shift our attention to another of America's sacred sites—the Alamo. In 1836, a Mexican force of perhaps 4,000 soldiers commanded by Antonio López de Santa Anna reached the outskirts of San Antonio, Texas. The Anglo-American garrison, numbering 187 men under the command of Colonel William Travis, withdrew to the Alamo. For thirteen days the Texans withstood siege before Mexican troops breached the walls and killed the Alamo defenders.

Today's textbooks pay homage to this heroic episode in the Texan war of independence against Mexico. As one late nineteenth-century historian put it, the courageous trio Travis, Bowie, and Crockett shed their blood upon "a holy altar" (quoted in Weber 1988: 138). Their dying as martyrs is commonly praised as a strategic and well-executed military move, a sacrifice that successfully delayed Mexican forces and ultimately set up a glorious victory for Texas at the subsequent Battle of San Jacinto, where Santa Anna was roundly defeated. The victorious battle cry became "Remember the Alamo!"

And remember it we have. Enshrined in dominant American folklore, the Alamo is one of America's most cherished cultural icons. According to frontier ideology, Americans arriving in Texas brought with them a culture capable of transforming the wilderness into a productive part of the

United States of America. The birth of Texas, it is written, was made possible by the death of the Alamo defenders. For many, the Alamo remains a symbolic confirmation that the spread of Anglo-Texan culture across the American Southwest had been predestined by God Almighty. Many a Texan ranks the Alamo alongside Lexington and Concord in terms of historical significance.

But for many Texans of Hispanic descent, the Alamo has become a recurring bad dream that continues to exclude the Hispanic population from any honorable role in Texas history. More than half of San Antonio's population is Hispanic, and many are challenging the traditional heroic image of the Alamo. Some voices today demand that the Hispanic people be assigned a more positive and significant role in the history of the American Southwest.

The Alamo, they point out, began as a small-scale Spanish mission long before it became an Anglo-Texan shrine. Known as Mission San Antonio de Valero, it was established in 1718 to bring Christianity to the local Indian population. By this view, a handful of brave and unarmed friars attempted to bring their own brand of civilization to the untamed Texas wilderness. They had no interest in storming sturdy fortresses. They were men of peace, whose goal was to save souls.<sup>1</sup>

What does all this have to do with archaeology? Plenty. Representatives of San Antonio's Hispanic community believe that additional research should be conducted at the Alamo—archaeological research emphasizing not the short-lived 1836 battle but rather the eighteenth-century mission period. Archaeologist Anne Fox of the University of Texas at San Antonio agrees. She has a deep and long-standing interest in the Spanish missions of Texas and believes that further excavations in and around the Alamo would shed important new light on this little-known chapter of San Antonio history.

But there is a problem. The Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) are the state-appointed custodians of the Alamo and its archaeological record. According to Fox (personal communication), the DRT has actively stonewalled any applications for archaeological excavations targeting the Alamo-as-mission. For decades, the DRT has felt that mission period research would detract from the true historical significance of the site as "the cradle of Texas liberty" (thereby effectively denying the DRT their ancestral identity).

Fox finds the apprehensiveness of the DRT toward mission research troublesome. But she is also critical of those in the Hispanic community

who are keeping alive the animosity between Anglos and Hispanics regarding the Alamo. Fox believes that archaeologists should ignore both factions and simply do their research.

Anthropologist Holly Breachley Brear (1995) has analyzed the social and political situation surrounding the modern Alamo. According to Brear, archaeologists like Fox threaten the current political structure in San Antonio. Although that attitude has softened somewhat in recent years, in the eyes of the DRT members, it is those "thirteen days to glory" that still constitute the primary significance of the Alamo.

And they are probably right. If the DRT were to recognize the historical significance of the earlier mission period, or to honor the Mexican soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Alamo, they would threaten the sociopolitical power balance in modern San Antonio. They would be empowering an ethnic group directly descended from the "enemy" at the Alamo.

