American groups who first began to define the issues that were about to confront us all. Each scholarly discipline is now challenged to reexamine its premises and ethics, a thanatopsis if you will not unlike that of Remington’s “The Frontier Trooper” a little over one hundred years ago: In another’s death we not only must contemplate our own mortality but face the pretensions of our own points of view.

References


THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE: THE REBURIAL ISSUE AS AN ISSUE

WORLD COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Humankind is forever questioning, analyzing, and studying its history, ancestors, and any other remnants of the past that may assist in the endless search for self-knowledge. The thirst is insatiable. Every object must be unearthed in case a missing link to the past or a clue to the future might be uncovered. The Indian peoples of the Americas have been of special interest to researchers, and the reburial issue has been an especially contentious subject of debate recently. In this essay, we attempt to explain the conflicting emotions surrounding the treatment of Indian remains and question why white people continue to betray the Indians even after death. Indians cannot find peace in the afterlife if their bones are exhumed and put on display in glass cases in museums thousands of miles from their birthplace. In this article the authors explore some of the excuses used by scientists, archaeologists, and others, in the name of research, to justify the disinterment of many sacred burial grounds. There is also a comparison made between the situation of blacks in America relative to the plight of Native Americans. Issues such as “dominant ideology” and the “500 years or 1992” also are discussed within the context of the reburial issue.

In “The Sacred and the Profane,” the authors make various recommendations in resolving the reburial issue, and promote the active involvement of indigenous peoples in the form of a commission designed to oversee the conservation and preservation of native artifacts and culture.

Remember the old song, “El preso número nueve”: “y si vuelvo a nacer, yo lo vuelvo a matar” (“If you are born again, I’ll kill you once more”)? Many Indians have been resurrected from their graves by grave diggers and archaeologists for years. A recent National Geographic article (1) claimed that there are hundreds of thousands of Indians lying in museums throughout the United States of America alone in the

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name of "scientific" knowledge. They are now being "reburied," in some cases with rituals, others silently. Hundreds of thousands—that is a lot of digging.

There is a pattern: The reburial occurs only after the artifacts disappear and reappear on the antique market, and after the human bones have been photographed, labeled, measured, and studied. Then the Indians' bones are placed in cardboard boxes, returned to their "rightful" owners, and placed in the ground once again. Just looking at those photographs of the cardboard boxes in the National Geographic being buried in the ground is sad. The author of the article carefully pointed out that the bones will be buried just below the "plow line" to assure readers that they will not be brought up inadvertently.

This same article contains a photograph of a governor signing a bill to return the bones and make it illegal to dig them up. A small Inca girl looks on, knowing that her bones are safe for now and possibly forever. It is the age-old picture of the dominant society; the neurotic legality of having it in writing. The written word supposedly implies a commitment to the Indian, but instead is reminiscent of its time-proved worthlessness in the hundreds of signed and broken treaties, treaties that can be purchased for five dollars a copy from Washington-based institutions.

In the photograph, the Indian stands there, looking over the governor's shoulder as he signs his written promise. Once again, it is the image of Indians asking for something from the white people: "I want back my land"); "I want back my way of life"); "I want back my spirit and dignity"); "At least, give me back my ancestors' bones."

We must not allow the disentombing: The dominant society does not need those bones; it is not in need of the economic activity generated around the Indian artifacts dug up with them; and society does not need the kind of "knowledge" (scientific or otherwise) that it purportedly is generated from the study of those bones. By having the Indians situate themselves against "science," however, the dominant society is able to show that Indians basically are uncivilized and know nothing about "progress." Many ideological purposes are achieved with this ploy.

Society's moral cultural stature is such that it does not know what to do with these bones, artifacts, and ideas that these traces of history represent for the human race. There can be no mincing of words about this: Our society today, built upon the forced disappearance of other societies gone by, cannot benefit from disinterring what it has consciously interred. Dominant Western society made the historical error of burying the Indian societies; let it not make the mistake of trying to bring back parts of those societies for some scapegoat reason about "science" or "society" in abstracto. Its "science" and its "society" are no reason for doing what it did then, nor for what it is doing now.

Today's society knows not what to do with the artifacts and bones that it has exhumed, except place a market price on them. Aside from this obvious shortcoming of contemporary society, there are others. All are significant to discuss, and make the reburial issue a very significant historical issue: today's society does not know what to do with its present members now, its living members. A society that has not been able to accommodate the living surely cannot be expected to know what to do with the dead.

The Reburial Issue is Not the Issue

Each renewed generation must learn how to deal with its ancestors, and call attention to the disrespect that some peoples' children show toward others. Ours is not to qualify the profane or provoke stupor over obvious violations of the past for the sake of some undefined need (an economic need for "studying/selling" the past).

Our questioning today is repeated just as each society in the past has resolved its own existence in its own way; something that remains resolved six feet under. In the dead, those past resolutions of previous societal conflict emerge. Each society decides what to do with its dead. Now that problem is recreated when deciding whether to bring them up, or leave them lie, or rebury the ones disinterred already. The reasons for disturbing those remains or not is a relationship of the sociohistorical context and consciousness of each researcher, and each knows the degree of consciousness or ignorance that he or she possesses.

