CONFLICT IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF LIVING TRADITIONS

Edited by Robert Layton

Department of Anthropology, University of Durham

11 *The sanctity of the grave: White concepts and American Indian burials*

RANDALL H. McGUIRE

For the past four years I have been conducting research on mortuary customs, death rituals, forms of memorialization, and beliefs about death in Binghamton, New York. As an archaeologist, my focus on these studies has been on the material aspects of death in upstate New York, particularly gravestones and cemeteries. During the same time period, I have also been involved in a more traditional archaeological, mortuary study – the analysis of grave lots associated with over 250 Hohokam cremations from the site of La Ciudad in Phoenix, Arizona. This second pursuit has directly embroiled me in the controversies surrounding the disturbance, the disposition, and the interpretation of Indian burials.

My research on Binghamton mortuary customs has proceeded in a fashion very different from my research on the Hohokam. My students and I have gone into the cemeteries of Binghamton, not with spades, trowels, and screens, but with pencils, clipboards, and cameras. In the cemeteries we took extreme care not to disturb graves or monuments in any way. At La Ciudad we used standard archaeological techniques of excavation to expose, record, and collect the cremations. Whereas our study in Binghamton left no marks on the graves, the excavation of the La Ciudad cremations left no trace of the cremations.

It could be argued that the differences in method between the two projects solely result from the nature of the data in each case. If I had not excavated at La Ciudad I could not have studied Hohokam burials, because there was no surface evidence of their existence and we have no written records to describe them. Furthermore, the burials at La Ciudad lay in the path of a motorway interchange and would have been destroyed if they had not been excavated.

I do, however, have questions about the cemeteries in Binghamton that can only be answered through excavation. The cemeteries, expecially those dating to the 19th century, contain many unmarked graves. Contrary to our initial expectation, no cemeteries of this age had complete detailed records identifying the individuals buried in the cemetery. Nor do we know if the patterns of the changing investment that we see in the memorials is the same for the caskets in the ground. This information is not obtainable from funeral home records, because such records rarely survive from the 19th century. If we had broken ground in a Binghamton cemetery we would have been quickly ejected from the cemetery and faced the probability of criminal prosecution.

The citizens of Binghamton have received my study with interest and

approval. I have given talks on the gravestone project to public school teachers, students, churches, and civic groups, and have become a regular on the breakfast and lunch club circuit.

The O'odham (Pima) Indians of southern Arizona have had a much more negative reaction to my research at La Ciudad. O'odhams working on the excavation crew alternated between being excited and fascinated by the exposure to their ancestors' homes and irrigation works to stony silence, visible discomfort, and emotional distress when burials were excavated. The Inter-tribal Council of Arizona protested our excavations and laid out a series of demands, including one that the burials – both bones and artefacts – be returned to the O'odham when our work was complete, that Indian observers be present on our site during the excavation and that our final reports be submitted to the O'odham as well as to a panel of archaeologists for review.

When I talk to the people of Binghamton about cemeteries and burials they uniformly support the sanctity of the grave. Repeatedly they state that once in the ground a burial is to be undisturbed and a burial plot maintained in perpetuity. They are unaware of how frequently graves are moved or disturbed. Often when I mention some instance of a white grave being disturbed, a cemetery being abandoned or destroyed, they react in surprise that such activities are, in fact, legal.

Paradoxically, these same people do not object to the excavation and display of ancient burials, even when they are European in origin. They also accept without question the routine excavation and curation of Indian graves which they equate with the ancient graves regardless of the age of the Indian burials. Such inconsistencies led me to ask why ancient graves should not be accorded the sanctity of the grave, and more importantly why should Indian graves so automatically be classified as ancient?

To answer this question, we need to know how the sanctity of the grave is respected in practice and why some graves are violated and others are not. Two cases where Binghamton cemeteries were removed to allow for economic development suggest that the sanctity of the grave has been differentially respected depending on class and race. An understanding of why popular opinion accepts these deviations from the commonly held norm requires a historical consideration of how the modern American ideologies regarding both graves and Indian people developed.

Cemetery removal in Broome County

Cemetery abandonments are far more common in Broome County, New York than most of its citizens realize. All of the churches established in the first half of the 19th century had graveyards adjacent or near to them. All but three such churchyard cemeteries were removed to accommodate church expansion or economic development. Many early historic cemeteries lacked or lost permanent markers and these have been disturbed by construction projects, especially road building. Some unmarked cemeteries, such as the Broome

County poor farm cemetery and the Binghamton Psychiatric Center cemetery, included hundreds of individuals. Finally construction activities and farming occasionally destroy scattered, small, family cemeteries.

The Christ Episcopal Church graveyard

The Christ Episcopal Church, in downtown Binghamton was one of the first churches in the county, and one of the last to remove its graveyard (Miller 1985). The congregation started burying people in the churchyard in 1824. Burials occurred regularly from 1824 to 1869, during which time at least 305 individuals were interred in the churchyard (Christ Church 1818–59, 1859–69, 1869–84). The occupants of the Christ Church yard included several prominent founders of Binghamton.

The church began moving graves from the cemetery as early as 1853 when the vestry paid $29.50 for the removal of bodies to clear space for a new church building (Christ Church 1816–75, June 28, 1853). By the late 19th century the Christ Church cemetery was an anachronism and in the way of the church's activities. Descendants removed many graves to family plots in the newer secular cemeteries in Broome County. The church's location in downtown Binghamton eventually made the land far too valuable to be used as a graveyard. The church slowly dismantled the cemetery, in at least two episodes of removal between 1854 and 1915, including the sale of a portion of the cemetery to the YMCA in 1904 (Binghamton Press 1930c). By 1915 only a remnant of 24 to 30 marked graves dating from 1820 to 1879 remained, and the church initiated efforts to remove these graves (Westcott 1915, Brownlow 1930).

