

# Untold Stories 2019: Indigenous Futures and Collaborative Conservation

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Akomawt Educational Initiative and Untold Stories



"We would like to begin this session by respectfully acknowledging that the land on which we are meeting today is the traditional homeland of the Mohegan people. We pay our respects to the elders of this community, both past and present. We are humbled and thankful for their generosity as they allow us to be guests here now."

# Untold Stories 2019: Indigenous Futures and Collaborative Conservation

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Akomawt Educational Initiative and Untold Stories



Documents for today's workshop are  
accessible online at:

<https://www.untoldstories.live/mohegansun-2019>

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Why is this workshop  
necessary?

What do we mean by  
“indigenous futures”?

What do we mean by  
“collaborative conservation”?

# Acknowledging the history of conservation:

- “Our” museums and “our” collections are on occupied indigenous lands.
- Art conservation as practiced within the context of most “western” collecting institutions has been involved in colonial, imperial and genocidal practices that removed cultural heritage and its care from their originating communities
- Art conservation has often emphasized the visual aspects of cultural heritage over more important aspects such as performance, use and handling, storytelling and the continuation of living cultural practices.
- “Scientific” care of collections may be in direct conflict with appropriate cultural care of cultural heritage. Art conservation practices have often negated or disregarded these long-standing forms of cultural care, or have fetishized them.
- Art conservation practices have been extractive, demanding and information from indigenous peoples without appropriate permission or respect.
- Consultation of indigenous peoples has been seen as unnecessary, obstructive or simply pro forma.
- Indigenous knowledge has been co-opted in art conservation practices without assuming or insisting that indigenous peoples craft their own narratives about their own cultural heritage.

# Necessary Framework for Moving Ahead Collaboratively:

- The right to narrate one's cultural heritage is a human right.
- Collaborative conservation depends on respect for indigenous sovereignty and intellectual property.
- Collaboration depends on developing mutually respectful and trusting relationships with indigenous people whose cultural heritage museums may hold.
- Art conservators are only temporary stewards of cultural heritage; as stewards, our responsibility is to the people whose materials we care for.
- Consultation begins as a project is being developed, and the project should change in response to, and in conversation with the indigenous communities whose cultural heritage is at stake.
- Art conservators should not/cannot assume that indigenous peoples should share all that they know about their cultural heritage with us.
- Any information exchanged during the collaborative process should be documented through negotiation and discussion; appropriate sharing of this information should be negotiated and discussed.
- True collaboration requires a willingness to be uncomfortable and to put down defensiveness, guilt and/or any assumption of power.

# Land Acknowledgement

- Traditional protocol- entering a space and thanking that space for hosting us as guests and blessing the things we speak, think, pray and do together.
  - Reflection of kinship human and non human
- Acknowledgments started in the U.S. in 2016 in response to the 94 “calls to action” by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
- Why we practice acknowledgment
  - Gathering together to listen to speeches and watch performances is one way civilizations share values.
  - Raise awareness about histories that are often suppressed or forgotten, establish a context that will highlight a group’s humanity, and recognize the diversity within our own communities.
  - To help pave the way to honoring those with whom we share this land.
  - To impart a foundational teaching in emotional intelligence & show future generations how to repair relationships

# Land Acknowledgement

**“The traditions we champion matter more than ever.” - Angela Flournoy, 2016**

**Identify the traditional custodians of the land on which your event is taking place or the local groups who should be recognized**

**Proceed with care and carry out good research in order to draft a statement**

**Deliver the land acknowledgment with respect**

Adapted from the The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture

# Land Acknowledgement

**“When we benefit and gain things, it is important to also offer and give.”**

- Kanyon Sayers-Roods, 2018

# Land Acknowledgement

- What it does not accomplish
  - Change the effects of dispossession of the nation's first peoples or the legacy of colonialism
  - Be the end goal; or completion of a decolonial, multivocal process.
- When first people, as a political entity, have been displaced, killed, dispossessed
  - These are widowed homelands (Cronon)
  - Necessity to acknowledge that those communities shaped cultural landscape

# Terminology and Power - generalizing

- Native American, American Indian: Terms created by and used for the purpose of the dominant culture in the United States.
- Native People, Indigenous People: Terms that are not tied to the concept of the United States.
- Indian: Term for inhabitants of the continent by colonists and early Americans. Also, used in the writing of the Constitution. Federal laws about Indigenous People in America are known as Federal Indian Law. Legal terminology of Native people as one large group, although incorrect, use the term to this day. Sometimes informal throwback term used within emic situations.
- All of the above terms are generalized terms and do not identify Native populations as they identify themselves. Whenever possible be specific!

