

*86th Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology
Online*

CASE STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ETHICS

*for the Sixteenth Annual Intercollegiate
Ethics Bowl Competition
April 15, 2021*



PREPARED BY

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, APRIL 15



FINAL ROUND

1:00-3:00 PM

Virtual Location TBD

*University of Alabama vs. University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign*

CASE ONE



Professor Carl Short, an esteemed professor of anthropology at Edgewater University, has directed fieldwork at some of the most renowned Agadean sites in northern Asia. Given his positive standing among both the academic community and the local indigenous community, Professor Short has been able to carry out countless well-funded expeditions to Agadean sites throughout his career.

Professor Short's latest mentee is Gabriel Reynolds. Unfamiliar with the sites excavated by his advisor, Gabriel spends his first year going through Professor Short's collections and databases. Enthusiastic about potential topics for his dissertation research, Gabriel approaches Professor Short about the upcoming excavation season in northern Asia. Despite worries about Gabriel's lack of international experience, Professor Short agrees to let him join the project. Throughout the rest of the year, Gabriel learns about U.S. historic preservation laws in classes with other faculty.

Once summer arrives, Gabriel travels to Asia. One night, after working for a few weeks, Gabriel walks into what he thought was an unoccupied lab and finds Professor Short alone and in the midst of cutting off fragments from an Agadean textile. Uncertain about what he witnessed, Gabriel seeks clarification from Brian Pierce, a senior staff member, telling him "Earlier today, I saw Professor Short cut a few pieces off the textile we found a couple weeks ago. I didn't hear about any conversations with the Agade about sampling." Gabriel asks, "Is this normal?"

"You are worrying about nothing. I am sure Professor Short already consulted with them," replies Brian. The following day, as Gabriel works on labeling artifacts in the lab, one of the visiting Agade leaders notices the freshly tattered edges on the recently excavated textile. Perplexed by the artifact's condition, the Agade leader asks Gabriel, "Do you remember if this textile was recovered with such a jagged edge? This looks like it was recently cut!" Unsure about how to respond, Gabriel nervously replies, "Oh, wow... I see. I'm not entirely sure. I'll ask Professor Short about it."

Later in the week, Gabriel approaches him, saying "Dr. Short, one of the Agade leaders asked me about the cut edge on the textile. I didn't know what to say, but I told him I would bring it up with you." "What's there to talk about?" replies Professor Short, irritated by the news. Gabriel asks, "I mean, destructive sampling would require consultation with the Agade, right? Isn't that what we would do back home with artifacts and indigenous communities?"

"Look, Gabriel, you have no idea what you are talking about," Professor Short says. "The laws in this country are different than those back home. The dates from those samples will transform our knowledge about Agade history!" exclaims Professor Short. Agitated, he adds, "You know, I am starting to wonder if you wanted to come here to learn about Agade culture or to simply cause problems. Don't bother me with this again. I wouldn't want it to negatively impact your academic progress."

Gabriel is certain that the lack of consultation poses a significant problem, but he also does not want to jeopardize his future in the program.

CASE TWO



350 years ago, explorers reached the shores of Rogenia, an island in the Pacific. At the time of their arrival, indigenous Rogenians were wary about the men aboard the two ships. Not long after the establishment of settlement camps, the explorers experienced difficulties procuring sufficient resources. To address this need, Captain Thomas Higdon, the expedition leader, executed a plan to capture able-bodied individuals from the Rogenian population. In response, Rogenians resisted and fought off the explorers for months. Ultimately, the arrival of additional ships carrying men and resources led to the capture of several hundred men and women.

Exasperated by their refusal to comply, Captain Higdon mandated that all captives serve fixed terms of indentured servitude. Despite Captain Higdon's moral objection to slavery, indentured servitude morphed into a cruel system that effectively enslaved thousands of Rogenians for two centuries. During this time, Rogenia became an international hub for trade. Today, over 100 years after the abolishment of slavery, Rogenia is an independent nation.