In 1929 the vestry proposed to earn money for the church by renting the cemetery area to a car dealer for use as a parking lot (Christ Church 1914–32, p. 234). In 1930 the church notified the families of individuals in the marked graves about the removal of the cemetery and family members claimed all but four of the graves.

In a series of letters the descendants expressed their concerns (Christ Church 1929). The families raised two issues: would the graves be moved to another appropriate place, and who would pay for it? As long as the graves were moved to an appropriate place and the church paid for it there, no one objected to the removal.

A series of letters dating between 1915 and 1930 from Lewis Morris to church officials suggest that the care followed by the church in the 1930 removal was inspired by Mr Morris' constant attention to the yard. In 1915 he wrote to protest against the removal of all but two of the headstones from the graves, and demanded that the church restore the markers to the graves (Morris 1915). He interpreted the movement of the stones as an attempt by the church to convert the cemetery to a new use without proper reburial of the bodies. Several years later he argued that the bodies could not be ignored if the church built a new rectory, because a Mrs Coerr living in Binghamton had relatives in the cemetery. 'Any desecration of their graves would break her heart' (Morris

1919). Mr Morris also had seven relatives buried in the yard and wrote to the rector, 'I have confidence in you and am trusting you to have the work [reburial] done thoroughly, carefully, and with reverence' (Morris 1925). In 1930 Mr Morris faithfully observed the 11-day process of removal and reburial (Binghamton Press 1930a, c).

The removal of the cemetery attracted a lot of public attention, because the burials included prominent citizens and also because the church was downtown, in the public eye (Binghamton Press 1930a, b, c). Hundreds of people observed the process from the pavement adjacent to the yard (Binghamton Press 1930a).

Only marked graves were moved and no effort was made to locate unmarked graves. The laws of New York, at that time, required removal and reburial of only the marked graves (Schreiner 1929). James Brownlow, then clerk of the vestry, told the local paper, 'All that I am concerned with is the removal of bodies in graves plainly marked' (Binghamton Press 1930b).

The Broome County poor farm cemetery and the Comfort site

In 1962 construction crews building Interstate 81, north of Binghamton, encountered a large unmarked cemetery which had been associated with the 19th-century Broome County poor farm. The Comfort site, an 18th-century Indian village, and an earlier prehistoric Owasco Phase component was at the same location. Construction activities disturbed both prehistoric and historic Indian graves in the site. The 18th-century village contained Indians from several different tribes, and from 1753 to 1778 Nanticokes occupied the area later disturbed by motorway construction (Elliot 1977, p. 100). There were three episodes of grave removal: 1962–1963, 1969, and 1971–72 corresponding to phases of road construction and construction of a comfort station on the location. No archaeological report has ever been published on this project and my information comes from interviews with individuals involved in the project and the existing field notes (SUNY 1971).

The state contracted with a local undertaker for the removal and immediate reburial of the poor-farm graves. In the case of these indigent unmarked graves the sanctity of the grave was respected in a most cursory manner. With no descendants to insist on correct procedures, a rural location, and barricades to hide the bodies from public view, the cemetery was removed quickly with a minimum of fuss and concern.

When the archaeological laboratory of the State University of New York at Binghamton raised objection to the destruction of archaeological materials in 1971 they were allowed to come in and excavate the Indian graves and other parts of the prehistoric site. The archaeologist in the field decided what was an Indian grave and what was an indigent White grave. The department of transportation would then call the undertaker to get the White graves. The decision seemed to be based primarily on whether there were goods with the graves of obvious Indian origin, the presence or absence of a casket, and the position of the body. The archaeologists excavated at least nine Indian graves, eight prehistoric and one (burial 7) in a coffin and clearly historic (SUNY

1971). Other historic Indian burials were probably removed by the undertaker because they were mistaken for Whites (Elliot pers. comm.). The graves dug up by the archaeologist were put in boxes and curated; they have never been studied.

The treatment of both indigent and Indian graves contrasts markedly with that of Christ's Church, where extreme care was taken to remove the marked graves of middle class and prominent individuals. Even in the case of the Christ Church graveyard it seems that some pressure from a descendant was required to guarantee that the sanctity of the burials was respected. The respect for the sanctity of the grave would appear to be a relatively weak or ambiguous concept in the modern United States which is likely to be set aside for economic or other considerations unless forcefully defended.

These cases suggest several conclusions regarding the nature of contemporary American beliefs about graves. The movement of graves does not appear to be problematic as long as the burials are handled with respect and reinterred in an appropriate place. Marked graves are far more likely to be respected, left alone, or reburied than unmarked graves. Graves are regarded as being primarily of concern to the family of the deceased and of far less importance to the community, church, or state. The justification for respecting graves is based more on a consideration for the feelings of descendants than concern for the spiritual wellbeing or sacredness of the dead. Historic Indian burials have been classified apart from White graves and treated as archaeological (that is ancient) specimens.

Rosen (1980) in a review of US federal and state laws regarding burials found that these laws are structured by the same set of beliefs regarding graves as are evident in the Broome County cases. Rosen argues that because Indian graves are not marked, often perceived as abandoned, seldom in recognized cemeteries, and often difficult to connect to specific descendants, they rarely receive protection under existing laws to protect the sanctity of the grave (see also Hopkins 1973, Talmage 1982, Echo-Hawk 1986).

These same factors work to produce a class bias in the treatment of graves. The graves of the poor were (and are) often unmarked, interred in unkempt (abandoned) cemeteries, and often difficult to connect to specific descendants. In the Broome County cases they were accorded reburial, but not with the same respect or care as middle class individuals.