# Terminology and Power - a shifting awareness

- Tribe: anthropology term for a culturally distinct society.
- Nation: Term forced on tribes through the Indian Reorganization Act (1934). Gained popularity in the 1970s after AIM in response to the term “tribe”. Gaining popularity amongst Native governments as they reassert sovereignty and self-sufficiency.
- Tribal Nation: Sometimes used by tribal governments as a way to include both.
- Community: social term for all Native People and their families (both 1. Native and 2. non Native People with kinship or marriage ties to a tribal group) within an immediate geographic area.

# Terminology and Power - Our Conservation Language

## Descriptions:

Cultural property vs.  
cultural heritage

Object vs. item vs.  
artifact vs. piece

Dissociation from  
original makers,  
users, locations,  
other related  
parts

## Condition:

- “Ethnographic dirt”
- “Wear” or  
“damage” from use

## Treatments:

- Spit cleaning, chemical treatments
- Storage (inert materials) and display (lack of ventilation)
- Freezing

# A Context for Community, Culture & Survivance



[“Dawnland” a film by the Upstander Project](#)

# Dawnland - Collaborative Storytelling

Effective collaboration involves multiple worldviews. By using Native place names in Native storytelling, another dimension is added to the narrative that includes Indigenous perspectives.



# How do we tell these stories together?



# Engaging with Native Communities

## Building meaningful relationships

- Understanding appropriate cultural authorities, roles
- Modified & flexible timelines
- Honoring time, traditional knowledge with monetary reimbursement and symbols of cultural significance.
- Willingness to work in indigenous space such as homes, tribal community centers, etc.

## Roles in Tribal Communities

- Elder's & Youth Councils
- Tribal Historic Preservation Office
- Tribally operated museums/cultural centers/ archives/ libraries
- Community groups made up of tribal community members

Check your privilege at the door: sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships/trust building require time, humility

# Collaborating is Talking

Do:

Ask “What tribe or nation are you?” “Where are your people from?”

Ask follow up questions and use the terminology used in your conversation partner’s replies.

Use the present tense whenever speaking about the community...in the present.

Be humble and when possible self deprecating.

Practice

Don’t:

Mention your great grandmother who was a full blooded “Cherokee” princess.

Use terms to quantify identity/culture. Ie Ask “How much?” “A real Indian?” Native peoples are citizens of sovereign Nations. Blood quantum is a colonial measure meant to erase Indigenous people out of existence.

Touch any piece of jewelry, clothing, hair, etc. on a Native person’s body.

Assume that all praxis /interactions with Native people revolve around NAGPRA.

**Remember: It is helpful to acknowledge discomfort**

# Collaborating is Talking: Your Turn

Find a partner seated near you.

Use the scripts provided to practice using these suggestions.

Report out to the table:

What are some follow up questions you would have ?

What are some examples of respectful questions? What are some examples of disrespectful questions?

At the conclusion of this initial discussion, how would you end your time together?

"One Becomes the Other" by Jeffrey Gibson  
(Choctaw/Cherokee)



Detail "Shield No. 14"

# Living Collections vs. Ethnographic Objects

the living nature of material culture

the necessity of feeding, speaking to, being with pieces

access to collections and pieces made by ancestors

cultural continuity and living communities

using museum pieces to dance in, sing with, live with

collections and objects indicate survivance to the descendants of the makers



# What is Indigenous Conservation?

Indigenous conservation is built on the precept that the relational is primary and object is secondary.

How do we move from colonial understandings of collections to understandings that incorporate the understandings of Native people? Examples:

Conservation and Community Access  
to Language at Passamaquoddy



Conserving Hero Material Culture  
at the Navajo Nation Museum



# What is Indigenous Conservation?

Jacob Fowler, Montauk Whaleman



"Among other articles, we noticed a riding whip of whale-bone, beautifully carved, and a small curiously inlaid [box?] with red and white cedar. These were the workmanship of the Indian men, when absent on whaling voyages — for be it known to the uninitiated, that these sons of the forest, having laid aside their arrows, are so exceedingly dexterous in the use of the harpoon, that at times, the settlement is destitute of men — every mother's son of them being out on a whaling expedition from New London."