In addition, any strategy for understanding the mission period would require excavations reaching far beyond the boundary of state-owned property at the Alamo. As archaeologists sought to locate and expose the foundations of the mission compound, their excavations extended well into the predominantly city-owned portion of the Alamo Plaza. Clearly, these new physical and conceptual boundaries better serve the Hispanic community's broader interest in the site and undermine the DRT's narrow focus on the Alamo-as-battlefield. Many politically active Hispanics are encouraging broad-scale archaeological research and public interpretation of the Alamo-as-mission to highlight peaceful Hispanic origins within the state of Texas and to support the Hispanic claim to owning the so-called "hallowed ground" at the Alamo.

Archaeologists digging and interpreting America's historic sites such as the Alamo likewise face considerable pressure from tourist expectations. The Alamo attracts visitors mostly because of the famous 1836 battle. When archaeologists like Anne Fox excavate there, they can expect to read about their finds in tomorrow's newspaper. The dig itself becomes a tourist attraction.

Such excavations are always in danger of threatening the prevailing ideology. During the 1988 field season at the Alamo, one reporter from an Austin newspaper complained that the archaeologists working on mission period remains outside the Alamo "seemed to be drawing as much reverent attention from the tourists as the indoor exhibits on David Crockett, William Travis and the other heroes of 1836" (Brear 1995: 146). The prob-

lem is clear: archaeologists allowed to dig at the Alamo are supposed to find the concrete evidence of the known past—that is, the 1836 past.

Similar problems plague the serious historian seeking to conduct meaningful research elsewhere in the Hispanic Southwest. As David Weber, a distinguished historian of the Spanish Borderlands, points out, some of the most cherished morsels of Alamo lore simply have no basis in historic fact: "They have moved out of the earthly realm of reality into the stratosphere of myth" (Weber 1988: 135–36). Here is what Weber thinks about some of those morsels of Alamo lore:

**Myth:** William Barret Travis is supposed to have traced a line in the dirt and said something like: "Those of you who are willing to stay with me and die with me, cross this line" (quoted in Weber 1988: 136).

**Fact:** There is no convincing evidence that Travis ever uttered this famous speech or drew such a line. In fact, many military historians have concluded that the defense of the Alamo is best characterized in terms of indecision and fatigue.

**Legend:** The battle slogan of Colonel Travis at the Alamo was "Victory or Death."

**Fact:** True enough, but Travis was no deliberate martyr. He said "Victory or Death" only at the beginning of the siege, when he fully expected to win and live. He firmly believed that victory was at hand so long as reinforcements arrived; they never came.

**Legend:** The fearless Alamo defenders fought to their last breath, only to perish beneath a human tidal wave of Mexican soldiers.

**Fact:** Davy Crockett and half a dozen other Alamo defenders were probably captured by Mexican troops and then, on orders from Santa Anna, executed. Even worse, some contemporary accounts suggest that Crockett and the others may even have—horrors!—surrendered.

**Legend:** We'll never know exactly what happened at the Alamo; after all, nobody who fought there survived.

**Fact:** Actually, there were lots of survivors—thousands of victorious Mexican soldiers. But their recorded observations have won scant acceptance because, after all, these are "enemy" sources.

When serious students of Texas history turn to the evidence contained in these nineteenth-century accounts, they are sometimes publicly reviled.

One Texas newspaper termed Hispanic perspectives on Alamo history "a commie plot to trash our heroes" (quoted in Weber 1988: 137). Another writer—from Crockett's home state of Tennessee—questioned the manhood of the historian involved, describing him as a "gutless wonder" (quoted in Weber 1988: 138).

Such are the tensions surrounding America's sacred sites. When archaeologists excavate and interpret their findings, they are increasingly faced with pressure and conflict from various public constituencies. The world of archaeology is only beginning to appreciate the ramifications and conflicts involved when multiple versions of ultimate reality are taken to the American public.

### Touring America's Sacred Sites: Not an Easy Call

In the case of the Alamo, tourism is a given. Historic battlefields are an important element in our national identity. American pride will always motivate people to visit such places, to experience the power of the place for themselves.

