

# ARCHAEOLOGY AND MY MISSION TO EMPOWER THE YOUTH OF MY COMMUNITY

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I am passionate about helping people and teaching them how to empower themselves. I grew up believing the only way I could change the world was to become a medical doctor. In order to change the world, I had to understand the people of the world.

I entered Howard University as a double major studying history and biology. Biology proved to be a barrier between me and my hopes. At the end of my first year, I tearfully informed my mother that I could not become a medical doctor. My mother, who is a museum professional, simply said, "Try Anthropology as a major. It has the things you like: history and science." Needless to say, I took my mother's advice and never looked back.

In my third year of college, I took my first archaeology class, Introduction to Archaeology, and I was captivated from the first day. It was the one class I looked forward to every week. I will never forget the second day of class, when my professor, Dr. Bruce Dahlin, announced that he took one student on an all expenses paid trip every year to Mexico to learn how to excavate. The only requirements were that you had to obtain an A in his class and take Archaeology II in the spring. I inquired regularly about my performance in the class and volunteered for extra credit work, to ensure the highest grade in the class. I went to his office hours and made up questions to ask him, to ensure he did not forget I really wanted to be the one student to go on the excavation. I received an A for that course and felt like I was half way to my future as an archaeologist.

I was one of only two students who registered for the spring session of Archaeology II. The other student dropped the course after being handed a site report to read in the second week. The next week, my professor informed me I would be going to Mexico, provided I finished the course and earned an A. That summer, I went to the Yucatán and fell in love with archaeology!

The following year, still excited about my new-found passion,

I had to make a decision. Was I going to pursue archaeology or move in a different direction? As many undergraduates know, this is the big question. What am I really going to do with my life?

I looked at a number of different factors. First, I had never seen or met any other archaeologists other than my professor and the two archaeologists I worked with in Mexico. Second, since I had never heard of archaeology before I entered college, was the field of archaeology a lucrative career choice? Third, I had never read any works written by or heard of any African American archaeologists, even though I was a student at Howard University and had firsthand knowledge of the African American Burial Ground Project in New York City. Every African American from Howard University working on the project was either a physical anthropologist or a historian; none were archaeologists. As a student, I had learned about the project from a physical anthropological standpoint. If I had been introduced to the archaeological side of this project, I feel my choice of archaeology as a career option would have been better informed.

Worried that I was dreaming, not being realistic, and concerned about the viability of a career in archaeology; upon completion of my undergraduate degree, I chose to pursue a Master's degree in history...a dream deferred. In the words of Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun? (Hughes, 1951)

So, I began graduate studies in History at Howard University and felt it was the best decision for me at the time. As a historian, I could become a teacher or go into the field of museum studies. There are always jobs available in both of these fields. In addition, I felt my talents would be best served as a teacher, empowering children and helping them reach their true potential. For the next two years, I taught sixth grade in Washington D.C. and went to school full time.

However, I felt a void. Though I truly was passionate about working with students and loved being a teacher, I was not content with my life's direction. I told my students every day they could be anything they dreamed; the only thing stopping them was themselves. But how could I be a role model without leading by example?

I had deferred my dream long enough. I applied to several doctoral programs in Archaeology. Excited about my new adventure and supported by very few people, I pursued my dream of becoming an archaeologist.

I began my first semester at the University of California, Berkeley in the fall of 2003. After my first semester in the program, I remember thinking: "How do archaeologists empower and change the lives of contemporary people in a meaningful way?" The university I attended required all students to conduct outreach in the local community. This was one of the aspects of the program that had attracted me. When it came time for me to participate in outreach, I felt this would be my way to empower contemporary people.

The outreach program was conducted at a local school with sixth-grade students. The students enjoyed the lessons and the hands-on activities that taught them about archaeology. After completion of the program activities, the lead teacher ended her goodbye with "See you next year." Her parting statement led me to inquire about the department's relationship with the school. I found out that a partnership between the school and the Anthropology Department had existed for several years.

All that week, I reflected on how I grew up never learning about archaeology. In my community, there were no archaeology programs, and the subject was never mentioned in school. I felt it was my mission to change the situation. From that time forward, I would make sure that children in my local community would have the opportunity to learn about archaeology from someone who looks like them.

In conjunction with my advisor, I created an archaeological outreach program, every semester, when I returned home to Washington, D.C., I conducted my outreach with local schools. This was the beginning of Archaeology in the Community, Inc.

After partnering with local D.C. and Maryland universities and museums on archaeological education programs, I quickly realized there was not only a need but a demand for archaeology education. I figured the only way to make a real impact was to turn my grassroots organization into a company. In 2009, I established Archaeology in the Community, Inc. as a nonprofit company in the District of Columbia; with the programming being focused primarily in the Washington, D.C. and Maryland area.



*Dr. Jones helping a student create a stratigraphy chart, Washington, DC. Picture taken by Jasmin Whitting.*

I work with local schools, community centers, churches, and other organizations to provide free archaeological education to local children. The organization conducts a variety of programs for children: one-day classroom visits, archaeology clubs, after school programs, and four week in-school programs. Recently, we have expanded to offer educational seminars for undergraduate students majoring in anthropology. The seminars are created to teach college students about the job market and how to adequately prepare themselves for life after college.

Managing a nonprofit can be very challenging. My typical days are not spent behind a desk. Instead, most of my time is spent in someone else's classroom (teaching archaeology) or in someone else's office (negotiating how I am going to provide programming for their organization).

The job is not easy. Running a nonprofit means that, at the end of the day, I am constantly worried about how to raise enough capital to keep my dream going. However, when a child says "Dr. Jones, I want to be an archaeologist just like you," it lets me know I'm doing the right thing and that I am making a difference.

My advice to future archaeologists is to follow your dreams. Do what you love and what you are passionate about. And most importantly, be patient. I realized my dream. I am a doctor (of archaeology) who loves helping children learn about archaeology. I am passionate about empowering future generations through the knowledge and perspectives only archaeology can provide.

### References Cited

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