Relations of power structure the treatment of graves in the United States. These relations are obscured to the general public and to the archaeological community by historically constructed ideologies regarding death and Indians. Beliefs about death define what the concept of the sanctity of the grave entails, and the White notion of the Indian determines how that concept will be applied to Indian graves.

White attitudes towards burials and Indian people

From the Middle Ages until the present, Western culture has embodied a belief

in the sanctity of the grave. At no time has this sanctity been extended to all individuals nor has it entailed prohibitions against moving remains. Through time, however, the reasons for sanctity, the proper treatment of graves, how far into the past sanctity is extended, the sanctions against violation of sanctity, and who is responsible for (concerned with) sanctity has changed greatly (Stannard 1975).

White American attitudes towards Indian people have always originated from a definition of the Indian as an alien (Berkhofer 1978, p. xv, Trigger 1980). Defining Indians as alien placed them outside the usual rights and privileges of society, and lumping them as a singular group denied them an identity except in relationship to Whites.

Whites have attempted to characterize the 'otherness' of Indians in terms of an opposition between the noble savage and the savage savage. Two more basic ideas about American Indians, however, mediate this seemingly incompatible dichotomy. Both of these views see the Indian as a primitive. In Western thought, primitive is a temporal concept that creates otherness by relegating people to an ancient time, regardless of their true historical context (Fabian 1983, p. 18). The coeval existence of the primitive Indian and American civilization has been historically reconciled in the United States by the notion that the Indian was vanishing or had vanished. Regardless of the Indians' character (noble or savage), the assumption of their inevitable demise, either as a race or as cultural groups, became the guiding principle justifying how they were treated (Dippie 1982, pp. xi–xii). The conceptualization of Indians as vanishing (or vanished) primitive others, has combined with changing White attitudes towards burials to justify the denial of sanctity for Indian graves in different ways through time.

Medieval Christians

The concept of the sanctity of the graves is a very ancient concept in Western thought (Ariès 1974). Early Christians believed that entrance to heaven required a person's body be undisturbed on the Day of Judgment. Only martyred saints were guaranteed entrance to heaven, so medieval Christians sought burial *ad sancto*, that is, burial near the saints. As the saints' graves were often associated with churches, the custom was generalized to burial in the church or churchyard cemetery.

Throughout the medieval period the bodies of the dead were committed to the hands of the church (Ariès 1974, 1985). The rich and the powerful were often laid in ornate sarcophagi which we still see today in the cathedrals of southern England. Most people ended up in the cemetery, but not a cemetery we would recognize. There was no plan to the placement of graves; there were few markers and graves were intruded, one into the other. The gravediggers threw the disturbed bone up on the ground and collected it and stored it in massive charnel houses along either side of the cemetery. In the charnel houses they sorted the bone by type, stacks of skulls, stacks of rib bones, and stacks of leg bones, etc. In some parts of Germany and Italy the remains were artistically

displayed with scenes, such as the nativity, constructed from the skeletons and bones (Ariès 1985).

The disturbance and moving of bones within the church grounds extended to all forms of burial. The sarcophagi of the élite were often reused and the skull of the old body left in the box with the new body (Ariès 1985). We might assume that this constant movement of bone violated the sanctity of the grave, but it did not. The medieval Europeans believed that once the bodies had been committed to the church, it did not matter what the church did with them as long as they were kept on the grounds of the church.

Not everyone automatically received the sanctity of the churchyard (Ariès 1985). Only those who had led virtuous lives and were good Christians were entitled to a church burial. Indeed legal procedures existed whereby people's remains could be removed from the cemetery. Such expulsion meant, in the belief of the time, that these individuals would be prevented from entering heaven on the day of judgement. The bones of saved Christians were accorded sanctity, but the bones of sinners and non-Christians were denied sanctity.

In England during the 17th and early 18th century the appearance of individually marked graves located outside the church signalled a radical departure from the medieval pattern (Ariès 1985). Graves were marked so that they would not be accidentally or intentionally violated. Some of the rich forsook the inside of the church for burial in the churchyard. Even within the church the dead began to demand their remains not be violated, as evident in William Shakespeare's 1616 epitaph:

> Good frend for Jesus sake forebare to digg the dust enclosed heare.
> Blesed be ye man ye spares thes stones and curst be he y moves my bones.

In this time period, sanctity of the grave came to require that the integrity and identity of individual remains be maintained, and markers became important to fulfil these functions.

Colonial America

Initially the Puritans in America did not use gravestones but, by the middle of the 17th century, they had imported this innovative pattern to New England (Tashjian & Tashjian 1974). Puritan gravestones were an innovative burial practice, different and less conservative than contemporary practices in England or the southern colonies (Ariès 1985), not quaint medieval survivals.

Colonial Americans excluded Indians from the sanctified inviolate grave on the medieval principle. Indians were infidels, they were heathens and therefore they were denied Christian burial and the sanctity of the grave. Europeans could debate the nobility of the Indian, but in the American colonies the Indian others were 'doleful creatures who were the veriest ruines of mankind, which were found on the earth' (Pearce 1965, p. 29). Christian Indians, in theory, gave up their Indianness and were to be treated like Whites, but in reality they were treated little differently to their heathen brethren (Dippie 1982). In the

colonial period a definite dichotomy was established between Indian graves and the graves of Whites.

The new republic

The cemeteries of Broome County appear at the end of the 18th century and vary little from their New England counterparts. Throughout the first half of the 19th century cemeteries were community graveyards, the property of churches or towns. Individuals gained access to the cemetery by virtue of their membership in the town or the church. The graves themselves remained the property of the community and did not pass to private ownership. The community granted families use-rights to the cemetery and the graves clustered in family groupings. Responsibility and concern for the sanctity of the grave was vested in these community groups such as the Christ Church.

