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## Re-conceptualizing Oral Culture Collections and Archival Practices

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## Re-conceptualizing Oral Culture Collections and Archival Practices

### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank Dr. Edward Benoit, III, Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science at Louisiana State University, for his comments and suggestions.

## Re-conceptualizing Oral Culture Collections and Archival Practices

Amy Catania, PhD

### Introduction

The privileging of the written word over the spoken word seems to be a European conceit that arose out of the Enlightenment. Prior to this time period, even Europeans were skeptical of the written word, echoing many of Plato's objections.<sup>1</sup> People asked, how does the reader know whether or not the writer has a sound ethos? A speaker, after all, was only as good as his (or in rare cases her) reputation, but how does one determine if a writer is telling the truth? As Walter Ong points out, "Witnesses were *prima facie* more credible than texts because they could be challenged and made to defend their statements, whereas texts could not."<sup>2</sup> Yet, by the time the European fever to colonize other peoples reached its zenith, the written word, and especially books, had gained in prominence. This trust of the written word over the spoken word, ironically, made European conquerors overlook the same kinds of oral cultures that had existed in their own societies. In fact, Europeans sought to erase oral cultures in many of their colonies and were particularly ruthless in their zeal in both Australia and the Americas.<sup>3</sup> In the United States and Canada, not only were indigenous peoples slaughtered, but by the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, indigenous children had to attend schools where they were forbidden to speak their native languages.<sup>4</sup> In Australia, the wholesale ethnic cleansing of indigenous persons was a tactic employed by early settlers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Ong, "Orality and Literacy," in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (New York: Routledge, 2002), 111.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* (emphasis in the original).

<sup>3</sup> Naadli Todd Ormiston, "Re-conceptualizing Research: an Indigenous Perspective," *The People's Child & Family Review* 5, no. 1 (2010): 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*; Sarah L. Surface-Evans, "A Landscape of Assimilation and Resistance: the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School," *International Journal of Archeology* 20 (2016): 574.

<sup>5</sup> One example of such an action is the Massacre at Appin, which occurred on April 17, 1816. Aboriginals were shot and herded off a cliff during this massacre. For a contemporary account of the event, see the New South Wales State Archives & Records' transcription of James Wallis' journal, which can be found at the

Another was the theft of land through a land-grabbing set of laws which justified British actions.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, past assumptions concerning aboriginal cultures have led to stereotyping and labeling under the guise of understanding. Yet, “all humans have culture, that culture is the prerequisite for humanness, and that identity for any individual is a multivariate composition, non-fixed, situational, and continually maintained and transformed by culture.”<sup>7</sup> In essence, each culture transforms and changes over time no matter how that culture preserves its traditions.

Just as cultures change, so too do perceptions, but often such change comes slowly. One notion that has been slow to die out is the idea that somehow Western preservation specialists are better at preservation than indigenous persons, and this can lead to another kind of theft. Many artifacts, records, and treasures of different peoples were stolen by colonizers and shipped far away from their countries of origin in a misguided effort to preserve something the colonizers did not fully understand, but felt was somehow in danger in the hands of the very people who produced such items. This notion, too, needs to change, and the savvy, modern archivist will need to work closely with indigenous groups when considering current collections and holdings that pertain to those particular groups. That process must start with the creation of trust. Indigenous persons, due to systematic oppression and the theft of cultural artifacts, land, children, and so much more, have few reasons to trust those of European descent.

In the last few decades, archivists have made efforts to work with indigenous persons, discussing how, where, and in what context records should be preserved, maintained, or, in some cases, returned to the group(s) to which they belong. In addition, there have been attempts to respect the desires of indigenous persons when recording

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following website: <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/stories/massacre-appin-17-april-1816>;

<sup>6</sup> Sue McKemmish, “Recordkeeping in the Continuum: an Australian Tradition,” in *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, ed. Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemmish, and Andrew J. Lau (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 128.

<sup>7</sup> Marcia Langton, “Urbanizing Aborigines: the Social Scientists’ Great Deception,” *Social Alternatives* 2, no. 2 (1981): 17.

activities and ceremonies. Yet, how does a person steeped in European practices avoid becoming or acting in a manner that appears to be a second colonization? This article seeks to find what (if any) past or present practices in the collection, maintenance, and preservation of oral cultural records and artifacts of indigenous peoples are the best and most respectable methods for archivists to follow. In essence, this article is a meta-analysis and consideration of decolonizing research practices, reflecting upon what has been done and what has yet to be done in efforts to preserve indigenous oral cultures.

### Literature Review

Several anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have cataloged, written about, and worked to preserve ethnographies of cultures not their own. In doing so, they have often ignored both the desires and input of the indigenous persons whom they studied. Angela Cavender Wilson points out the hypocrisy of such a practice, asking, “Would historians attempt to write a history of Germany without consulting any German sources? Would a scholar of Chinese history attempt to write Chinese history without consulting Chinese sources? Why is it that scholars in American Indian history have written so many academically acceptable works without consulting American Indian sources?”<sup>8</sup> In essence, when Western historians have written about non-indigenous persons, they do tend to consult native sources, but the opposite tendency has been a historical trend when writing about indigenous persons. This difference in practice has been glaring and problematic.

Another difference lies in the Western notion that written texts are more accurate than oral texts, but this is an erroneous assumption. For example, consider a history textbook which claims that enslaved persons in the United States were happy under a system of systematic oppression, while a recorded interview with a formerly enslaved person presents the lived experience of that individual. Which is more accurate in its essence? The first is propaganda, which makes it valuable for considering how people thought during the period within which the text was written, but it is not accurate.

