

WORKING TOGETHER ON RACE AND RACIALISM IN AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Kurt Dongoske and Larry Zimmerman

Kurt Dongoske is Director and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Zuni Heritage and Historic Preservation Office, and the Principal Investigator for Zuni Cultural Resource Enterprise, Zuni, New Mexico. Larry Zimmerman is Professor of Anthropology and Museum Studies and Public Scholar of Native American Representation at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art.

The idea for this thematic volume of *The SAA Archaeological Record* was set in motion when Roger Echo-Hawk submitted his article “Working Together on Race” for consideration to the Working Together column. At first reading, I (Kurt), as associate editor for the column, was not sure that Roger’s article was appropriate for the Working Together column, in part because it seemed to be directed at a very small subset of the SAA membership. Yet the message that Roger was sending in his essay struck me as very important and I continued to think that his points were necessary for the SAA membership to hear, contemplate, and respond to.

I telephoned Roger and we talked about his article. I tried to convince him to rewrite it so that it would appeal to a broader audience. Roger was adamant about his artistic privilege to present his message in his terms and wanted the article to appear as written. After reflecting on Roger’s position as an artist, followed by a long conversation with Larry Zimmerman about Roger’s article, the three of us agreed that it would be appropriate to publish Roger’s essay, but that the article needed to be contextualized rather than appear as a stand-alone piece. As a result, Larry Zimmerman and I presented the idea of an edited volume on race and racialism in American archaeology to Andrew Duff, the Editor of *The SAA Archaeological Record*. Andrew gave us his blessing. Larry and I proceeded to ask a number of colleagues to write accompanying articles on race and racialism in American archaeology or to write an article in reaction to Roger’s essay. The following collection of essays that comprise this thematic volume is the result.

The premise of this thematic volume is based on an ever-growing consensus in anthropology that the concept of race is best described as an expression of cultural ideology and not a biological reality. Within the past ten years, professional organizations such as the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, the American Anthropological Association, and the American Sociological Association have adopt-

ed formal position statements on race. All acknowledge the status of race as a cultural idea and not as a valid biological description of humankind. The Society for American Archaeology, however, has for the most part remained silent on the issue of race and racialism. In archaeology, the lack of useful professional discourse on race means that the strongest currents of social practice will necessarily shape the production of professional archaeology. With the establishment of new paradigms like “Indigenous archaeology,” “community-based” archaeology, and the systematic attention to “stakeholders,” it is increasingly apparent that SAA needs to encourage a useful and wide-ranging dialogue on race. In the absence of such a discourse, professional archaeology will necessarily defer to the status quo of mainstream social uses of race. The national media discussion about the human remains known as Kennewick Man, for example, focused almost exclusively on issues of race and the putative racial identity-assignment of those remains; American professional archaeology apparently had nothing to say other than stating that if Kennewick Man was pre-Columbian, then it must be Native American. Searching the extensive SAA positioning on Kennewick Man, one searches in vain for any input on race as culture versus race as biology.

The thematic volume begins with an article entitled “Deconstructing Roger Echo-Hawk (sort of),” in which Larry Zimmerman provides us with a background for understanding Roger Echo-Hawk’s essay, defines Closet Chickens, and provides us with useful additional definitions. Roger Echo-Hawk’s essay follows and challenges our notions about the usefulness of race as a meaningful construct for archaeology. Paul Mullins responds to Echo-Hawk by proposing that the key question in any scholarship of race is how differentiating rhetoric is used to leverage inequality between social groups. Carol McDavid offers us her professional use of racial constructs as a means of prompting people to examine their individual ideas about race. She also shares with us her own personal views of race and how they have evolved from expe-

riences as a child witnessing the civil rights movement. Eldon Yellowhorn provides us with his personal experience as a Native American starting out in archaeology in the early 1980s and now comparing those past experiences with his role as a professor of archaeology. Anne Kakaliouras presents a very thoughtful analysis of the concept of race from the perspective of physical anthropology and bioarchaeology. The

thematic volume concludes with an essay entitled “Merciless Greetings” by Roger Echo-Hawk, in which he reacts to the other essays and challenges the Society for American Archaeology to promote a meaningful discussion about race amongst its membership. Finally, Roger asks the question of whether the SAA should join other major anthropology organizations in producing a formal statement on race.

DECONSTRUCTING ROGER ECHO-HAWK (SORT OF)

Larry J. Zimmerman

Larry Zimmerman is Professor of Anthropology and Museum Studies and Public Scholar of Native American Representation at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art.

For most readers, Roger Echo-Hawk’s essay will need at least some illumination. The voices of both S&S and Kennewickman reflect Roger’s “split personality.” Roger is a trained historian, a composer, a poet, and a member of the Pawnee nation, but he has not been an Indian for several years (Echo-Hawk and Zimmerman 2006: 662). (Yeah, I know. That last one probably surprises you, and it is related to the point of his essay!) He is no stranger to archaeology, observing and interacting with us since at least the 1980s. His first encounter with attitudes of archaeologists came when he worked closely with the Native American Rights Fund to repatriate remains of his ancestors from the Nebraska State Historical Society, the Smithsonian, and other places they were held. He also served as an archaeological monitor for construction of the Denver International Airport and handled repatriation for the Denver Art Museum and the Colorado Historical Society. Roger wrote a profoundly challenging essay about oral tradition published in *American Antiquity* (Echo-Hawk 2000), as well as a useful and thought-provoking guide on repatriation (2002). Like it or not, Roger knows enough about our discipline and how we think to make more than a few archaeologists uncomfortable!

Roger has been worrying about race-related issues for a long time. In late 2004, he and I began a discussion on race and

archaeology spinning off discussions by members of a Yahoo Group, the Closet Chickens (see below for an explanation), about the racialization of American archaeology. A news release had prompted intense discussion by the Chickens, recounting discovery in Mexico of remains supposedly more than 12,000 years old. The investigator and the reporter both described the remains in racial terms, the former contending that “[Native Americans] cannot claim to have been the first people there [in America]” and the reporter asserted that the findings were similar to those of the scientists who “won” the Kennewick court case (Rincon 2004). If you are curious, the spirited Closet Chickens discussion partly ended up in the article Roger and I wrote for *American Indian Quarterly’s* special issue on decolonizing American archaeology (Echo-Hawk and Zimmerman 2006). You may also wish to read some of his other writing on race (Echo-Hawk 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d), several of them with archaeology-related content. His most recent pieces (Echo-Hawk 2009a, 2009b) are especially challenging!

What became apparent during the discussion was that Roger was able to play the anthropologist, on the outside-looking-in at a group of archaeologists, and with his focused questions, he forced us to compare our “reals” to our ideals and our good intentions to the sometimes questionable implications