Traditional Cultural Values and Non-Indian Advisors

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Abstract:

Since its beginning, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Cultural Resources Protection Program has been successful. The goal has been to develop and manage a wholly tribal program specifically driven by traditional cultural values. The program uses science and archaeology as an information base, but decisions are made through the teachings of elders. Non-Indian technical staff give technical advise that helps in the decision making process, but they must work in concert with the tribe, which has a vested interest in the aboriginal lands and resources being protected.

This paper relates the story of an archaeologist who went to work for a tribal cultural resource protection program. The paper begins with the circumstances that led to the hiring. Then the authors identify some of the contributions that anthropology has brought to the situation and present some of the challenges encountered during this intercultural experience. The paper then concludes with the new roles that anthropologists are playing as they work to assist tribal communities.

The anthropology discussed in this paper is different from much of the anthropological work conducted with tribes in the past. In this case, while the anthropologist is there to learn, the purpose of learning is not so she can conduct a study to be published in an anthropological journal, but rather to learn the culture so she can be more useful to the people. The paper was prepared by both authors and in that regard represents their collective thoughts. For presentation purposes, the paper is told from the perspective of the archaeologist, and therefore told in the first person.

Background

Jeff Van Pelt is a Umatilla Tribal member and the Program Manager for the Cultural Resources Protection Program (CRPP) for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). I have a Master's degree in anthropology, I am non-Indian, and have been working for the CTUIR as an anthropologist since 1995. My work has not been from a traditional approach; I did not come to study the Indians nor did I come with the intent to develop a better tribal program. I wasn't even looking for a job. It just happened.

The CTUIR's Cultural Resource Protection Program (CRPP) began in 1987 with a plan to develop and manage a tribal program specifically driven by the Indian worldview of the Earth and all the resources on earth, natural and cultural alike. Such a perspective is in sharp contrast to the non-Indian view of cultural resources. The CRPP has been successful by soliciting cultural resource contracts from private, state, and federal agencies. In turn, training, education, and employment in CRM – CRM from a tribal perspective – has been provided to tribal members. Archaeologists have been hired to help implement the contracts and provide professional perspectives and deliverables.

In 1994, I had just taken a year-long break from 20 years of doing archaeology. In fact, I had decided to quit the field all together and begin a new career in the fitness field. My self-made job as a personal trainer was just taking off when Jeff called one day and asked me to go to work for him. I had met Jeff several years previously when I was working for Dr. Jim Chatters and the Hanford Cultural Resource Program at the U.S. Department of Energy's facility in southeastern Washington State. At that time, the Umatilla CRPP program was just beginning, and Jeff was trying to increase involvement by the CRPP in Hanford activities. This proved more difficult than easy as Chatters was not one to encourage such involvement.

I initially resisted Jeff's job offer because I did not want to go back to cultural resource management. Most of my reasons for leaving stem from the bias' and

hypocrisies that archaeologists tend to have about working with Indians. Dr. Chatters, later to be the central figure in the Kennewick Man controversy (Downey 2000), is a prime example of such attitudes. It had always been appalling to me that archaeologists brag about their advanced degrees in anthropology and then inadvertently or conveniently forget about the living people they impact daily.

To make a long story short, I took the job with Jeff but under the conditions that I would never 1) have to write another CRM report, and 2) do archaeology again. Jeff agreed, as this was all part of the plan. He didn't want another full-time archaeologist who produced reports; he already had a bunch of those. He had a vision and a clear path in front of him.

Under Jeff's direction, and with the assistance of anthropologists, tribal elders, and others the CRPP has developed the following approach to protecting cultural resources important to past, present, and future generations:

- The CRPP hires professional archaeologists/anthropologists for their technical expertise. These archaeologists become part of the tribal cultural resource team, which also includes tribal technicians and administrative assistants. This approach not only increases the professional quality of the work we do, but adds strength to cultural resource protection and teaches tribal members valuable skills. The tribal technicians are able to take the knowledge gained from the anthropologists and integrate it with their traditional teachings from their elders and oral traditions.