The Broome County cemetery of the early 19th century arranged the dead to create the ideal community which the community of the living could never truly obtain. The boundary fence around it separated member from non-member in death, and redefined this relationship to the living. Within the cemetery distinctions existed between husband and wife, adult and child; but not between the familiar units that comprised the community. The inequalities and relations of power within the communities were obscured in death, denying their efficacy among the living by declaring them transitory and fleeing manifestations of this life to be left behind in a better life that waited.

The cemetery expressed the certainty of death and the hope of redemption (Saum 1975). The epitaphs speak of escaping of the troubles of this world to the glories of the next. They also implied that the deceased waited on the 'other side' to be reunited with family and loved one. The willow tree, so prominently displayed on many headstones, was a symbol of death and mourning, but a beautiful and inviting symbol.

The cemetery became a memorial landscape to preserve the memory of individuals as members of a community. Sanctity required not only the preservation of the grave, but also the creation of a landscape suitable for use by the living for contemplation and remembrance. The emphasis on sanctity was subtly shifted from a concern for the spiritual welfare of the dead to a respect for the emotional needs of the living.

In the early 19th century the movement of the frontier west of the Appalachians, and the removal, destruction, or concentration of east coast Indians for the first time created a situation where most White Americans would have little or no first-hand contact with Indians in their lifetime. The American Indian had vanished from the practical experience of most Whites, and the myth of the vanishing Indian appeared to be confirmed in their day-to-day existence (Dippie 1982, pp.12–18). Scholars reinforced the popular conception with a litany of lost tribes and declining numbers (Heckewelder 1876, p.93, Emerson & Forbes 1914, p.23).

Debates concerning the nobility of the Indian moved to American soil and then (as now) the nobility of the savage seemed directly proportional to the

distance separating the commentator from day-to-day contact with Indian people. The noble savage, however, could only exist in the untamed wilderness of the west, and as the advance of American civilization transformed the wilderness the primitive had inevitably to perish (Berkhofer 1978, p.89, Dippie 1982, p.28). The Indians who survived the advance of civilization and lived in small concentrations in the east or on the fringe of the frontier were a reality that denied the noble image. Their drunkenness, beggary, and savagery was explained as degradation resulting from their contact with civilization. They were fallen noble savages, unworthy of their heritage (Dippie 1982, pp.25-8).

The romantic sentimentality for graves provided a vehicle for lamenting the passing of the noble Indian. Numerous poets used the setting of the 'old Indian burying ground' to pen requiems for the vanishing race (Freneau 1907, pp.369-70, Bryant 1826, p.17). Once 'abandoned', the Indian burial ground, like the nation itself, became the property of the Whites to be put to beneficial use by the poet or the scholar.

The 18th-century theory of environmentalism held that differences in the natural and social environment produced the diversity of the human species. According to this theory the primitive state of the Indian resulted from the environment of the Western Hemisphere, raising the possibility that the new American republic might ultimately sink to the same state (Gerbi 1973, Berkhofer 1978, pp.42-3, Dippie 1982, pp. 32-4).

Thomas Jefferson (1964) accepted the environmental theory, but attempted to refute the idea that the North American environment created an inferior flora, fauna, and humanity. To help establish this point Jefferson excavated an Indian burial mound, being the first to disturb Indian graves for the sake of scholarly inquiry. According to Jefferson (1964, pp.91-2) the Indians were a noble and powerful race that had vanished from the east coast due to the vices of civilization, not deficiencies in the environment. White Americans with the benefit of the virtues of civilization could only build a great nation.

Jefferson and other romantic American nationalists of the early 19th century identified the Indian as the first 'American' to establish a distinctive national identity for the new republic, much as Europeans of the same period resurrected Celts, Goths, Magyars, and Anglo-Saxons to legitimate their own nationality (Dippie 1982, pp.16-17). Those who were troubled by a savage ancestry promulgated the 'myth of the mound builders', that a civilized, often white, race had built the great earthen monuments of the midwest only to be overrun by red savages (Dippie 1982, pp. 17-18). Both of these notions appropriated the Indian past to legitimate the White Nation. The mound-builder theory did not withstand empirical scrutiny in the late 19th century, but the identification of Indians as the first Americans is a fundamental part of the modern concept of an American national heritage.

The scholarly and political debates of the late 18th and early 19th century linked Indians and the environment of North America as the font of an American nation and a proper arena of scholarly inquiry. The establishement, in 1794, of the first museum of national history, Peale's Museum in

Philadelphia, institutionalized Indians as a subject of natural history (Goetzmann & Goetzmann 1986 p.15, Sellers 1980). While Schoolcraft (1851–57) and Heckewelder (1876) sought to record the vanishing memory culture of the eastern Indians, adventurers like George Catlin (1841) and Prince Maximilian travelled west to try and preserve the primitive culture of the plains Indians before it vanished (Dippie 1982, pp.25–9, Goetzmann & Goetzmann 1986, pp.15–35, 44–57).

By the middle of the century the Indian had become an essential part of the American heritage, and because the Indian was vanishing it was up to the White intellectuals to preserve what they could of Indian culture. The Indian was transformed in the popular imagination of the east from a savage threat to life and limb to a curiosity and subject of scholarly investigation.

The American Victorian

The expansion of capitalism and industrialization in mid-19th-century America brought with it an alteration of the ideology in which the cemetery participated. The new ideology stressed self-achievement and matured in the latter part of the century as a doctrine of Social Darwinism.