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<sup>8</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson, “American Indian History or Non-Indian Perceptions of American Indian History?,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1996): 3.

The interviewee may not remember all of the details of his/her life, but the essence contains much more accuracy than the written text. Both oral and written texts relay important information that will be valuable for successive generations.

In addition, storytelling is much more dynamic than written texts. Consider that, “A key difference [that Aboriginal scholar Thomas King] observed was that written stories have a way of fossilising the past, of setting it in stone. Ever-changing oral stories, evolving, shifting in ways dependant on both the story teller and their audience have other purposes as well.”<sup>9</sup> While written texts, with the exception of editing or the creation of deliberate palimpsests, are often kept close to the original form, oral stories change with the needs of successive generations—the lesson or core of the story may be the same, the rest changes.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the ways in which archivists think of oral records need to evolve. One important step is “decolonizing research.”

By decolonizing research, archivists can seek to accommodate the needs of many different groups who are stakeholders in the preservation and dissemination processes. Naadli Todd Ormiston, a social worker and instructor at the University of Victoria, relates the need for new approaches to research, pointing out that:

Until recently, most of this research has been conducted on Indigenous people, culture and lands without the permission, consultation, or involvement of the people being researched. In its earliest form, this resulted in the removal of Indigenous people from their homelands, the suppression of their nationhood, the replacement of their governments, and the destruction of their identities and cultures.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sue McKemmish, Shannon Faulkhead, and Lynette Russell, “Distrust in the Archive: Reconciling Records,” *Archival Science* 11, no.3/4 (2011): 224.

<sup>10</sup> One might consider the musical *Beach Blanket Babylon* to be a modern, Western example of oral story-telling traditions in which the idea that first inspired the musical remains the same, but the characters and situations change in order to remain relevant to each successive generation.

<sup>11</sup> Ormiston, 50.

In other words, those of European descent have not respected the wishes and desires of indigenous persons, and by not doing so, have furthered the systematic oppression that already exists.

Ormiston, drawing upon the work of Australian researcher Irabinna, seeks to, “Indigenize the research process.”<sup>12</sup> For example, Ormiston refutes the idea that oral traditions must be written down in order to be preserved.<sup>13</sup> From his perspective, the Tlingit people, the native group to which he belongs, have managed to preserve their culture for centuries without the help of written records.<sup>14</sup> He provides an excellent example of how Europeans constantly privilege written records as the means by which information is preserved, not taking into account the ways in which oral cultural traditions have survived for hundreds or even thousands of years without the aid of being written down. Ormiston further suggests that each group create guidelines for itself as to what will and will not be allowed when researchers study that particular group.<sup>15</sup> He provides a series of guidelines that draw upon the research of others (see Appendix A). A researcher, then, must be cognizant of each groups’ desires, not assuming that indigenous people will all have the same guidelines or needs.

Ormiston’s observations about colonization and research echo ideas considered years prior to his writings. Beverley Bailey, a university professor, explains inherent racism in the university educational system.<sup>16</sup> Although the article was written over a decade and a half ago, her points are still relevant. Bailey writes, “We expect **our** students from very different cultures to fit into **our** ‘one size fits all’ institution. We have a list of largely unwritten expectations: you will all speak English; you will all write research papers and exams; you will be on time and always present; you will learn what we decide you need to know in a series of unrelated courses.”<sup>17</sup> Those research papers and exams often come in formats that cater to European constructions. Papers are linear. Exams may

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<sup>12</sup> Irabinna is also known by the name Dr. Lester Rigney. Ormiston, 50-51.

<sup>13</sup> Ormiston, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ormiston, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Beverley Bailey, “A White Paper on Aboriginal Education in Universities,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 32, no. 1 (2000): n.p.

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, n.p. (emphasis in the original).

be multiple choice, and those choices may not take into account the ways in which different cultures may interpret questions and passages. In addition, information that students may deem relevant might differ from the professor's notions of relevance due to cultural differences. The justification for the kind of education that Bailey describes is that, "such is necessary if we want **our** Native students to succeed in the world as **it** is today. This is an argument that assumes that success in white man's terms is 'the' **way** to be."<sup>18</sup> As she explains, such a presupposition can cause harm to students. The preconceived notions of Western researchers and graduates of such institutions can permeate the ways in which they conduct themselves when they become professionals, and this is a particular danger for archivists.

The systems archivists use in order to organize their collections may vary widely, but many archivists come from Western traditions. However, they are often cataloging items that are not European or Western. This is where an archivist needs to put aside his/her notions and try to immerse him/herself as much as possible in the culture whose items are being preserved. Sue McKemish, Shannon Faulkhead, and Lynette Russel consider the ways in which research and archival practices need to be decolonized if archivists are to work with indigenous peoples when preserving artifacts belonging to those groups. As part of this process, the researchers considered the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (see Appendix B). They also discussed how their own backgrounds have informed their research and made clear they were very conscious of their own biases. They explain that their research, "points to the implications for archival theory and practice of embracing multiple ways of knowing and archiving, and multiple forms of archival records, including the oral and the written."<sup>19</sup> In essence, both oral and written records may contain multiple perspectives, and those perspectives need to be taken into consideration when collecting, preserving, and accessing cultural artifacts.