When we witness ourselves as a collective, as an abstract entity called society, in which we live and work and die, debating our ignorance of the past and doubting even our own reasons or the motives of others, it becomes difficult to come to terms with the past—
because we have not come to terms with our present. We are not in control of our societal relations, and we are not certain as to who we are, or why we do what we do. We must understand that society is incapable of taking care of either the artifacts or the knowledge obtained thereof. (An examination of any of the numerous price guides published regarding the buying or selling values of Indian artifacts is but one example of this fact.)

What are we doing with the dead? We ask, what are we doing with the living? What is being done to the indigenous peoples of the world, if not at times sending them forcibly to their graves, and then studiously asking whether they should be brought back in order to learn something about them or to learn something about ourselves? It is ironic and insulting that Western society has buried 90% of the original societies and peoples of this so-called Western hemisphere, and then construed archaeological studies to examine the remains of what it buried when it could have studied those cultures in situ during the inhuman conquest.

Why, we ask, is there not a reburial issue regarding the remains of the indigenous peoples of Africa, who were brought over to “America” during and after the conquest? The African slaves lost their cultures almost in total (except for their singing attributes, some may retort). They too were uprooted from their original societies to replace the indigenous peoples of America, who were being placed forcibly into the ground. The blacks are made to feel irrelevant in terms of history; they are ignored with regard to the conquest. The only place that they are studied today is in Africa, and that is with some urgency to associate them with the missing link of the human genealogical tree—the chain of events leading from the monkey to human. It seems unnecessary to study the history of blacks in America, because everyone knows where they came from: they were shackled and brought forcibly from Africa (all 13 million of them back then). The blacks need not become part of the “reburial issue” because dominant white society does not want to know anything about them to begin with; so they are made to feel unimportant to history. The Indians are belittled by attacking their spirit and their ancestors. The ancestors of the blacks are simply ignored; the ancestors of the Indians are insulted, disinterred. With that, the ideological onslaught is complete, both races are demeaned. Dominant ideology is enhanced.

Somehow, the thirst for past knowledge often misses the scholarly mark. Where are we traveling on this sacred and profane planet hurling through the cosmos, living and dead together, populating only a few feet above and below the surface of this earth, the spiraling lifeline of humankind? This spotted existence has a consciousness about itself, which through that same historical awareness humankind now questions its past as though the past alone could solve the future riddle of our existence. What does that little arrowpoint, or spearhead, or broken bit of pottery have to do with us now (much less, what can we learn from them about tomorrow)? Some say nothing; others contend everything. Some say there is no spirit; others affirm that the spirit is ongoing, an unending recreation of events. Some say that the spirit of the present lies dead in the past. It seems as though we are here to determine the sacred and the profane of all of humankind’s activity. Is science as sacred as many scientists acclaim; is touching a gravesite as profane as affirmed?

The reburial issue is not the sole issue. Many unburied remains of past conquests are “discovered.” We cannot, however, rescue the past from its own fate, that it be known. Nor can we change what happened then by stating our intentions now. The reburial issue lies within the realm of the buried past. It is impossible, however, to rebury what was never buried properly in the first place. American historians know this well. By addressing only the issue of reburial, many points of history are avoided or distorted.

What happened to the hundreds of cultures and civilizations in both America and Africa that were liquidated, entirely exterminated by the conqueror’s hand? They do not want to dig up that issue; they do not want to address issues of “violence and conflict” that is politically profane, not archaeologically sacred. That issue creates political divisions today upon yesteryear’s conflicts. The conquest is done and buried; they only wish to discuss the buried human remains of the sacred, and not the Indians who were horse-and-quartered, hamstrung, or skinned alive. The reburial issue makes it sound like the conquest was something sacred.

Many people seem not to realize that the majority of indigenous peoples were not even buried. Others were not buried underground, but buried high on the trees’ boughs so that their spirits might rise faster on their journey. Discussion of the sacredness of the burials, and arguments for giving the dead a ritualistic and sacred reburial
misses the point; "reburial" takes for granted something (i.e., burial) that did not always occur in the first place. Most peoples in America were put asunder by the warring hand of Europeans invading our ancestors' lands through profane conquest.

Even those few who were ritually buried, who escaped the dreadful torture of conquest, are the object of continued harassment. They will not be let alone even in their graves; they are still being attacked for their wares. Those who escaped the cold steel and hot volleys of the conqueror's weapons still are being punished in the name of science.

Thus, we are drawn into the trap of speaking about reburial, where in actuality nobody really wants the bones back, as such; no one can have them, as such; and no one owns them, as such. We would just like the dominant society to leave us alone for many reasons. It is unable to do so. However, we must demand it. Society must pay respect to our dead as well as to our living. The remains of the past indigenous peoples are scattered throughout the battlefields of this land called now The Americas/America.