During the last 75 years, archaeological and historical surveys have been conducted across the island. Housed in the Rogenian National Museum, these surveys have resulted in the collection and documentation of thousands of artifacts, buildings, and landscapes from prehistoric and historic periods. These preservation efforts are currently led by museum employees Shawn Corrales—a prehistoric archaeologist and director of the anthropology division—and Aimee Williams—a historical archaeologist and director of the history division.

Recent unrest in Rogenia has resulted in both civil and unruly protests, some of which have led to a larger call for the destruction of any and all symbols of oppression. Sympathetic to these calls, Shawn encourages the removal of offensive monuments by any means possible—whether through civil appeals—or by force. Stunned by Shawn's public calls, Aimee privately meets with him and asks, "Shawn, what are you doing? As archaeologists, we are supposed to preserve and document all aspects of the archaeological record—not encourage their destruction!" Shawn replies, "I appreciate your concern, however, what you are missing is that these monuments are not historically accurate. They are propagandistic interpretations of the past."

Aimee then adds, "Aren't all monuments created from an interpretation of history? How can you—an archaeologist who has previously argued for the preservation of other symbols of oppression from archaeological sites in other countries—stand here and dictate what should be destroyed?! Moreover, I would argue that 'sanitizing' the past by calling for a cavalier toppling of these monuments by unruly crowds is not only unsafe, but also strikes at the record we are duty-bound to preserve!" She adds, "As a descendant of those persecuted by the colonizers, I believe that we can't adopt a simplistic, one-sided view of the past. A complete story is required, no matter how painful the events. This is the only way that we as a country can achieve healing and reconciliation."

Upon hearing of Shawn and Aimee's disagreements, the museum director invites them both to a private meeting with the museum's board of trustees and local politicians. Aimee is not sure how she should make her case.

CASE THREE



Cristina Turner, a recent M.A. graduate from Hillside University in the southeastern United States, was hired as an assistant exhibition designer for the prestigious Southeastern Archaeological Museum (SAM). After observing Cristina's success with a number of popular exhibitions, Dr. Joshua Smith, Cristina's supervisor and Curator of Anthropology, recommends that she be considered for a promotion. Immediately after submitting his recommendation to the museum director, Joshua notifies Cristina and the other employees in his department that he plans to leave for a job across the country. Although she is saddened by the unexpected news, Cristina expresses her gratitude stating, "Josh, thank you so much for everything you have done for me. I really can't imagine having a better advocate and ally here. Has there been any talk of who will replace you?" Joshua responds, "Of course, although I don't know who the board is considering for my position. Don't worry about it, I'm sure you'll be in great hands. This museum has a long-standing reputation for taking care of its employees and attracting the most talented museum professionals."

Shortly after Joshua's departure, the board of directors hires Dr. Samantha Ward, a highly-regarded and well-known museum professional, to serve as both Curator of Anthropology and the exhibition design supervisor. During Samantha's first couple months at the SAM, Cristina dismisses her concerns about the supervisory change—everything was running smoothly across the museum. Shortly into Samantha's tenure, however, the SAM was struck by a sudden decline in museum attendance and annual memberships stemming from an economic recession. Concern grew among the museum's board of directors as many long-time donors halted their monetary support of the museum. With the museum's financial situation growing dire, Cristina plans to seek reassurance from Samantha about her future, as she would have instinctually done with her previous supervisor.

At the end of the work day, Cristina knocks on Samantha's office door and asks, "Excuse me, Samantha, do you have a few minutes to talk?" "I'm a little busy right now, but sure—what's on your mind?" she responds. Cristina inquires, "I know that the museum is currently under financial stress, but I am wondering if you heard anything from the board regarding the promotion request submitted by my previous supervisor." Samantha replies, "The board did get back to me, however, I personally am not so sure you're in a position for a promotion." "What do you mean?" asks Cristina. Samantha explains, "Sweetie, based on your work on this current project, I really don't think you can handle the increased responsibility. Besides, I have someone else in mind."