The notion that oral and written records are equally important points to the need for hybridity in collection development. That

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid (emphasis in the original).

<sup>19</sup> McKemish, Faulkhead, and Russel, 212.

hybridity can also be very beneficial when a researcher belongs to an indigenous group, while being trained in Western educational practices. Faulkhead is just such an individual. She is Koorie and her educational background is European. In straddling these two worlds, she can provide a unique perspective concerning the preservation of her own people's oral and written traditions. She reiterates the importance of her hybridity in an article published in 2017, writing that she wants, "a research design that was respectful of both Koorie community and academic traditions."<sup>20</sup> She goes on to describe the methodologies employed and the ways in which she constantly tries to negotiate multiple perspective from multiple traditions. Faulkhead's research and reflections provide valuable insights into culturally sensitive approaches to indigenous oral cultures.

### **Discussion of Case Studies**

This discussion will be split into two sections. The first will review past practices. The second will cover more contemporary practices.

#### *Past Practices*

Decolonizing research is a relatively recent concept and comes after years of considering the ideas and views of indigenous persons as somehow less than those of European descent or quaint and belonging to the past or folkloric tradition. Even Claude Lévi-Strauss, a household name in anthropology, acknowledged the limitations of his own research. He admitted that his photographs were often misleading, capturing the Western idea of a pristine prehistoric people, while never depicting the absolute devastation that tended to follow encounters with Westerners.<sup>21</sup> Instead, there is a kind of idealized view of those same individuals. This romanticization is a holdover from the fiction of the noble savage so prevalent and popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The noble savage image found resonance in Hollywood films and even

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<sup>20</sup> Shannon Faulkhead, "Designing Research Respectful of Academic and Indigenous Tradition," in *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, ed. Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemmish, and Andrew J. Lau, (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University Publishing, 2017): 480.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Ishi's Brain, Ishi's Ashes: Anthropology and Genocide," *Anthropology Today* 17, no. 1 (2001): 12-13.

children's literature in works like *The Indian in the Cupboard* (1980). The notion also appears in history books when figures such as Sitting Bull and Geronimo are depicted as tragic leaders who fought for a lost cause. In California history, perhaps the most romanticized native figure is that of Ishi, who, during his time, was widely touted as "the last Yahi."<sup>22</sup> His story is one that might have become a footnote in history if not for Theodora Kroeber's book, *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America* (1961), which elicits various levels of sympathy, indignation, and interest, and presents an image of Ishi as a kind of noble savage reminiscent of Romantic Era works.<sup>23</sup> His story is emblematic of early Western ethnography and attempts at oral history preservation.

In 1911, Ishi was discovered when he walked away from Deer Creek and into a slaughterhouse only four miles from Oroville in Northern California.<sup>24</sup> He was held by a local sheriff, and the media attention reached as far as San Francisco. Alfred Kroeber and Thomas Waterman, two University of California, Berkeley (UCB) anthropologists, saw Ishi's capture as an ethnographic opportunity, contacted the Indian Bureau in Washington, and were granted a kind of custody of Ishi as if he were an errant child.<sup>25</sup> Ishi then became a ward of UCB and eventually lived and worked at the Anthropology Museum in San Francisco, which was under the auspices of the University of San Francisco.<sup>26</sup>

While at the museum, Kroeber and his assistant, Waterman, were eventually able to speak with Ishi through an interpreter.<sup>27</sup> A federal agent assigned to Ishi's case, Special Agent Kelsey, was particularly anxious to get Ishi's story recorded on a phonograph or similar device.<sup>28</sup> Kroeber and Waterman were equally eager to record the story of this man's life, as well as the language in which he

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<sup>22</sup> Clifton Kroeber and Karl Kroeber, "Ishi; Wowonupo to Parnassus Heights, 1908-1911," *Journal of the Southwest* 44, no.4 (2002): 357.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Pascal, "Naturalizing 'Ishi': Narrative Appropriations of America's 'Las Wild Indian,'" *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 2 (1997): 29, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Kroeber and Kroeber, 361.

<sup>25</sup> Pascal, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Kroeber and Kroeber, 371.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Kroeber and Kroeber, 373.

related that tale, before Ishi passed.<sup>29</sup> Ishi became emblematic of “the Yahi people, the wild (or pre-Columbian) Indians of North American, and (more broadly still) Stone Age humans.”<sup>30</sup> In essence, Ishi became a kind of metonym for Native Americans, standing in as a symbol for his entire culture.

The government, though, was more interested in Ishi as a “model” Indian, who was able to adapt to “civilized” culture and do “simple manual labor.”<sup>31</sup> Ishi was a hard-working employee who took advantage of free housing and medical care and was able to save money from his job at the museum. In his free time, Ishi also created artifacts, including “bows, arrows, and projectile points,” sharing aspects of his culture and drawing in crowds curious to see this last wild Indian at such tasks.<sup>32</sup> Ishi did allow himself to be recorded, and he played Yahi music and told stories, which were preserved on wax cylinders, many of which unfortunately melted.<sup>33</sup> Kroeber also recorded Ishi’s stories by hand.<sup>34</sup>

Kroeber saw his role at the museum and anthropology department as part of “salvage ethnography,” attempting to document the cultures of indigenous peoples who had all but disappeared by the early 1900s.<sup>35</sup> After serving as the curator of the Anthropology Museum for a decade and a half, Kroeber completed his work *Handbook of the Indians of California* (1917), which left him despondent and disillusioned, and he turned to more theoretical works.<sup>36</sup>

Part of what might have disillusioned Kroeber was that Ishi had died of tuberculosis just the year before in 1916. After Ishi’s death, Kroeber, who considered himself Ishi’s friend, as well as ethnographer, had requested that no autopsy be performed and that the body be cremated in accordance with Ishi’s traditions as Kroeber understood them—that did not happen. There was instead an autopsy, and the brain was removed. The lack of respect for a

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<sup>29</sup> Kroeber and Kroeber, 384.