- Uncas Monument Commemoration, 1842

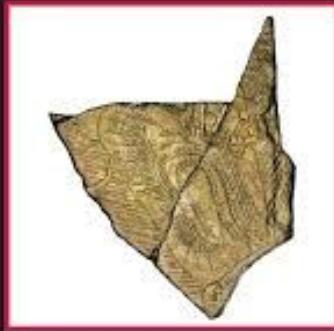


Whale Teeth—presented by  
"Crangs" Edwin C. Fowler, a Mohegan  
whaler, in 1884. (#280)

“What if archaeologists were asked to explain the *continued presence* of descendant communities 500 years after Columbus *instead of their disappearance or marginality*? That’s a much more interesting story.”

-Mike Wilcox





# American Antiquity



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## THEORY IN COLLABORATIVE INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY: INSIGHTS FROM MOHEGAN

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### Abstract

There is little doubt that Indigenous, collaborative, and community-based archaeologies offer productive means of reshaping the ways in which archaeologists conduct research in North America. Scholarly reporting, however, typically places less emphasis on the ways in which Indigenous and collaborative versions of archaeology influence our interpretations of the past and penetrate archaeology at the level of theory. In this article, we begin to fill this void, critically considering archaeological research and teaching at Mohegan in terms of the deeper impacts that Indigenous knowledge, interests, and sensitivities make via collaborative projects. We frame the collaboration as greater than the sum of its heterogeneous components, including its diverse human participants. From this perspective, the project produces new and valuable orientations toward current theoretical debates in archaeology. We address these themes as they relate to ongoing research and teaching at several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sites on the Mohegan Reservation in Uncasville, Connecticut.

# How do we move forward? Decolonizing and Indigenizing Conservation



# Closing Action Items: Decolonizing Conservation

Acknowledge

Ask

Practice

# Closing Action Items: Decolonizing Conservation

## Acknowledge:

- The history of colonialism and genocide that has disenfranchised indigenous people from their cultural heritage and lands.
- That the field conservation has been complicit in this history and needs to repair this history.
- That we do not and should not have all of the cultural knowledge associated with the cultural heritage in our care; this is indigenous intellectual and community property.

## Ask:

- Do I have cultural/legal authority to document, conserve and circulate information about this cultural heritage? If not, how to I respectfully ask for permission (that ideally grows out of collaboration)?
- Whose history and whose current comfort and needs are being prioritized with our work? If this project or treatment only prioritizes non-indigenous benefits, is this ethical?
- How can I ensure that I do not speak for people who should (and can) speak for themselves?

## Practice:

- Being uncomfortable with our privilege. We are caretakers of this cultural heritage due to historical circumstance. Our benefit is at the loss of indigenous communities.
- Asking what indigenous communities wish for and need with their cultural heritage. How can our work be part of their cultural continuance and thriving?
- Humility and reverence towards the cultural heritage and the peoples who have cared for it over millennia.

# Closing Action Items: Indigenizing Conservation

Honor

Listen

Sustain

# Closing Action Items: Indigenizing Conservation

## Honor:

- The generations before us by asking how did the maker want this piece used? How can we fulfill that intention?
- The generations after us by building institutional policies that are dedicated to educating, training , and providing paths for young people now and for as long as the field exists.

## Listen:

- To tribal communities in all of their forms: political, cultural, social.
- To Indigenous people with cultural grounding and academic grounding. Living in their homeland and inhabiting other spaces. Elders and youth. Mothers and fathers. People who speak their tribal languages and people who are learning their languages. People who go to ceremony and people who go to church. And all of the people living in between.
- In spaces that are Indigenous; moving out of institutional and colonial buildings and working in community and cultural centers, in sovereign landscapes, and when invited, in homes. Remember that in these spaces you are a guest.

## Sustain:

- Relationships with tribal communities by promoting opportunities for institution-wide collaboration.
- Collections by creating policies for community access to feed, orient , bless and interact with pieces both in colonial and non-colonized spaces.

# “Guidelines for the Treatment of Sacred Objects”

Heid E. Erdrich



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Please take our paper or online survey  
before you leave.

<https://www.untoldstories.live/mohegansun-2019>

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# Thank you!