- The CRPP participates in professional anthropology conferences in order to communicate the tribal perspectives and needs to the professional archaeology profession. Tribal staff assist in writing these papers and as they progress in their development produce and present them on their own. This helps their intellectual development, communication skills, and increases their self esteem. Participation in conferences is a way of cheering team members on which in turn strengthens the team. All of the papers that were prepared in written form – numbering over 40 during a 12-year period, have been compiled into one book which will be made available to tribes and others who need it (Burney and Van Pelt 2000).

- The CRPP purchases new technology and technical training for tribal staff. Funding from agencies enable the introduction of new technologies such as digital photography, laser mapping, and videography. Tribal technicians become experts in these areas and take on the responsibility to teach the next generation of technicians. The CRPP is a major partner in developing the U.S. Department of Energy's HAMMER cultural resource test bed and training facilities in Richland, Washington [http://www.hammertraining.com/prop/prop19.html].

- The CRPP conducts CRM training for other Tribes and Agencies. Training is not conventional (from a CRM perspective) but taught from a tribal perspective. The training includes "place" as part of the learning process. Three examples of these training efforts are:

1. The Aboriginal Lifeways, Prehistoric Artifact Recognition and Documentation Training for tribal youth. This training is held in the Blue Mountains, northeastern Oregon. The attendees all camp at the Lake for one week, following the regime from the past. In this natural setting, the training emphasizes the importance of documenting prehistoric archaeological sites and the technologies utilized by peoples in the prehistoric past, while including hands on experience in traditional lifeways such as flintknapping, atl latl throwing, and food processing (Burney, Van Pelt, and Bailor 1998).

2. The Archaeological Resource Protection Act (ARPA) Training for Law Enforcement (Longenecker and Van Pelt 1999). This multiple-day class was based on the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's ARPA training, but added a much needed component – the tribal perspective. By sharing this perspective, law enforcement people see

firsthand that looting of cemeteries and archaeological sites are not victimless crimes. They leave with a newfound appreciation for why the laws and their enforcement of those laws is important.

3. The State and Tribal Summit for Oregon. This 2-day workshop was hosted by the CTUIR CRPP and held at the Tamastalikt Cultural Institute on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. The CRPP provided training by and for Oregon agencies and tribes to address culture specific concerns, beliefs, issues, ideas, and general thoughts about protection and preservation of cultural resources. Again, by communicating the tribal perspective to the participants, we were able to transform how they view cultural resources and the need for protection.

- Finally, the Tribe is forming Government to Government relationships with all 3 of the National Forests with in their ceded area, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Energy Hanford, Bonneville Power Administration, City and County governments, and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Contributions from Anthropology

As you remember, I never wanted to do archaeology again, so the CTUIR CRPP hired me under the auspices of a cultural resources monitor. Jeff had other reasons for hiring me, some of which he did not know at the time. Three months later, he found out. An Indian Cemetery was inadvertently discovered on the project I was monitoring; six weeks later, Kennewick Man was discovered and 30 days after Kennewick Man, remains from 4 individuals were found nearby eroding into the Columbia River. My academic and field expertise on human and animal bones was useful. I applied everything I knew.

At that time I had no idea how I was helping the Indian people. Nor did I realize that Jeff was studying me (instead of the other way around). He was figuring out whether I was thinking with my heart or with my head. And he was keeping a watchful eye on me to see if there were any effects on me or my family from my handling of human remains. To help protect me, Jeff started teaching me the protocol in handling human bones and artifacts. I became a student again. He taught me about the spiritual ties that those who were here before have with the physical things (artifacts) that they leave behind. He taught me about the feelings that he carries for those who were here before. I never learned any of these things in graduate school. I never learned, for example, that there are other ways of doing archaeology, or other ways of looking at the remains from other cultures beyond the scientific way.

Although its been five years and I have been given both an advisory and a teaching role in the Program, I am still learning. I supply technical expertise and teach basic anthropological and archaeological field skills. For example, I teach CTUIR tribal members and other tribes to identify human and animal bones either in the field during work hours or at the Aboriginal Lifeways Training Camp. I also help Jeff on all inadvertent discoveries and related burial issues.

I have a simple role as far as the anthropological and archaeological communities would see it. I can identify human and animal bones and teach bone identification to tribal members. The bigger role I play transcends these activities. I've been told that I'm helping the ones who were here before so that they can continue teaching the ones who are here on earth today.