<sup>30</sup> Pascal, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Kroeber and Kroeber, 375.

<sup>32</sup> Kroeber and Kroeber, 378.

<sup>33</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

culture's burial practices was emblematic of the way Westerners often ignored indigenous traditions, treating those individuals in a manner that would have horrified Westerners had the practice been directed at an individual from within their own culture. Kroeber, upon hearing that an autopsy had been performed, requested that Ishi's brain be sent it to the Smithsonian Institution for curation, while the rest of the body was finally cremated.<sup>37</sup> The ashes were saved in a Pueblo jar and buried in Oakland.<sup>38</sup> The funerary practices would lead to controversy during the 1990s when the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act passed the U. S. Congress.<sup>39</sup>

In accordance with the new law, Art Angle, Chair of the Butte County American Indian Cultural Committee, decided to try to recover Ishi's remains so that he might be laid to rest in the tradition of his people.<sup>40</sup> After the passage of the above act, institutions like museums, archives, and libraries that housed such controversial artifacts came under fire as individuals from indigenous groups began to make their voices and desires heard. On the one hand, the professionals working at such institutions had been trained in a Western tradition and did not want to give up what they considered invaluable and important historical artifacts, preserving Kroeber's idea of "salvage ethnography." On the other hand, those artifacts were often stolen or even ill-gotten items taken or received under dubious circumstances. Although Kroeber acted in what he thought would be in the best interests for his discipline, Angle would challenge that decision

After initial denials and then acknowledgements, the anthropology department at UCB gave the brain to Angle and issued an official apology on April 5, 1999. Some accepted this apology, but others felt that it fell short and was too little, too late.<sup>41</sup> This incident with Ishi's brain, however, did cause the department to reflect upon their current practices. Scheper-Hughes remarks:

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<sup>37</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 12, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 12.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 17-18.

Anthropologists have been asked to transform our central and defining practice of fieldwork, to de-colonize ourselves and imagine new relations to our subjects. The relations with key informants we once thought of as our ‘friends’ or ‘good companions’ we now see as often tinged with professional opportunism and shot through with imbalances of power.<sup>42</sup>

This is a particularly important point when considering Kroeber and Ishi. Kroeber saw himself as befriending his informant and did not consider that Ishi had little choice due to an imbalance of power. Ishi made the most out of his situation. Yet, based on the stories that the native man told, one has to ask if he ever really recounted his own life or decided to weave his own experiences and other tales together to relate an experience of a whole people.<sup>43</sup> In order to preserve his life, did Ishi tell Kroeber what the anthropologist wanted to hear, thereby reinforcing expectations and even stereotypes? Did Ishi have to be persuaded to become an informant? The imbalance of power makes these questions difficult to answer, and the accounts remaining from the early twentieth century are largely from Western perspectives.

In addition, Western researchers, like Kroeber, tried to interpret stories based on their own folklore, rather than considering the cultural and personal significance of stories like Ishi’s “Wood Duck Man.”<sup>44</sup> Understanding a culture often means immersing oneself as much as possible in that culture and asking an indigenous individual to act as a guide in understanding the ideas of a particular group. In Scheper-Hughes’ words, “At what point does the anthropologist-as-witness become a bystander or a co-conspirator?”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Pascal, 36.

<sup>44</sup> In the story of Wood Duck Man, Ishi describes a man who is searching for a wife. Different women come to speak to the Wood Duck Man in the hopes of becoming his wife, and each woman has her own narrative. It is unclear if this is Ishi’s story about searching for a wife, a story that he has been told, a collective tale passed down through generations, or something else entirely. The tale seems disjointed by Western standards of storytelling, and Kroeber did not have the cultural knowledge to understand the tale or its importance completely. Pascal, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Scheper-Hughes, 18.

Kroeber became a kind of co-conspirator in the re-colonization of Ishi and his story, and although he had good intentions in wanting to preserve a disappearing culture, he did not necessarily go about doing so in the best manner. The need to think beyond Western constructions and decolonizing ideas is an important lesson gleaned from Ishi's (his)story and Kroeber's handling of it.

In spite of stories like Ishi's, there were Native American scholars and researchers who did attempt to set the record straight. In the 1940s, Fred Gone from the Gros Ventre community, and Mark "Rex" Flying from the Assiniboine community, began collecting stories and narratives from tribal elders for the Montana Writers' Program.<sup>46</sup> Such research and work was largely ignored by the academic community and dismissed as folklore.<sup>47</sup> Gone and Flying had primary source materials in their possession, which would have been invaluable to historians, and yet early academic prejudices kept researchers from consulting such sources. Dismissing such texts reinforces Wilson's point that Western academics did not consult indigenous persons in the course of their research.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time that Gone and Flying were collecting their stories, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) floated an idea of creating guidebooks for states that had indigenous populations.<sup>49</sup> This was an effort to help the tourist trade, but also to dispel negative images of native groups. Those in charge at the central office of the BIA believed that a "scientific" approach would create a more "accurate" picture of Native Americans, which, ironically, was exactly what anthropologists claimed to have done in the previous decades when they created those negative depictions of indigenous persons.<sup>50</sup> The guidebooks ended up repeating the errors of the past and not consulting the very individuals whose cultures writers were depicting in those works.<sup>51</sup> In addition, they emphasized assimilation and

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<sup>46</sup> Mindy J. Morgan, "Constructions and Contestations of the Authoritative Voice: Native-American Communities and the Federal Writers' Project," *The American Indian Quarterly* 29, no. 1-2 (2005): 56.