As Brear has pointed out (1995: 1), these places "are still where we fight the social and political Other, but with images and words rather than with guns. Here we create boundaries between 'us' and 'them' with identities born from historic individuals, identities inherited by entire groups in current society. Our battle sites, in being the origin of these images, become our most hallowed ground and the object of patriotic pilgrimages." Closing the Alamo to tourists would be sacrilegious to Anglo-Americans; for the dominant society, such historic touchstones inform us about our national, heroic roots. The Hispanic community also wishes to see people visit the Alamo but wants to present a very different message there.

However, tourism at the Medicine Wheel raises a rather different set of concerns. To many Indian people, this remains a holy place, one of many sacred sites where important ceremonies are performed to this day. Sacred lands are considered to be vital to individual and tribal harmony. And some important sacred sites—including the Bighorn Medicine Wheel—are overrun each year by thousands of non-Indians: well-meaning tourists, scientific teams, and New Agers seeking a spiritual experience. There is great concern in Indian communities that the plants, paths, shrines, rocks, and other aspects of sacred sites are being destroyed by the curious and the insensitive.

I suspect that many North American archaeologists would agree that the Bighorn Medicine Wheel is one of America's more intriguing ancient sites. With its spectacular setting and puzzling past, the Medicine Wheel seems to be a natural for the heritage tourist. Or is it? Should tourists be encouraged to visit the Bighorn Medicine Wheel? As archaeologists, how do we balance out our dual concerns with bringing American archaeology to the interested public while respecting the wishes of the descendant populations still involved with many of those sites?

Let me sketch two different approaches to this problem, once again using the Bighorn Medicine Wheel as a concrete example. Today, there are popular guidebooks aimed at bringing North American archaeology to an interested traveling public. In *America's Ancient Treasures* (1993), Franklin and Mary Etling Folsom describe thousands of archaeological museums and sites available for tourist visits. They provide a first-rate, encyclopedic overview, aiming "to open doors to those who are curious and who want to dig metaphorically into the past" (1993: xi). My own *Exploring Ancient Native America* (Thomas 1994) is intended to do the same thing but employs a more selective, more personalized and thematic framework. Both books are designed to educate the traveler about the ancient Native American past. Both likewise acknowledge the sometimes conflicting imperatives of archaeological research and traditional American Indian religious beliefs.

The Folsoms considered this issue carefully and decided to exclude the Medicine Wheel from their fourth edition of *America's Ancient Treasures*. After consulting with representatives at the American Indian Rights Fund, they declined either to discuss the site or to provide directions for visiting it. Instead, they simply wrote (Folsom and Folsom 1993: 251) that the Bighorn Medicine Wheel "is sacred to Native Americans who worship there. They request that visitors stay away and do not invade their privacy." This position reflects a sensitivity to native interests not evident in the previous editions of *America's Ancient Treasures*. They made a good decision.

At about the same time, I struggled with precisely the same issue but came to the opposite conclusion. In *Exploring Ancient Native America*, I spent eight pages describing the Bighorn Medicine Wheel in some detail, discussing several possible explanations of its origin and use, and providing precise directions for tourists wishing to get there.

Like Folsom and Folsom, I discussed this matter with various Native American people. These conversations elicited a broad range of opinion.

Some expressed the view that sacred sites should never be visited by the non-Indian public. Other Indian people saw no particular problem with tourists visiting such sites. After all, they noted, places like the Medicine Wheel are already visited by thousands of non-Indians every year; no single author can hope to stem this flood of visitation. The key issue, they pointed out, was to educate the public about native values and to be certain that such sacred sites are protected from looting and despoliation.

I was still undecided about whether or not to include the Medicine Wheel when I discussed the matter with the late William Tallbull, a Northern Cheyenne elder with a deep and long-lasting relationship to the Medicine Wheel. Tallbull was an important part of a coalition of tribal, scientific, ecological, and government interests cooperating to assure that the Medicine Wheel would be protected, preserved, and respected. He supported the U.S. Forest Service's decision to keep the site open to the public but with the last 1.5 miles of the access road closed to vehicular traffic. Tourists would still be permitted to visit the site but would be required to cover the remaining distance on foot. In his view, this solution minimized the negative impacts of tourism while maintaining the religious freedom of the native people who worshipped there, himself included.

