



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

February 17, 1997

Ms. Tessie Naranjo, Chair  
NAGPRA Review Committee  
P.O. Box 1807  
Española, NM 87532

Dear Tessie:

The Society for American Archaeology thanks the NAGPRA Review Committee for its invitation to participate in discussion and formulation of recommendations concerning the disposition of culturally unidentified human remains. As you know, SAA has suggested that it may be easier to resolve the issue of culturally unidentified remains once we all have more experience in the repatriation of affiliated remains. However, we are aware of the Review Committee's charge to make recommendations on this matter and we appreciate the Committee's desire to accomplish this task. SAA stands ready to participate with other organizations in a process of dialogue and consensus formation, and we believe that such a process can help the Committee achieve its goal. We offer several recommendations that might make the suggested dialogue more immediately productive, and some questions that might be considered when this forum is organized.

It is our opinion that, as currently proposed, the list of potential participants is too large for effective dialogue. SAA believes that representatives from a smaller set of directly involved institutions and organizations would better achieve the goal the Review Committee has before it. In particular, representatives from Native American organizations (NARF, Keepers of the Treasures), museums and other repository institutions (AAM, AAU), and the archaeological and physical anthropological communities (SAA, AAPA) would best represent the range of opinion surrounding this issue. These are also the groups that represent the majority of the individuals and organizations that have an ongoing interest in this dialogue. While the other individuals and specific institutions on the distribution list of your letter have valuable perspectives, we feel that information from such sources could be solicited (formally or informally) by a smaller convened group made up of representatives of the organizations mentioned above. Limiting the participants to national organizations will ensure the fairest and most representative coverage.

The foregoing is particularly salient in light of the time frame suggested in your letter. As you are abundantly aware, this is not an easy issue upon which to achieve consensus. The likelihood of agreement being reached would be substantially enhanced with a smaller working group. Nonetheless, given past experience with this issue, we question the feasibility of accomplishing this goal in the period of one month. A March deadline seems unrealistic, at best. Perhaps a May or June deadline for bringing the process to completion would provide a more reasonable amount of time within which to make progress on such an important issue.

As you are aware, convening such a group, especially on short notice, will entail considerable expense as well as an investment of considerable time. In light of the importance of this issue, perhaps the Review Committee could encourage NPS to provide a grant to an organization that would agree to coordinate this effort in order to cover travel and meeting costs. (Another benefit of a smaller group is that

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it would be able to accomplish its work more quickly and the meeting cost would be less.) In sum, the Society for American Archaeology suggests that if the issues of the size, timing, and funding of meetings can be resolved, the approach you suggest is likely to be productive in bringing the lingering issue of repatriation of culturally unidentified remains closer to resolution.

Once again, the Society for American Archaeology would like to thank the NAGPRA Review Committee for the invitation to participate in this process. We are optimistic about the potential outcome of the proposed dialogue, and hope that you and the NAGPRA Review Committee will consider the points we have raised as you help shape the proposed discussion. We look forward to future communication and collaboration on this topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lipe".

William Lipe  
President, Society for American Archaeology