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, 57.

<sup>48</sup> Wilson, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Morgan, 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Morgan, 61.

acculturation over the uniqueness of native cultures.<sup>52</sup> Native Americans were often depicted as relegated to the past and received the same “Stone Age” designation as Ishi even though such communities did exist during Gone and Flying’s time and continue to exist today. These guidebooks were kindred to a second colonization and continued to disseminate erroneous information.

In large part, projects like those that Gone and Flying conducted were ignored in favor of works like the BIA’s about assimilation and acculturation. Gone and Flying’s work would not be rediscovered until the 1980s.<sup>53</sup> During this decade, multi-cultural histories and ethnic studies programs sought to reclaim marginalized voices, including those of indigenous communities. This was also a time when archivists seemed to recognize significant anthropological collections in their archives. One of these was the Lucullus V. McWhorter collection at the State College of Washington (i.e. Washington State University).<sup>54</sup>

In the early twentieth century, McWhorter did try to work in partnership with the Nez Perce in Washington State. He collected artifacts, making sure to log the creators, and accumulated stories. He took photographs with the permission of those individuals, advocated for the rights of local Native Americans, and wrote several histories. He also arranged for Indian shows at such festivals as the Walla Walla Frontier Days in which local groups showcased their cultures for a modest sum.<sup>55</sup> Such arrangements also allowed him to set up interviews.<sup>56</sup> Like Kroeber, however, McWhorter did not consider the uneven power dynamic. He acted as a kind of agent, and the participants might have considered themselves beholden to him. Thus, he could not be certain of the content of those interviews.

Yet, that McWhorter did want to learn about native culture from indigenous persons, and gained consent to do so, is an important step forward from Kroeber’s time. In addition, like Gone and Flying’s work, McWhorter’s publications were often dismissed

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<sup>52</sup> Morgan, 63-64.

<sup>53</sup> Morgan, 65.

<sup>54</sup> Trevor James Bond, “From Treasure Room to Archives: the McWhorter Papers and the State College of Washington,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2011): 68.

<sup>55</sup> Bond, 67-68.

<sup>56</sup> Bond, 68.

as folkloric, rather than historical or scholarly in nature, which highlighted Western prejudices concerning such scholarship.<sup>57</sup> In spite of his publications being largely ignored, his collection was highly coveted, and upon McWhorter's death in 1944, he donated his collection to the Washington State University.<sup>58</sup> His papers present an important stepping-stone in the collection of oral history and culture. What should be emphasized, however, is that he worked with indigenous individuals rather than asking them to conform to his ideas about them, and in this way, he was a bit ahead of his time.

From Kroeber to McWhorter and beyond, ethnographers have collected and stored native stories in diverse formats from the written word to wax cylinders to more recent media like CDs. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Fereshteh Toosi created a project that used recordings of native stories from the Onondaga Creek area in central New York State. The projects' creators edited and presented interviews in small samples that were "specifically chosen for their connection to particular locations along the creek and surrounding neighborhoods."<sup>59</sup> Listeners needed to visit the locations in order to understand the interviews.<sup>60</sup> Construction projects, which would force the relocation of current residents, were the impetus behind the endeavor, as a history of displacement seemed to be repeating itself.<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, the purpose for conducting this project is laudable, as Toosi was attempting to stop a construction plan that would erase areas of cultural significance. On the other hand, the individuals who provided the interviews did not seem to be consulted in the use of their voices in such a project, and this appears to be another form of usurpation. Such an action, no matter how well intentioned, can lead down a very slippery slope. The use of an oral history collection in such a political manner is not advisable.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bond, 73.

<sup>58</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> Fereshteh Toosi, "Up the Creek! A Site-Specific Oral History Project," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 30 (Special Issue: Talking Green: Oral History and Environmental History) (2010) 1.

<sup>60</sup> Toosi, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Toosi, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Consider, for example, the controversy surrounding a Dodge truck commercial that aired during Super Bowl LII which used Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words. When words are used for purposes other than the original intention, such a practice can be viewed as a usurpation and form of colonization or even racism, and thus

*Current Practices*

Instead of repeating the errors of past methods, an archivist needs to decolonize his/her ideas about archival practices. As Marisa Elena Duarte and Miranda Berlande-Lewis point out:

For non-Indigenous individuals decolonization work means stepping back from normative expectations that (1) all knowledge in the world can be represented in document form, (2) to some degree, already is, and (3) Indigenous ways of knowing *belong* in state-funded university and government library, archive, and museum collections, especially for the benefit of society's privileged elite."<sup>63</sup>

