



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

February 24, 2012

Kevin Kay
President, Spike TV
1633 Broadway
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mr. Kay,

I write to you as the president of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) to express concern about the new reality television series entitled, “American Digger,” which will premiere on Spike TV March 20. We ask in the strongest possible terms that you take steps to alter the message of the show, which is contrary to the ethics of American archaeological practice, highly destructive, and possibly illegal.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With nearly 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

Archaeology is a scientific discipline involving the systematic examination and careful study of evidence relevant to human lives and lifestyles in the past. Members of SAA endeavor to stimulate interest in the past, advocate for the conservation of cultural resources, encourage public access to and appreciation of archaeology, and oppose all looting of sites and the purchase and sale of looted archaeological materials. In contrast to these standards of archaeological research and conduct, “American Digger” presents excavation as treasure hunting. The association of professional archaeology with “treasure hunting” impugns the discipline and the thousands of good scientists associated with it.

The archaeological record is precious. Once a site is dug, excavations completed, and artifacts removed, the site can never reveal the mysteries of the past again. Archaeologists are careful to preserve buried history so that future techniques and approaches can tease more information from the ground. Excavating in the way you suggest, without a plan, with little regard for science, preservation, or future approaches, is unethical and robs our descendants of knowledge.

SAA does not know your intentions with regard to acquiring the appropriate federal, state, and city permits for excavation. The Antiquities Act of 1906, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 each provide protection to archaeological sites on federal property. Many states have stricter laws that apply to private property. Although it is legal to excavate on private land in some states, the removal of indigenous artifacts is highly unethical.

We believe that, at a minimum, you should work with the appropriate archaeologist in the State Historic Preservation Offices, the municipalities or, if this is impossible, hire a consultant who is a Registered Professional Archaeologist.

We do think, however, that a series on American archaeology, especially focusing on such places as Detroit, Brooklyn, Chicago, and Jamestown, could be exciting and successful if it proceeds within the parameters of good science. Such a series could utilize existing excavations and archaeological work without initiating unnecessary digs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

William F. Limp
President