

COMMENT ON "FIGHTING INDIANA JONES," ASCA 1988 PROCEEDINGS
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COMMENT

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The symposium represents a revolution: archaeology to the people! Hoi polloi initiated into the brotherhood of the learned; the high priests reveal the mysteries. Science demystified! .

Not that this never happened before. I proudly wear the 25th Anniversary pin of the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society, which grew from the common concerns, and shared satisfactions, of a number of excellent avocational archaeologists readily organized by the province's first Provincial Archaeologist, Thomas F. Kehoe. The groundwork had been laid in the 1950s by Boyd Wettlaufer, Bruce McCorquodale, and Robert Nero, all with professional experience in archaeology but none employed as such. Led by Ken Cronk in Saskatoon and John and Jean Hodges in Regina, non-professional archaeologists in Saskatchewan understood the interdependence between the professional and the avocational archaeologist. Other provinces and states have enjoyed similar enlightened cooperation. It is worth noting that the Society for American Archaeology was founded as a means of fostering such cooperation, and that the Society is once again building a structure for regular consultations between itself and the state archaeological societies.

What is new, and seen so clearly in these papers, is the wholesale effort to bring archaeology to the general public. Avocational archaeologists have been accustomed to seek out contacts with professionals, or were contacted in the course of surveys. Now, the proliferation of conservation and heritage regulations and the demand for accountability in public expenditures brings archaeology, like it or not, to the notice of a wider spectrum of the general public. Those who may not find archaeology intruding directly into their lives, encounter it on public television and in community activities. State tourism agencies tout archaeological sites to attract visitors. Schoolchildren are introduced to archaeology through field trips and simulations. What was once considered the preserve of Ph.D.s is discovered to be quite accessible to the average American.

We always knew the (alleged) romance and mystery of archaeology attracted public interest. Schliemann and the gold of Troy, King Tut's lavish tomb, human sacrifice in Mexico -- movie-fantasy stuff, not what ordinary people get close to. Public archaeology today is something different, hands-on experience for Mom and Dad and the family. This newly encouraged wide participation of citizens in archaeological study makes it a democratic science, an American science such as the first Director of the Smithsonian, Joseph Henry, wanted to build (Hinsley 1981) European science was elitist, dominated by leisured aristocrats; Henry was convinced science could be pursued by all men (if perhaps not women), needing only sincerity and a willingness to work

hard.[Endnote #1]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Henry's ideal of a democratic American science began to be replaced by the German model of the research university. Anthropologists are familiar with this in the story of the conflict between Franz Boas, the German Ph.D., and the self-taught anthropologists of Major Powell's Bureau of American Ethnology in the Smithsonian. Protracted specialized study was said to be indispensable for anyone working in science. Thus the sciences came to resemble priesthoods, a Great Tradition accessible only to the learned, while common folk ignorantly followed their Little Traditions -- arranging arrowheads in the shape of a war-bonneted Indian chief's head, for example.

Several factors seem to have worked synergetically to move archaeology back toward democratic participation. The value of the tourist's dollar has stimulated state/provincial governments to develop archaeological sites, especially where, as in Arizona or Alberta, tourism is a major source of income. School curricula have been incorporating archaeological exercises since the 1960s, as means to teach the "inquiry method" designed to encourage critical and creative thinking in children.[Endnote #2] Increasing numbers of retired persons, coupled with medical advice to them to stay active, have opened demand for healthy, less-strenuous but intellectually stimulating activities; Arizona's attractiveness to retired couples has heightened this factor in the state. Each of these factors reinforces the impact of the others.

Public archaeology is becoming a significant component in the battle between what Edward Sapir called genuine versus spurious culture. [Biblio Entry #2] Sapir believed that only when people responsibly undertook the activities of their society could they be said to genuinely possess a culture. To be mere passive spectators was to have only spurious culture. From Sapir's perspective, it is interesting that participation in archaeology is growing, a small counter-movement to the floodtide of passive consumerism in American society. As several of the papers in this volume mention, the people who pursue genuine culture are likely to be active in many ways, and one of their activities will be voting. Sapir's emphasis on genuine culture involving not just activity, but responsibility, points up the linkage between seeking intellectually satisfying exercises and conscientiously voting. Encouraging public participation in archaeology is targeting a message to that portion of the citizens most likely to get out and vote on issues relevant to archaeology.

Public participation in archaeology is Jeffersonian democracy and smart politics, as Jefferson himself exemplified. (He carefully excavated a Virginia mound, in the midst of his eminently smart political career.) Elitist mystification is undemocratic, poor political strategy, and as every field archaeologist should know, stupid when so much can be gained from the knowledge and skills of local residents and avocational archaeologists. In the end, we don't fight Indiana Jones and his doomed Temple of Doom, we offer him a carrot and lead him into our crew. There is a stick behind our back, as the recent successfully prosecuted case against

looting demonstrated, but Arizona's feast of carrots, seen in these papers, is proving its effectiveness.

NOTES

1. This was an aspect of the Common-sense Realist philosophy popular in nineteenth-century America. The basis for this philosophy, developed by the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid, is presented in Laudan, 1981, chapter 7 (pp. 86-110).

2. Still needed is incorporation of American Indian history, pre- and post-Columbian, in school textbooks. Wider adult participation in archaeology may lead to better appreciation of America's precolonial history and of the later and present condition of Indian peoples. The Homol'ovi Project (Hays' paper) is an example of this possible benefit from public participation in an archaeological project.

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