These assumptions can be quite dangerous and lead to practices such as the theft of cultural artifacts and the creation of records without the permission of a group. In some cases, decolonizing research means acknowledging that the very ways that archivists classify and name can be problematic and not reflect indigenous practices and thought processes.<sup>64</sup> Duarte and Berlande-Lewis propose being open to new ways of knowing and thinking, including discussions with indigenous thinkers and community leaders.<sup>65</sup> Duarte and Berlande-Lewis also suggest, "envisioning, and discovering the beauty of our knowledge" as new methodologies for archivists to consider.<sup>66</sup> According to the two scholars' research, envisioning is a way of imagining the world (see Appendix C). "Discovering the beauty of our knowledge" involves the dissemination of knowledge in such a way that benefits the entire indigenous community.<sup>67</sup> In such a

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professionals, such as archivists, need to be very careful and thoughtful in how their collections are used. For more information on the Dodge commercial, see the NBC article, "Use of Martin Luther King Jr. to sell trucks infuriates admirers during Super Bowl," via the following link: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/use-martin-luther-king-jr-sell-trucks-infuriates-admirers-during-n844591>.

<sup>63</sup> Marisa Elena Duarte and Miranda Berlande-Lewis, "Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 5-6 (2015): 678. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>64</sup> Duarte and Berlande-Lewis, 681-682.

<sup>65</sup> Duarte and Berlande-Lewis, 687.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

process, knowledge is not locked away, but made accessible within the society itself, unlike in many Western institutions. At the same time, such indigenous communities may not like that knowledge shared with outsiders, and archivists have to be particularly sensitive to this concern.<sup>68</sup> Westerners have not always respected such boundaries, and this has historically created distrust. So archivists have to create trust before they can work with indigenous individuals and learn about new ways of considering the world.

Duarte and Berlande-Lewis provide an important example of such thinking in practice. Brian Deer, working for the University of Alaska Fairbanks, in consultation with community elders, created a classification scheme called the Alaska Native Languages Archive (ANLA). He took into account the desires of those elders in depicting their languages in specific ways and in specific contexts.<sup>69</sup> Like the Deer example provided, Duarte and Berlande-Lewis focus largely on cataloging and classification systems, as these are often the ways in which researchers search for items. By opening up these systems and being flexible, individuals from both indigenous and non-indigenous groups are able to find materials more easily than in previous systems. In addition, the two authors acknowledge many attempts at new organizational systems, such as Dr. Cherly Metoyer's work with the Mashantucket Pequot Nation and David George-Shonogo's work with the Seneca nation, as well as many others.<sup>70</sup> The importance of these different ideas and constructions lies in the active collaboration between archivists and indigenous persons in creating these systems.

Part of the challenge is creating a system in which both male and female members of indigenous communities are represented in research. Unfortunately, much of Western research conducted in the past has focused predominately on indigenous men. Indigenous women, due to Western conceptions of female roles, such as the stereotyped "squaw," have often found themselves absent from ethnographic accounts and dismissed. If women are present, they are often depicted as suffering at the hands of indigenous men and in need of rescue. Gayatri Spivak points out this phenomenon as,

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<sup>68</sup> Duarte and Berlande, 690.

<sup>69</sup> Duarte and Berlande-Lewis, 692.

<sup>70</sup> Duarte and Berlande-Lewis, 698.

“White men saving brown women from brown men.”<sup>71</sup> This was precisely the reasoning that early colonists used to justify the kidnapping and rape of those “brown women.” There was little effort made by early researchers to consider differences in cultural practices between and among indigenous groups, especially those that were matriarchies and ruled by councils of women.

Also, indigenous women are often depicted as homogenous, even though they are as different as the indigenous groups to which they belong. Western feminists, in particular, have often derided indigenous women for keeping to what they perceived as subservient, traditional feminine roles, such as washing clothes and cooking, without asking these same women questions about their cultures.<sup>72</sup> Indigenous women reject the notion that the work they do is subservient and some consider that such roles, “hold their tribes together.”<sup>73</sup> Native American women’s perceptions can be very different from Western views and should not be discounted. Just as Kroeber imposed Western culture on Ishi, Western women need to be careful not to do the same. Indigenous women’s voices are just as important as male voices and should not be discounted.

The same is true in Australia, where all indigenous voices need to be heard and acknowledged. Like Native Americans, the aboriginal populations in Australia were subjected to practices of mass genocide and land-grabbing. In addition, aboriginal stories and culture had largely been dismissed by Westerners, but recent efforts in the last couple of decades have been made to correct this problematic practice.

The beginnings of this process started with a social movement – reconciliation.<sup>74</sup> Reconciliation was a process that attempted to make up for past practices and build, at the very least, a tentative trust between the Aboriginal populations and the descendants of colonists in Australia. Australian archival institutions and professionals saw the importance of the movement and started

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<sup>71</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994): 93.

<sup>72</sup> Devon A. Mihesuah, “Commonality of Difference: American Indian Women and History,” *The American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1996): 19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 216.

their own processes toward reconciliation in their practices. Like their American counterparts, archivists acknowledged that indigenous archival practices may be best suited for the cultural artifacts which belonged to those cultures, and archivists could learn from those practices.<sup>75</sup> People belonging to indigenous populations began to be included in archival discussions. The input of individuals like Faulkhead, who was both a Koorie and trained in Western traditions was also significant.<sup>76</sup> She possessed a unique perspective, as she straddled two cultures and could provide important insight, acting like a kind of idea translator and interpreter. Individuals like Faulkhead are invaluable when attempting to change practices as ingrained as those in the Western archival world.