Starting in the third decade of the 19th century the form of the American cemetery shifted to take on a new configuration. The start of the rural cemetery movement in Boston marks the appearance of this shift (French 1975, Darnall 1983). The rural cemetery movement was a reaction to, and explicit rejection of, the old community cemetery. The advocates of the movement condemned the early cemeteries as filthy, unhealthy, and unattractive. They argued that a more sanitary and attractive way must be found to dispose of the dead. They sought to relocate the cemetery in rural areas removed from human habitations, in park-like settings where people could come, picnic, walk, contemplate and absorb the moral lessons woven into the landscape of the cemetery. To accomplish this goal they formed associations which established and managed the cemeteries. Individuals and families became members of the association by purchasing plots in the cemetery.

The rural cemetery movement transferred the care of the dead, and responsibility for the dead, from the community, the church, the town, or some other community group, to the individual family. In the mid-19th century the dead became principally a family concern and ceased to be a primary concern for the community. Throughout the remainder of the 19th century and into the 20th, most churches and towns in Binghamton attempted to divest themselves of their old cemeteries, either by removing them or turning them over to associations.

In the mid to late 19th century, Victorian Americans dealt with the pain and shock of death by maintaining a relationship with the dead (Douglas 1975, Fallows 1885, Farrell 1980, Jackson 1977, Pike & Armstrong 1980). This was accomplished though a wide variety of practices and in material culture. The cemetery was a bridge that connected the living and the dead, and the family plot an extension of the house. As long as the connection between the cemetery

plot and the family home was maintained, then death had not triumphed, death had been denied.

Markers had been important in the first part of the century as memorials, in the second half of the century they gained significance, because they identified the family and reinforced their social position and status (McGuire 1988). The poor of the 19th century could not afford the elaborate monuments and large plots required to maintain this ongoing relationship with the dead; just as their lives violated social conventions, so too did their deaths. With a weakened sense of community responsibility for the dead, the poor's inability to maintain the proper forms of memorialization became a justification for disregarding the sanctity of their graves, just as their failure to maintain the proper forms of dress, housing, family, and decorum in life had justified their exploitation.

By the 1870s all of the Indians of the United States had been concentrated in small areas or forced into the more undesirable corners of the west. This reduction of the Indian population to reservations opened up the west for White settlement, and it removed Indian people from the day-to-day experience of most Whites in the west, as well as the east. The Indians on reservations, contrary to earlier predictions, did not vanish as a race but lived on as 'fallen noble savages'. The notion of the vanishing Indians was preserved, because the salvation of the Indians as people required that they be lifted from their debased condition and since they could not return to nature they must assimilate and discard their Indianness (Dippie 1982, pp.162–4). The policy makers of the late 19th century did not envision a romantic death for the Indian, but a less dramatic cultural extinction as Indians joined the melting pot of American society by shedding their primitiveness.

In the scientific world the movement of Indian policy towards assimilation was supported by a dominant theory of cultural evolution. In 1879 John Wesley Powell established the Bureau of American Ethnology and instituted research based on evolutionary principles. His goals were much like Indian scholars of a generation before, to preserve the vanishing culture of the American Indian and to advise the government on Indian policy (Dippie 1982, pp.167–9, Berkhofer 1978, p.54).

Powell, along with many of the other late 19th-century ethnologists, including McGee, Morgan, Grinnell, and McClintock, saw their study of the Indian as part of a larger interest in natural history (Dippie 1982, pp.223–8). The scholarly treatment of Indians as objects of natural history, their remains to be collected like fossils and botanical specimens, was firmly institutionalized and taken for granted in the Department of Interior, and in the great natural history museums such as the National Museum at the Smithsonian, the Peabody, the Chicago Field Museum and the American Museum of Natural History, all established in the mid to late 1800s (Willey & Sabloff 1980, pp.41–5).

During the later half of the 19th century archaeology established itself as an academic discipline (Willey & Sabloff 1980, p.34). From the beginning in the United States, it was treated as a subfield of anthropology, a part of the greater study of the disappearing American Indian, and institutionalized in the

museums of natural history and the federal government. The major debat
throughout the 19th century concerned the mound-builder controversy, whic
was finally resolved in favour of the Indians by a former entomologist, Cyru
Thomas (1894). Thomas' conclusions rehabilitated the Indian as a noble savag
capable of great achievements.

Cultural evolution guided both 19th-century archaeology and cultura
anthropology. As Trigger (1980) has discussed, archaeologists consistentl
refused to recognize Indian progress along the unilineal evolutionary laddei
The Indians were generally regarded as the prime examples of a single stage o
evolution, barbarism. Furthermore, they were commonly thought to have beei
in North America for a relatively short time, so that the mounds in the east an
the standing-wall ruins of the south-west were all dated to a relatively shor
time span not long before European contact and conquest.

By the end. of the 19th century the poets had abandoned the Indian buria
grounds, leaving them to the archaeologist, and the pre-eminent right o
archaeologists to these remains was unquestioned. Indian people, like the poor
had little power to protect the sanctity of their graves and the nature of thei
burials did not accord them sanctity in the popular mind. The burials
were rarely marked, often abandoned, and seldom traceable to
particular families. They violated the conventions of the time, and this
failure to maintain correct forms made them all the more unquestionabl
objects of natural history, the remains of a lost primitive race.

The modern age

The glorification of death did not survive the first half of the 20th century
From the time of World War I until the 1930s the Victorian customs wer
attacked as morbid and wasteful (Becker 1973). The competing ideology ha:
been called the pornography of death (Gorer 1955). It attempts to deal witl
death by denying it and removing it from the living (Ariès 1974).