Stunned by her response, Cristina stands in silence. Samantha continues by stating, "Look, you should be grateful you even have a job. Do you think you're smarter and better than everyone else? I really don't care for your uppityness and attempts to get ahead."—a subtle reference to Cristina being African-American. Completely shocked, Cristina makes her way out of the office in tears.

After reporting the incident to Human Resources and a subsequent HR investigation, Cristina learns that the museum ultimately declined to pursue action given their inability to corroborate her story. Feeling like her position at the museum is now in jeopardy—much less any potential for a promotion—Cristina has no idea how to proceed.

CASE FOUR



Dr. Samir Hassan is an esteemed and popular tenured professor of Near Eastern archaeology at Kensington College, a prestigious liberal arts institution in the northeastern United States. Beyond his scholarship, during his time at Kensington, Samir has developed a reputation for coordinating strong fundraising campaigns on behalf of the college.

In the wake of another successful campaign, Kensington's chief financial officer Lawrence Staley floats the idea of opening an archaeological museum with Samir leading the project. Samir responds, "I'm honored to be considered, but what exactly will we be displaying in this museum? And how is the museum supposed to enlarge the university's endowment?"

"I'm glad you asked. It won't be a problem. One of our board members, Frank Lewis [a long-time donor to Kensington and well-known philanthropist] is connected to important people with ties to the Near East and can borrow artifacts for rotating exhibitions" Lawrence replies. "Regarding your second question, Frank persuasively argued that an archaeological museum would attract renewed interest in Kensington's archaeology program which translates to new donors and students." Fascinated by both the seemingly easy access to artifacts on a revolving basis for museum exhibitions and the prospect of an expanded academic program, Samir agrees to oversee the establishment of the museum and asks for the names of Frank's contacts to make preliminary introductions.

Upon receiving the list, Samir realizes that he doesn't recognize anyone. After some extensive internet sleuthing, Samir is shocked to learn that Frank's associates have been tied to the illicit trafficking of antiquities. Alarmed by these revelations, Samir decides to contact Frank first to address his concerns rather than go directly to university administrators. After relaying what he found out, Samir asks Frank if he was aware of these activities.

"Listen, Samir, I appreciate your concerns, I really do, however, you have to understand that these artifacts were not so much 'trafficked' as they were 'rescued' from the ongoing conflicts in the region. Please understand that these individuals are only interested in preserving the past," Frank says. "Besides, you have to understand that if this museum doesn't happen, fundraising efforts will be damaged. We already sent out the press release, remember? Now, we wouldn't want that ... would we?"

Stunned by the boldfaced attempts at coercion, Samir feels paralyzed by Frank's response. Samir knows that any association with these trafficked artifacts can also adversely affect the reputation of Kensington's administrators and board. Furthermore, if he is complicit in this scheme, his reputation in the archaeological community could be seriously damaged.

Knowing that Frank has great influence over the Kensington board and Kensington's strong desire for the museum, Samir is completely baffled about how he should move forward.

CASE FIVE



Brian McCourt, a graduate from a reputable Master of Arts program in museum studies, recently landed his dream job with El Museo Dorado Nacional, a world-renowned museum in Spain. As a newly minted assistant curator for the Ethnology and Archaeology collections, Brian has already developed a sterling reputation for both his intimate knowledge of the museum's vast collections of prehistoric and historic artifact from countries across Asia and Africa and skill with engaging media and the general public.

One day, Brian gives a guided tour of the museum's collections to journalists from El Diario España, a national newspaper in Spain. Upon the conclusion of the tour, one of journalists asks, "What we've seen is truly impressive—are there any exhibitions scheduled over the next year?" Beaming with excitement, Brian replies, "Yes, of course! Our team is in the process of featuring a special exhibition on late prehistoric wooden figures from western Africa and southern Asia." Hoping to pique the journalists' interest, Brian promptly leads them into the storage room housing the artifacts for the special exhibit.