One important tangible output of the movement was the Trust and Technology project, founded in 2004, in which participants sought to create a link between the archive and Koorie communities.<sup>77</sup> The project sought to, “rely on sources of knowledge and methods of transmission that differ greatly from the knowledge frameworks of the wider community... [and] to enable the development of alternative systems and services which reflect the priorities of Koorie communities.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, the goal was to set aside any preconceived notions of the best way to preserve indigenous oral histories and consider the Koorie perspective. This included stepping away from the Western idea that written texts are superior to oral culture. In doing so, the authors were able to move away from, “the linked dichotomies of orality-literacy, myth-history, savagery-civilisation and tradition-modernity.”<sup>79</sup> This system of dichotomies so prevalent in Western constructions creates problems, as either/or formulations do not leave room for middle areas or even liminal spaces, which then further displaces those people who do not fit into such dichotomies, such as Faulkhead herself and many other individuals attempting to live within and between differing world views. One solution, then, is to change the ways in which metadata and descriptions are created, making these more inclusive of the ideas and descriptors that indigenous populations might use. Another

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<sup>75</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 220.

<sup>76</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 214.

<sup>77</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 222.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 226.

is to change ideas of ownership and to consider a co-ownership between the archive and the community presented in the archive.<sup>80</sup>

The idea of co-ownership is also presented by Anne Gilliland. Gilliland points out that historically, “According to traditional archival theory, archival description plays several roles: elucidating the circumstances of creation and creative intent behind the materials being described, exposing their documentary inter-relationships, supporting user assessment of their reliability and continued authenticity, and promoting findability. There are many complexities inherent in arranging.”<sup>81</sup> Since all of these ideas go into archival description, the importance of opening up archival description to indigenous individuals cannot be underestimated. One particularly important point that Gilliland makes is that being acknowledged as a co-creator means that the person so acknowledged has, “the right to ensure that archival description reflects co-creator perspectives, experiences, expressions, and ways of knowing.”<sup>82</sup> This is a positive practice that moves toward inclusion, rather than exclusion. In addition, such practices dovetail with the continuum model and the archival multiverse.<sup>83</sup>

Gilliland put the ideas considered above into practice in the Metadata Archeology Project between 2010 and 2012.<sup>84</sup> There were many challenges in this initiative, including the evolving process of metadata generation, the varying levels of access allowed by groups, and the diverse ideas among different indigenous communities represented.<sup>85</sup> Gilliland worried about the greater implications for opening up metadata and co-creator rights not only to indigenous communities, but also to other groups that had suffered historical injustices.<sup>86</sup>

Although Gilliland presents this as a concern, this may be an important future step in archival description. In the United States, for example, there are numerous instances of oppressive practices, from

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<sup>80</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 229.

<sup>81</sup> Anne J. Gilliland, “Contemplating Co-creator Rights in Archival Description,” *Knowledge Organization* 39, no. 5 (2012): 341.

<sup>82</sup> Gilliland, 342.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Gilliland, 345.

slavery to Japanese internment camps, and gaining input from communities affected could be a positive step forward in both acknowledging past practices and being more inclusive in future archival endeavors.

The ideas of co-creator inclusion and access to archival description and metadata are steps in a positive direction. McKemmish, Faulkhead, and Russell suggest an inclusive plan to work toward that positive future, which includes:

- an interface within the records-holding system(s), enabling resources to be searched and individual records to be viewed;
- tools for creating annotations and linking them to specific records housed in the records-holding system(s);
- a means to control access to annotations, probably involving the ability to provide multiple views, or redactions, of an annotation for various individuals and groups;
- integration into external systems that provide access to the records which have been annotated, so that, where desired, annotations and annotated records are displayed together.<sup>87</sup>

Such inclusion and access components are very important for providing context for records. Indigenous communities know their stories best and can provide the best metadata, annotations, and other information for greater understanding. Acknowledging this idea and providing the opportunity to augment records aid in building trust between archives and indigenous communities. Rather than being seen as thieves, archivists can and should be viewed as partners in the preservation of oral histories and cultures.

## Conclusion

There does seem to be a best practice developing both in the United States and in Australia with regard to indigenous oral history collections. First, create trust and a partnership between the archives and the indigenous communities represented in collections. The Trust and Technology project provides a model for where one might start in such a process. Second, ask permission before making any written records. Such a practice is an important component in

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 232.

building trust and mutual respect. Third, seek the community's opinion and advice regarding how information is preserved and who may or may not have access to the community's artifacts. Such an action helps build good relationships with indigenous communities and aids in decolonizing research processes. Fourth, provide co-creator rights and access to archival description and metadata, since indigenous communities know their own oral histories best. This creates that important element of hybridity. Finally, continue partnerships with the communities presented in a given collection and allow for multiple ways of viewing archival practices. The Western way is not the only way or necessarily the "right" way to collect, maintain, preserve, and allow access to oral history collections.

Archivists cannot become so set in their ways that they forget that although existing artifacts may not change per se, cultural conceptions and the needs of patrons do evolve. In the coming years, archivists will need to adjust their thinking and be mindful that the cultural climate is becoming one of inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Western methods are far from the only ways to conceptualize collection development and maintenance. In a post-colonial climate in which indigenous and displaced peoples are attempting to find their own identities after years of oppressive practices, it is important that archivists work with and seek to understand the needs of the communities represented in their collections. In essence, being flexible and open to new ideas and practices is essential, not just in oral history collection, but in greater archival practices.