The shift in belief was facilitated by a declining death rate, especially amonʃ
children, and the increased use of hospitals to house the dying. These change:
removed the reality of death from normal experience, and have beer
accompanied by ritual denials of death. The deceased is usually embalmed to ;
life-like state, and laid to rest in a slumber room at the mortuary. Following the
funeral there are prolonged periods of mourning and the wearing of black anc
everyday activities are discouraged as morbid and deleterious to the recover}
from grief (Huntington & Metcalf 1979, Warner 1959).

In the mid-20th century, the cemetery also becomes unobtrusive (Dethlefser
1977). The memorial park cemetery provides the final expression of a denial oi
death. The one Broome County memorial park, established in the 1930s,
resembles a golf course, except its steep terrain. Those who pass it are noi
confronted with the dead at all through their monuments, but instead observe a
verdant well-kept lawn with scattered vases of flowers.

Modern Binghamtonians express this denial of death, and it accounts in large
part for the ambiguous feelings towards burials and the usually weak concern

for protection of the sanctity of the grave seen in the examples of cemetery removal. All people support the sanctity of the grave, but have little knowledge of the processes involved in burial or the maintenance of cemeteries. Despite the near universal belief in sanctity, only a small minority of people consider the disturbance of graves to be a major issue. Many individuals see the caring and visitation of family graves as a guilt-provoking chore, and express a desire for cremation with a scattering of the ashes so that their children will be spared the responsibility. The sancity of the grave is regarded as being primarily a concern of the family and the cemetery, and only secondarily as a community matter.

The most common justification given for maintaining the sanctity of the grave is respect for the feelings of the dead individual's family. These justifications exclude burials of persons that the informant does not identify as individuals, and burials that cannot be linked to living descendants. That is, they exclude the dead of an ancient and vanished race.

Throughout the first third of the 20th century both the public and scholarly community accepted the idea that the demise of the American Indian was inevitable and imminent (Dippie 1982, p.273). Franz Boas shifted American anthropology away from an evolutionary perspective, but like several generations of researchers before him he and his students took to the field to salvage and save what they could of vanishing Indian culture (Berkhofer 1978, pp.61–9). Concurrently archaeology shifted its emphasis to chronological reconstructions and tracing cultural boundaries (Willey & Sabloff 1980, p.83). This shift also entailed a decreasing interest in Indian ethnology on the part of most archaeologists, removing all but a few from an awareness of Indian concerns and interests in the past (Trigger 1980, p.667).

The turn of the century brought a general awareness that the natural wonders of the United States were in danger of destruction, and a nationwide conservationist movement developed. This movement linked the preservation of Indian culture with the preservation of natural features (Dippie 1982, pp.222–36). In 1906 the federal Antiquities Act was passed to protect archaeological remains on federal land from pothunters, and to provide for the establishment of national monuments to preserve archaeological sites and properties with natural features of exceptional interest. Subsequent laws passed in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1970s continued this precedent of defining prehistoric Indian graves as archaeological resources and restricting their excavation to archaeologists. The major piece of US environmental legislation, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, identified archaeological sites as environmental resources.

In the 1930s scholarly opinion in the US began to reject the notion that Indians would vanish either as cultural groups or as a race (Dippie 1982, pp.273–5). The thrust of anthropological research on Indians shifted first to cultural change, then in the 1960s to a glorification of the survival of Indian tribes and groups. These shifts had little effect on archaeology, expecially because the emphasis on scientific research and the discovery of universal laws of cultural change starting in the early 1960s only served to increase the

alienation of archaeologists from Indian interests in their own past (Trigger 1980, p.672). American archaeologists were honestly shocked and confused in the early 1970s when Indian activists interfered with archaeological excavations and seized collections.

The general public has been slow to discard the notion of the vanishing Indian. Very few Americans have regular contact with Indian people, and the vast majority derive what awareness they have of Indian people from the media and their public school educations. During the early 1970s Indians became somewhat of a *cause célèbre* in the media, and several major magazines pronounced that the Indian was no longer vanishing (Dippie 1982, p.xi). Despite this flash of attention the popular media and many public school texts generally stereotype Indians as a foreign and vanishing race different and removed from the rest of us (Hirschfelder 1982, Stedman 1982, Hoxie 1985).

One of the major goals of the Indian rights movement continues to be raising the awareness of the general public to the continued existence of Indian people. Reburial is an important political issue in Indian rights, in part because by asserting their rights to protect the sanctity of their ancestors Indian people assert that they have not vanished, and that their beliefs and feelings are entitled to the same respect as other Americans.

All Indian people do not hold the exact same beliefs regarding the sanctity of burials, but consistent themes characterize the objections raised to the scientific study of Indian burials (Medicine 1973, Hamil & Zimmerman 1983, Talbot 1984, Haudenosaunee 1986, NCAI 1986, McW. Quick 1985). The Indian arguments tend to base sanctity on the sacred nature of the burials and a concern for the spiritual wellbeing of the deceased. The concept of ancestry they apply to the dead is a communal one that requires respect for the sanctity of the grave even in the absence of direct familial relations. Indian people differ on how large a community they envision. Some are only concerned with the burials of their own tribe, and others extend the community to all Indian dead. The degree or intensity of concern certainly varies among Indian people, but the sanctity of the grave is clearly of greater religious, emotional, and political interest to Indian people than Whites. Despite the variability that does exist among Indians on this issue it is very difficult to find Indian people that approve of the disturbance, study, and curation of Indian burials.

Conclusions

The people of modern Binghamton accept the differential treatment of White and Indian burials because they equate the Indian with the past, and view all Indian remains as ancient. The differential treatment of Indian graves is therefore justified, because the White population assumes that no Indian familial descendants exist that would be interested in or hurt by the disturbance.