To Tallbull, education remained a key consideration. He also felt it important to keep the site accessible to anybody who wished to experience the power of place. People have been drawn to this isolated mountaintop for centuries, and Tallbull believed it inappropriate to exclude anyone. Not only did he encourage me to include the Bighorn Medicine Wheel in *Exploring Ancient Native America*, but he offered to write a sidebar to my own discussion. In his perspective, sacred sites offer an important opportunity for teaching tolerance and respect.

William Tallbull's comments read in part (Tallbull 1994: 238-39):

To the Indigenous Peoples of North America, the archaeological sites found on North American soil are not "archaeological" sites. They are sites where our relatives lived and carried out their lives. Sacred Sites such as the Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain are no different. . . . When Native Peoples have been blessed by a site or area, they go back to give thanks and leave offerings whenever they get a chance. These should be left undisturbed and not handled or tampered with. Today many of our people are reconnecting with these sites after many years of being denied the privilege of practicing our own religion at these very sacred areas. In the past, trips were made in secret and hidden from curious eyes. If you go to see a Sacred Site,

remember you are walking on "holy ground," and we ask that you respect our culture and traditions. If you come to a site that is being used for a religious purpose, we hope you will understand.

In my discussion of the Medicine Wheel, I also published a lengthy poem in which Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne/Hodulgee/Muscogee) speaks eloquently about the importance of respecting Indian sacred ground.

Which approach is "correct"? As we take American archaeology to the public, what should we do about sacred sites? I don't know. I certainly have no quibble with the Folsoms' decision to exclude the Medicine Wheel; they did so for exactly the right reasons. But I am also glad that I included it, juxtaposed with the personal perspectives on this site from two prominent Indian people.

### Reality at the Millennium

To return to my central theme, does Margaret Mead's advice about American museums still work today? Is reality still the key?

While I suspect that the answer is probably yes, it seems clear that her recommendations on reality need some reworking. Mead was a frontline scientist in the modern world of her day. She lived in an optimistic time, when anthropologists believed that they could develop a fairly objective science of humanity, with universal standards for morality and conduct. In 1941 Mead could ask, "Is this true?" And if so, then this was what museums should serve up to the public. If it was not true, it should be left out.

With this single-minded approach, Mead would continue to argue that museum curators could—and should—address current issues of the day, including "race relations, the population explosion, the ravished environment and the concerns of the imprisoned children of the slums. . . . The museum is a perfect setting in which to represent the hazards to the environment, the devastation wrought by man and how it can be prevented or corrected, the price of overcrowding, the restoration of balance and beauty" (Mead 1970: 24-25). She wrote passionately that museum exhibits should systematically present "the truth as is now known" and that the museum is a place in which people "can renew their trust in science and in democracy" (Mead 1941: 67).

Margaret Mead died in 1978, and the world has changed since then. Today, we hear a great deal about the new postmodern world—a world that has grown distrustful of the kind of truth and reality that Mead wished to present in her museum. Postmodernist critics disparage efforts such as

hers to speak for "the other," whether they be colonized peoples, indigent groups and minorities, religious groups, or the working class.

Postmodern anthropologists minimize the authority of the "cultural producer." Instead the preference is to create opportunities for popular participation and democratic determination of cultural values—even at the expense of a certain incoherence. Rather than listening to authority figures (such as the all-knowing museum curator), postmodernists argue that each group deserves a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and that each voice should be accepted as authentic and legitimate.

Today's interpretive anthropology, an offshoot of the postmodern movement, also questions the discovery of scientific truths about other cultures; in their place are composed interpretations about the "other." For some interpretivist circles, the brand of ethnography pioneered by Mead (and many others) was not really an empirical account of another culture. It was just another species of fiction.

Deconstructionist approaches are said to be appropriate in anthropology because they get away from traditional "scientific" notions of ethnography—"what the culture was really like"—and focus instead on hidden intentions and unexpressed biases of the ethnographer/author: all truth is relative; all perceptions are mediated by one's cultural and sexual identity. As the influential postmodern thinker Jean-François Lyotard notes (quoted in Harvey 1990: 52), "consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value."