In the future, I suspect my contribution as an anthropologist will change as the Tribe's needs change. I have learned that Indian culture is dynamic and enduring. I have realized the culture is constantly changing in order to survive and that it can endure hardships which few of us probably have ever known.

I believe there will be roles for future anthropologists who want to work with Indian tribes as long as the anthropologists are willing to listen and learn. "Seek first to understand, and then to be understood," as Stephen Covey puts it (Covey 1990). To illustrate my point, here's an experience I am sure you have all had. Somebody new comes to you for your help, maybe they want to learn about the history of an area. You take them out to tell them what you know and show them the sites. You are giving of yourself because you know they know nothing of the area. However, rather than listen to you, all they can do is talk about what they think and what they know. Before long, you just give up and let them talk. That is how the Indians often feel when dealing with

anthropologists. Anthropologists tell the Indians they want to learn but won't be quiet long enough to listen so they can learn.

Challenges

We have observed many challenges as we work to help the CTUIR develop a program to protect its cultural resources. The following three examples are presented as the ones we find appropriate to present at this time. Some of the challenges that arise from the intercultural situations we work in are:

- differences in the concept of time
- differences in the concept of teachers and teaching
- differences between the importance of scientific data and the importance of people and their cultural values.

Time

The concept of time is a challenge that comes up every time I turn around. I was lucky and figured this one out early on, but many non-Indians simply do not get it. To most Indians, trying to impose time on situations is like trying to impose time on the birds -- it doesn't work. When its time for birds to change color, they will do it; they will change when they are ready, not when we say they should (cf. Bear Heart and Larkin 1998, 131). For Indian people, things happen when they happen, the teachings come when they come, and there's no big deal made about it. Many times you will hear elders tell young people to live one day at a time.

To many non-Indian groups, time is a precious thing. You only get so much of it in a lifetime and each day you must maximize it to become more efficient. There is a time to get up, a time to eat, a time to brush your teeth. Time is money. At work there are schedules, program modules, deadlines, and whistles and bells that tell you when to start and stop.

The common ground here is that all people are bound by time. We have days and nights. We get sleepy and hungry. If we work we have to get there on time. Even Indians get their kids to basketball games on time. This is a magnificent challenge not only for each side to understand where the other is coming from but to work in each others time frame. One of the challenges of my job is to play mediator between Jeff and a white executive who we will refer to as Det. When Jeff and Det sit together in a one-on-one meeting, little gets accomplished because each one is talking within their own concept of time.

Despite these differences, Det and Jeff have a very successful project going; one which has great future applications if, according to Det, it is handled correctly. In order to make the project more successful, Det wants to know our objectives, scope of work, time frames, and agendas. He wants to formalize it, prioritize it, analyze it. He wants to know exactly when we will be there, when we will do the work, and when we will have a deliverable to give his supervisor.

Jeff, on the other hand knows that the project is successful because we built it in our own time. Even though each step was started and completed in its own time, we finished and met "the deadline," without the blood, sweat, and tears that Det left behind just stressing over the time frame he imposed on us. Running on Indian time doesn't mean being an hour late for meetings, it simply means letting things happen naturally, letting the pieces fall into place, and having faith that things will work out. For Jeff, the answers to Det's questions don't come on a piece of paper, they can't even be put on a piece of paper. This is something Det just can't comprehend.

Jeff's answers sound like this: "Sometime, maybe the first of the week," "Give me a few days, I need to think about it," "It will come to me if I give it time, I can't force it to happen." Finally, out of frustration, Jeff will say "I'll get my staff to come up with something." Det still doesn't think Jeff is on to what he's saying and Det repeats himself another time or two. Jeff asks Det, "Why don't you do it then?" "No," Det says firmly and apologetically, "I want you to do it, your way."

The project has been and will continue to be successful because of the compromise found on both sides. Jeff was allowed to work in his concept of time while still meeting Det's deadline. Things got done when it was time. The Spirit worked through Jeff and moved him to be creative. The hand was not forced. Indian people are inspired much like artists. When they are moved by something around them, by a dream, or a vision, or a feeling, they create.