There are several important difference between the generally held White concept of the sanctity of the grave, and the concept currently being expressed

by Indian activists. For Whites, burials should be left undisturbed primarily out of respect for surviving family members. This is a secular concern, unlike the Indians' arguments which base sanctity on the sacred nature of the burials. The idea of communal ancestral relations being expressed by the Indians is foreign to the American public, who are primarily interested only with their direct blood relatives, and see the cemetery and burials as a major concern only to direct blood relatives.

The White emphasis on blood relations manifests itself in the views of most archaeologists. The policy statement of the Society for American Archaeology on reburial gives non-scientific interests in burials clear priority over scientific concerns only when 'specific biological descendants can be traced', in which case disposition of the remains 'should be determined by the closest living relatives' (SAA 1986). The distinction between historical and ancient burials which follows from the emphasis on blood relations appears in most arguments for the scientific investigation and curation of burials (Buikstra 1981, p.27, Early Man 1981, p.1, Turner 1986, p.1). The notion of the primitive, vanishing Indian, however, produced cases such as the Comfort site where Indian remains were treated as ancient regardless of their actual age.

The near universal expression of respect for the dead on the part of Whites suggests that most people in Broome County would be sympathetic to the desires of Indian people for the reburial of their ancestors, despite the difference in the reasons given by Indians and Whites for the sanctity of the grave. The passing of reburial laws in a number of states including Iowa, California, and Massachusetts suggests that such sympathies are widely held in the United States (Anderson 1985, Zimmerman 1985). The different rationales for the sanctity of the grave do not become points of contention between the general public and Indian people, because of Whites' ambiguous feelings about the dead, and because the Indian position grants sanctity in all cases the Whites normally would.

The different rationales do become points of contention between archaeologists and Indian people, because the Indians' broader concept of sanctity restricts or denies the archaeologists access to Indian burials. The practice of archaeology and physical anthropology developed in conformity with the White concept of sanctity. Archeologists and physical anthropologists tend to take the White beliefs as given and natural. These beliefs are not given and natural, but historically and culturally created in contexts of power relations and exploitation. We find ourselves embroiled in a controversy with Indian people today because of this history.

Note

A very abbreviated version of this chapter was published under the title, White American attitudes concerning burials, in *World Archaeological Bulletin* 2, 1988, pp. 40–5.

References

Anderson, D. 1985. Reburial: Is it reasonable? *Archaeology* **38**(5), 57–8.

Ariès, P. 1974. *Western attitudes towards death from the Middle Ages to the present*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ariès, P. 1985. *Images of man and death*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Becker, E. 1973. *The denial of death*. New York: Free Press.

Berkhofer, R.F. Jr. 1978. *The White man's Indian*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Binghamton Press 23 April, 1930a. Sleep of centuries is broken.

Binghamton Press 26 April, 1930b. Sailor's body removed.

Binghamton Press 6 May, 1930c. Stuarts body long removed, search ended.

Brownlow, J.G. 1930. Typed list of bodies removed from Christ Churchyard between 25 April and 8 May, 1930. Christ Church archives, old churchyard cemetery 1929–1931 file, 407.8 179, Binghamton.

Bryant, W.C. 1826. *Miscellaneous Poems Selected From the United States Literary Gazette*. Boston.

Buikstra, J.E. 1981. A specialist in ancient cemetery studies looks at the reburial issue. *Early Man*. Autumn, 26–7.

Catlin, George 1841. *North American Indians, being letters and notes on their manners, customs, written during eight years of travel amongst the wildest tribes of Indians in America.* Edinburgh: John Grant.

Christ Church 1816–75. Vestry notes, book 1. 406.2.1 A-70, Binghamton.

Christ Church 1818–59. Parish register book 1. 404.1.1 A-123, Binghamton.

Christ Church 1859–69. Parish register book 2. 404.1.2 A-124, Binghamton.

Christ Church 1869–84. Parish register book 3. 404.1.3 A-125, Binghamton.

Christ Church 1914–32. Vestry minutes book 5. 406.2.5 A-66, Binghamton.

Christ Church 1929. Old churchyard cemetery file. 407.8 A-179, Binghamton.

Darnall, M.J. 1983. The American cemetery as picturesque landscape: Bellefontaine Cemetery, St Louis. *Winterthur Portfolio* **18**, 249–70.

Dethlefsen, E.J. 1977. The cemetery and culture change: Archaeological focus and ethnographic perspective. In *The archaeology of US*, R.A. Gould & M.B. Schiffer (eds), 137–60. New York: Academic Press.

Dippie, B.W. 1982. *The vanishing American: White attitudes and U.S. Indian policy*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Douglas, A. 1975. Heaven our home: consolation literature in the northern United States, 1830–1880. In *Death in America*, D.E. Stannard (ed.), 49–68. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Early Man, 1981. Notes & discoveries. *Early Man*. Winter, (1).

Echo-Hawk, W.R. 1986. Museum rights vs Indian rights: guidelines for assessing competing legal interests in native cultural resources. *New York University review of law* **14**, 437–53.

Elliot, D. 1977. Otsiningo, an example of an eighteenth century settlement pattern. In *Current perspectives in northeastern archaeology: essays in honor of William A. Ritchie*, R.E. Funk & C.F. Hayes III (eds), *Research and transactions of the New York State Archaeological Association* **17**, 93–105.

Emerson, E.W. & W.E. Forbes (eds) 1914. *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Fabian, Johannes 1983. *Time and the other*. Columbia University Press: New York.

Fallows, D.D. 1885. *The home beyond, or views of heaven and its relation to earth*. Chicago: Fairbanks and Palmer Publishing.