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University and will be receiving her Graduate Certificate in Archival Studies this December from LSU. From her days as an undergraduate at U.C. Berkeley, where she first encountered the story of Ishi, Dr. Catania has retained a deep and abiding interest in oral history collections. Her true passion, however, lies in social justice and the equitable treatment of groups that have historically been dismissed, mistreated, and ignored.

## Appendix A: Ormiston's Recommendations Based on His Research

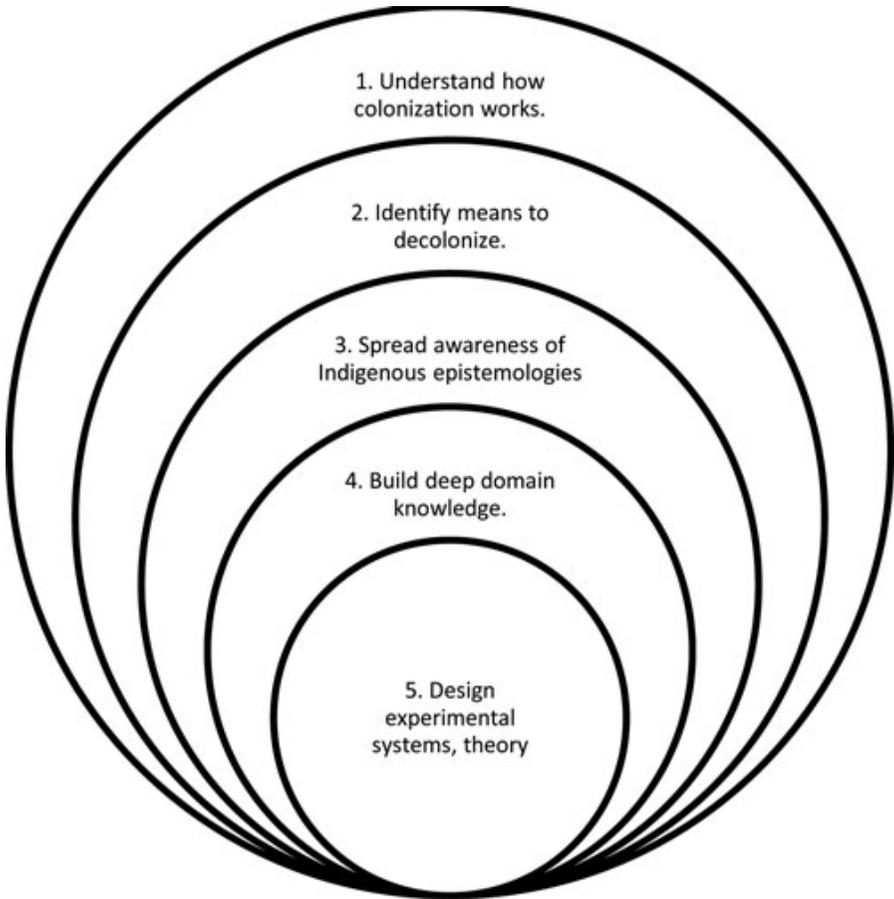
- Less emphasis on the individualistic notion of a “principal researcher” defining a “research question” and more emphasis on community definition/involvement in terms of what needs to be researched (what is transformative about the research for Indigenous people/communities?), and on how this research will be conducted at all stages;
- Inclusion of Indigenous worldviews through methodologies based on the distinctiveness of each “nation”;
- Standards and Principles for their communities/ organizations/institutions that apply to ALL people conducting research in an Indigenous context;
- Recognition that communities OWN the research conducted.
- Copyright is to be retained by the community;
- Commitment to Indigenous People conducting their own research whenever possible. Because social science methodology can never truly be “value free,” questions arise as to whom Indigenous people are being compared and whether the researchers know the culture or history of Indigenous people
- Social movement strategies that ensure responsibility, where the results of research always explore strategies for healing and community development;
- Researchers bringing a “thorough background on the history of colonialism and Euro-centrism and a broad- based knowledge of Indigenous history and culture when engaging in research in our communities” (Gilchrest, 1997);
- Proficiency/ fluency in Aboriginal languages (Battiste & Henderson, 2000);
- Awareness the effects (benefits and risks) the research may have on individuals, communities and Nations;
- Understanding that the elders have wisdom gained through experience, and that they know when it is time for the teachings to be shared;
- Always remembering our values as Tlingit people when conducting research:

- Respect for self and others
- Remember our traditions, our families, sharing, loyalty, pride
- Responsibility to future generations
  - Many truths
  - Care of subsistence areas, care of property
  - Reverence. We have a great word in our culture: haa shageinyaa. This is the great spirit above us. (Soboleff, P., personal communication 2003)

## **Appendix B: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)**

- Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination and can choose their political status and the way they want to develop (article 3).
- Indigenous peoples have the right to keep and develop their distinct characteristics and systems of law. They also have the right, if they want, to take part in the life of the rest of the country (article 4).
- Indigenous peoples shall be free from cultural genocide. Governments shall prevent actions which take away their distinct cultures and identities; the taking of their land and resources; their removal from their land; measures of assimilation; propaganda against them (article 7).
- Indigenous peoples have the right to their distinct identities. This includes the right to identify themselves as Indigenous (article 8).

### Appendix C: Stages in the Technique of Imagining<sup>88</sup>



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<sup>88</sup> Duarte and Berlande-Lewis, 688.