To their horror, the artifacts were stored inside a partially flooded storage room with water damage on the walls and ceilings and dust throughout. Shocked by the conditions, another journalist demands an explanation. Caught off guard, Brian quips, "Well, we don't have enough funding to maintain ideal conditions for all the artifacts in our care." Noticing the tension as he walks past the storage room, Dr. Jaime Castro Riojas, head curator for the Ethnology and Archaeology collections, steps in and says, "I'm sorry, but we will have to end this impromptu tour. Mr. McCourt has other matters to attend to."

After the visit, the journalists publish a damning exposé disclosing the inadequate conditions at El Museo Dorado Nacional. This news sparks international outrage and condemnation from local postcolonial activists within Spain. Ana Barreras Murillo, one of the activists, confronts Jaime and Brian during a press conference and shouts, "If you don't have the money to adequately house these artifacts, then they should be repatriated back to the countries they were taken from!" Unmoved by this suggestion, Jaime retorts, "These supposedly 'less-than-ideal' conditions are among the best in Spain and Europe as a whole! Besides, repatriation is out of the question. Those countries do not have the appropriate facilities and expertise to properly curate and safeguard these materials. They are better off and safer here in Spain!"

After the dramatic press conference, Jaime instructs Brian not to engage with any activists or journalists regarding the museum's collections, implying that his employment with the museum would be terminated and his reputation ruined if he does not comply. Although he feels like more—and not less—discourse with the public should take place, Brian is nonetheless shaken by the prospect of losing his promising career as a museum professional.

CASE SIX



Julia Grey Eyes is an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at Hamilton State University and curator of the department's archaeological museum. She is also a tribal elder and a NAGPRA tribal representative for the Tokori Tribe. In reviewing the university's NAGPRA inventory, Julia discovers major discrepancies between the museum's records and what was reported to the National NAGPRA Program Office. She also finds that lineal descendants, tribes, and Native American organizations were never contacted.

The department's NAGPRA inventory was completed by a senior faculty member, Professor Michael O'Conner, more than a decade before Julia arrived at Hamilton State. Michael is an outspoken critic of NAGPRA and is known to make insensitive and stereotypical comments about Indigenous peoples in his classroom. He had tried—but failed—to derail Julia's tenure case several years ago. Currently, the chair of the department is Vickie Jones, one of Michael's former students and his close collaborator.

Julia knows that over 1,000 human burials and associated funerary goods from 50+ archaeological sites remain unreported in the department's NAGPRA inventory. Since Julia's arrival at Hamilton State, she has spent all of her time outside of the classroom working hard to inventory the entire collection. This work has involved the laborious task of transferring artifacts from decomposing, corrugated boxes and brown-paper bags to archival plastic bags and acid-free curation boxes.

After 13 years of curatorial work, Julia estimates that more than two thirds of the department's collection were not inventoried and remained unexamined since they were originally excavated. In other words, the reported departmental NAGPRA inventory was far from complete. To make matters worse, her students tell her that Native American human skeletons encased in dirt and plaster jackets are laying on the floor of the attic of one of the oldest buildings on campus.

Julia feels obligated to her tribe, her family, and her ancestors to report these NAGPRA inconsistencies. On the other hand, she is up for promotion and letters of support from Michael and Vickie are critical to the university's final decision. As a bi-cultural Native American archaeologist, Julia is caught between her tribal responsibilities and her promotion to full professor. Julia knows that it is difficult enough to get Michael and Vickie to provide an unbiased review of her dossier. Reporting that the Department of Anthropology had failed to comply with NAGPRA would undoubtedly result in the denial of her promotion to full professor.

Given this conflict between her professional and personal life, Julia is unsure how to move forward.