Farrell, J. 1980. *Inventing the American way of death, 1830–1920.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

French, S. 1975. The cemetery as cultural institution: The establishment of Mount Auburn and the 'rural cemetery movement'. In *Death in America,* D.E. Stannard (ed.), 69–91. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Freneau, P. 1907 [original 1787]. The Indian burial ground. In *The poems of Philip Freneau, poet of the American revolution,* vol. 2, F.L. Pattee (ed.), 369–70. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gerbi, A. 1973. *The dispute of the New World: the history of a polemic, 1750–1900.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Goetzmann, W.H. & W.N. Goetzmann 1986. *The west of the imagination.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Gorer, G. 1955. The pornography of death. *Encounter* **5**, 49–52.

Haudenosaunee 1986. Communiqué issued by the Haudenosaunee Grand Council of Chiefs, Northeastern Anthropological Association Meetings, Buffalo, New York, March 20–23.

Hammil, J. & L.J. Zimmerman (eds) 1983. *Reburial of human skeletal remains: Perspectives from Lakota spiritual men and elders.* Indianapolis: American Indians Against Desecration.

Heckewelder, John 1876 [original 1818]. *History, manners, and customs of the Indian nations who once inhabited Pennsylvania and the neighboring states.* Philadelphia.

Hirschfelder, A.B. (ed.) 1982. *American Indian stereotypes in the world of children: A reader and bibliography.* Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press.

Hopkins, K.R. 1973. Finders keepers. *Museum news* March, 4–5.

Hoxie, F.E. 1985. The Indians versus the textbooks: is there a way out? *Perspectives* **23**.

Huntington, R. & P. Metcalf 1979. *Celebrations of death: The anthropology of mortuary ritual.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jackson, C.O. 1977. *Passing – The vision of death in America.* Westport: Greenwood Press.

Jefferson, T. 1964 [original 1785]. *Notes on the state of Virginia.* New York: Torchbooks.

Medicine, B. 1973. Finders keepers. *Museum News.* March, 5–7.

McGuire, R.H. 1988. Dialogues with the dead: ideology and the cemetery. In *The recovery of meaning in historical archaeology,* M.P. Leone & P.B. Potter jr. (eds), Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

McW. Quick, P. (ed.) 1985. *Proceedings: Conference on reburial.* Washington D.C.: Society for American Archaeology.

Miller, S. 1985. *Christ Church: A church and its community.* Binghamton: Christ Church.

Morris, L.H. 7 Sept. 1915. Letter to Mr Wescott. Christ Church archives, Old churchyard cemetery 1929–31 file, 407.8 179, Binghamton.

Morris, L.H. 16 June 1919. Letter to Mr Dewees. Christ Church archives, Old churchyard cemetery 1929–31 file, 407.8 179, Binghamton.

Morris, L.H. 28 July 1925. Letter to Mr Dewees. Christ Church archives, Old churchyard cemetery 1929–31 file, 407.8 179, Binghamton.

NCAI 1986. National Congress of American Indian resolution P-86-57-CC, Phoenix, Arizona.

Pearce, R.H. 1965. *Savagism and civilization: a study of the Indian and the American mind.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Pike, M.V. & J. Gray Armstrong 1980. *A time to mourn: expressions of grief in nineteenth century America.* Stony Brook: The Museum of Stony Brook.

Rosen, L. 1980. The excavation of American Indian burial sites: A problem in law and professional responsibility. *American Anthropologist* **82**, 5–27.

SAA 1986. Statement concerning the treatment of human remains. *Bulletin of the Society for American Archaeology* **4**(3), 7–8.

Saum, L.O. 1975. Death in the popular mind of pre-Civil War America. In *Death in America*, D.E. Stannard (ed.), 30–48. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Schoolcraft, H.R. 1857. *Information respecting the history, condition, and prospects of the Indian tribes of the United States*. Philadelphia.

Schreiner, E. 1929. Letter to Anna M. Parks, Registrar of vital statistics, Binghamton. Christ Church archives, Old churchyard cemetery 1929–31 file, 407.8 179, Binghamton.

Sellers, Charles Coleman 1980. *Mr. Peale's Museum*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Stannard, D.E. (ed.) 1975. *Death in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Stedman, R.W. 1982. *Shadows of the Indian*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Stilgoe, J.R. 1982. *Common landscapes of America 1580–1845*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

SUNY 1971. Field notes from the Comfort Site. Ms on file, Department of Anthropology.

Talbot, S. 1984. Desecration and American Indian religious freedom. *Akwesasne Notes*. **16**(4), 20–1.

Talmage, V.A. 1982. The violation of the sepulture: is it legal to excavate human burials? *Archaeology* **35**(6), 44–9.

Tashjian, D. & A. Tashjian 1974. *Memorials for children of change*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Thomas, C. 1894. Report on the mound excavations of the Bureau of Ethnology. *Bureau of American Ethnology twelfth annual report*. 3–730.

Trigger, B.G. 1980. Archaeology and the image of the American Indian. *American Antiquity* **45**, 662–76.

Turner, C.G. III 1986. What is lost with skeletal reburial? I. Adaptation. *Quarterly Review of Archaeology* **7**, 1–2.

Warner, W. Lloyd 1959. *The living and the dead*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Westcott, F. 1915. Form letter to descendants of individuals buried in the churchyard. Christ Church archives, Old churchyard cemetery 1929–31 file, 407.8 179, Binghamton.

Willey, G.R. & J.A. Sabloff 1980. *A history of American archaeology*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Zimmerman, L.J. 1985. A perspective on the reburial issue from South Dakota. In *Proceedings: conference on reburial issues*, P. McW. Quick (ed.), document 2, Washington, D.C.: Society for American Archaeology.