Few modern anthropologists believe in absolute value neutrality or complete objectivity. Today, most philosophers of science recognize that science exists as part of culture, not outside it. Values, properly factored in, can be productive, not contaminating. In other words, many contemporary anthropologists suggest that indeterminacy, multivocality, and relativism have become the messages of today.

### Taking Archaeology to a Postmodern Public

Many (perhaps even most) archaeologists are, I believe, sympathetic to the multiple voices being heard in today's archaeology. Most would agree that it is a good thing to have increased Native American participation in national archaeology meetings (even if some do not like the specific messages being delivered). Most archaeologists are glad that female voices are increasingly included in the profession and that women's contributions are recognized and rewarded (although some are uncomfortable with specific

views expressed by some feminists). And I also think the upsurge of interest in fields such as African-American and Hispanic-American archaeologies is widely recognized as a vital new direction in the field. These are all important new voices in Americanist archaeology.

There is, I believe, a real question about the degree to which postmodern thought has penetrated the American psyche. To be sure, there is an increased level of tolerance for other opinions within the academic world of professional archaeology, the rest of social science, and the humanities. But how much of this is strictly academic fad and fancy? As archaeology becomes increasingly inclusive, as previously disenfranchised groups are empowered and their voices are heard, as power is more broadly and more democratically distributed, what is the message for the American public?

Will we continue to hear about the "death of authority"—or the "death of your authority"? Will the new openness remain open, or will we experience the same old intolerance of different ideas, only with the power shifted from the traditional "haves" to the "have-nots"? The widespread call for multiple voices and diverse perspectives does not necessarily ensure tolerance for opinions that differ from one's own. Will the new inclusiveness turn out to be but a warmed-over version of the old exclusionism—dressed up in a different mix of racial, sexual, economic, and ideological dogma?

Here, I think, Mead's advice still resonates. Archaeologists have special responsibilities, not only to recover and interpret evidence of the human past but also to ensure that the past is not used for malevolent purposes in the present. This is not an easy task because it requires that individual archaeologists balance sometimes conflicting realities.

It is possible for multivocality to go too far, as any review of racist or chauvinist nationalistic readings of the past would demonstrate. Clearly, we must reject the extreme relativist position—that archaeological data are no more than mental constructs created by archaeologists and that interpretation is merely an individual expression of ideology or personal opinion. The problem posed by extreme relativism is that there are no viable means for deciding between multiple pasts—each is valid and equal. At its extreme, this chaotic view holds that no intellectual criteria are necessary to evaluate theories or to judge among them.

The program of extreme relativism leaves archaeology wholly at the mercy of political forces, forces that can employ censorship and domination to produce interchangeable pasts, which ultimately serve only as the bases of ideologies and not as frameworks for understanding humanity.

Accepting the position that one yarn is as good as another severs archaeology from the real world and trivializes the enterprise; we might as well be writers of pure fiction. Diversity in approach is a valuable thing—but not when taken to the extreme position of one-person's-view-of-something-old becoming the accepted archaeological standard. So viewed, archaeology becomes merely an article of faith.

Sixty years ago Mead argued that museums, unlike the mass media, insist on asking, "Is this true?" instead of asking: "will this make a hit?" As she also said, this is how museums have kept the people's trust. Truth and reality continue to have an important place in the world of archaeology, but taking that message to the American public has never been more difficult—or more important.

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### Note

1. We must note, of course, that alternative views exist here too. A number of contemporary native people point out the dark side of missions throughout America. Ed D. Castillo, a historian specializing in California history and a member of the Cahuilla tribe, views California's missions as "huge feudal estates . . . [that] grew rich from the efforts of a mass of unpaid forced laborers. . . . No reasonable person can argue that the California Indians in any way benefited from a colonization scheme that confiscated their land and resources; uprooted entire villages; forced them to migrate to the feudalistic mendicant estates on the coast; subjected them to daily floggings, forced labor, and wholesale sexual assaults on their wives and daughters; and resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent men, women and children" (Castillo 1989: 378, 392). Although Castillo's comments were specifically addressed toward California's mission system, many Native Americans feel that similar conditions characterized missions throughout America's Spanish Borderlands, including Mission San Antonio de Valero—the Alamo.

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