The Role of Teachers

The second challenge is in defining the roles of teachers. Among the Indian populations, teachers are for life; teaching is not a profession but a duty. The greatest teachers are those who have been here before. Teachers and the teachings are highly respected. Teachers don't leave when they die, they continue delivering the teachings (the Indian way of life) from the other world.

For many non-Indians, teachers come and go. Teaching is a profession. Parents are not teachers, they are providers. Teachers are only here while they are on earth and when they die they are gone forever. An example is the anthropologist who connects with an Indian Tribe, develops relationships, becomes a working member of the society, maybe becomes a teacher, then, he/she must leave. Time is up. (S)he was trusted, respected as a teacher but (s)he is gone, never to come back. Only the story of her/his life with the Indians will come back in book form. "And what good is this?" the Indians say. The next anthropologist who comes along will have a harder time gaining respect and trust.

Science vs. Culture

The third challenge is probably the most important one of all and the hardest one to solve: working between the two very different beliefs of science vs. cultural values. For many non-Indians in America, acquiring scientific data is more important than respecting cultural values. "Scientists frequently contend the knowledge and the pursuit of "truth" should be the paramount values of this society" (Tsosie 1999, 8). "America's legal institutions favor scientific values, while cultural and religious values often receive secondary consideration" (Tsosie 1999, 17).

While Native Americans often hire scientists, they do so for their expertise and knowledge, as one more tool that might make a better future for their children. However, Native Americans oppose this idea that truth is found solely in science. "Despite claims of archaeologists that this form of research is vital for understanding the past, most Indians argue that any information obtained at the expense of their burial rights and religious freedom is not worth knowing" (Riding In: 1999, 33). Indians believe all physical things left on earth, those things found in archaeological sites, have a physical link to the other world and that site preservation is the most important thing we can do in CRM. "Leave it alone," they say, "it is not yours."

Concluding Comments

If archaeology is to become more useful to indigenous peoples, archaeologists will need to become more tied to the cultural values of indigenous peoples. At some point in the past, archaeology surpassed anthropology as a useful science, probably because of its scientific nature. Artifacts were found in the ground by using a very scientific approach. These items were excavated, analyzed, and "great minds" synthesized the data and recreated a past event. "We are scientists and archaeology is a science," they would say. We were so caught up in telling people we were scientists and then justifying it that we forgot all about our cultural and social anthropology studies. We forgot about real people, other religions, other belief systems, other ways of doing things because we knew the right way – the scientific one.

A story I like to tell illustrates the above point very well. If you remember, I was hired as a cultural resources monitor. My job was to help monitor construction of a golf course. I was a crew member under the direction of a crew chief who was a tribal member. He had no formal or academic training as an anthropologist or archaeologist but was trained by the CRPP. He laid out plans for each day and assigned locations for each monitor – all very organized. I had a new field notebook and took a few notes but nothing cultural was being found so I didn't write much. I noticed the crew chief was taking notes all the time and when he wasn't taking notes he was marking things on topographic maps.

Finally, I asked him what he found to write about. He had taken notes on the animals around him, the wind direction, and the patterns of movement made by the scrapers and front end loaders. He then showed me the maps which he had made detailing the transfer of dirt from one place to another. The little archaeologist in me wanted to tell him that this wasn't what he was suppose to be taking notes on, but I was new and didn't say anything. I decided to observe. After all, it wasn't my project, and I didn't have to write the report. A month went by and all the crew members were pulled except for me. I continued to use the crew chiefs methods mainly to maintain consistency.

One day, an inadvertent discovery was made by a water truck operator. We ended up identifying several burials. A construction road had been made through part of the cemetery and Jeff needed to know if any bones had been scraped away and where they might be. A meeting was quickly formed on site and thinking caps were put on. I let them think for a while hoping my notes might reveal some information. Sure enough, because I had continued to keep the same kind of notes my crew chief had taught me to keep, I knew exactly where the dirt from the road had been taken. I learned that using this approach actually provided a better functional tool than the standard archaeological one I would have used.

When I was in graduate school in the 1970s, no one ever thought that we archaeologists or physical anthropologists would ever have to deal with living people again. That attitude turned out to be wrong, because now we find we must deal with living people, living cultures such as the Native American Tribes. We must learn not only to co-operate but to consult with and form co-management teams with them. We must be anthropologists again.

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