Ideological meanderings are varied and numerous. Comparisons of which conquerors were worse than others smack of clearing a collective conscience. Physical extermination is weighed erroneously against cultural elimination; degrees of human suffering cannot be compared. The archaeological sites are given a sense of history, of scientific knowledge and relevance, where basically exist only traces of what went before, what existed but was thrown out of existence.

The Indians today can be made to feel that their spirit is stronger than that of white people, that the Indian's spirit, the spirit of the vanquished was not broken by the conquest, or, better yet, that white people basically have no spirit. Hence, Indians can conclude that they are superior to the whites in spirit alone. Oddly enough, however, such a stance serves little practical purpose in the material world of the white people and their dominant laws. The white people dominate not the Indian's spirit, but the Indians' very being and life. Struggle against white people cannot be overemphasized or limited to the level of the spirit, as is often the case. Struggle must address the level of living, here and now, on everyday issues.

As long as they continue to publish pictures of Indians "asking" whites for things (such as the return of their ancestors' bones), then the white people's (or better, "non-Indian") system is safely guarded by that dominant ideology: They can refuse the petition or can accede magnanimously to it. With this course of action, the Indian movement can be reduced to the status of fighting for its bones, which is a way of hitting at the Indians' spirit, demonstrating what will happen to them after they pass onto the next world. Even their bones will not be safe.

By forcing Indians to fight for their bones, the movement can be maintained at the spiritual level, which, the white people know, is highly ineffectual in the face of the dominant laws. Dominant society prefers to have the Indians in the fields spreading tobacco over ancestral gravesites than have them doing something more productive for their own living peoples.

What is needed, essentially, is to show how to deal with the dominant ideology, how to break out of the syndrome of dominance. Ironically enough, our dominance consists in maintaining our thinking on a level that is overwhelming spiritual. As Ernest Benedict argues:

*Indians today hold the best title (to land) there is. We have occupied and used the land longer than any written record. We are part of it long before we ever saw a white man. This is our title, our ownership established by the Creator. We are satisfied that this is so. Holding such a title we need not fear the attacks from laws and governments. These are inventions of man, they cannot overthrow the instruction of the Creator.* (p. 2)

Feeling spiritually superior to one's adversary initially may be effective for struggle, for commitment, but soon it effectively keeps the people from fighting against the adversary. Indigenous peoples actually can be immobilized with such an ideology, making them feel that it is beneath them or simply not worth it to fight against such a soulless being. With that, the Indians do not resist, but remain with their spirit intact, while daily life remains burdened and dominated. By all means domination is real, not a figment of the imagination.

It is no easy task to break out of this imposed syndrome. Possibly there may be no breaking out as things stand. In the movie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," the big, tall Indian character breaks out of the insane asylum by bashing out of a window and freely flying away as a spirit. The spirit of his white friend already had been broken through a lobotomy performed by the white men in white
coats. The Indian was not to lose his spirit as well; and understandably enough dominant ideology encourages the mystification of the Indian spirit.

We face a situation that is suffocating, difficult to grasp fully in all of its psychological, ideological, and physical consequences. How can an individual renounce his or her spirit? It is impossible. How can we educate our peoples not to “ask” for the return of what has been taken from us? We cannot. We must ask for those bones to be returned to their rightful owners (!), but the asking must constitute a demand with no thanks given. There are no rightful owners as such; but once again we are drawn into the dominant trap of neurotic laws, of speaking in terms of property rights about the oneness of nature.

We must demand freedom for our living spirit now, not after we have been buried, disinterred, and reburied time after time by a spiritless society. There can be no reservations placed on the Indian way of death, just as we must not allow any laws of restrictions to be placed on the Indian way of life.

It is clear that the idea of “oneness” of the world was taken a bit too far in some indigenous societies. These societies tried to unite death and life at all times, realizing that there was a direct connection between the two. Our ancestors carried out war and profanity, no doubt. Many of these events, however, have been cited for the sake of convincing us that we were equally as bad as the white people, that our ancestors share complicity in the history of humankind’s suffering, of making others suffer. The photographs of the scalped white men are there to prove it; and there are the codices. We argue that one person’s profanity is no reason to create or substantiate a more refined version of profanity.

All of the profane aspects of humankind’s history is but a crucible for creating the sacredness of life. Toward that oneness of life and sacredness we strive. It is not for us to convince everyone that the comparative degrees of human suffering or the white peoples’ wars were worse than our ancestors’ wars. Human suffering is human suffering regardless of race, color, or creed. Such arguments of complicity serve only to reproduce the substantiation of violent acts such as the conquest: “We are not so bad, because they would have done the same thing to us” (so goes the human reasoning for inflicting pain).

All links to an indigenous past are broken consciously by those responsible for government policies, and they continue to be profanely sustained. We have reservations about the past, but these are not about the Indian reservations. They are outside the scope of Indian law, and are rather the object of the white people’s plunder. Now that white people are called to remember their ancestors’ past and to realize that their dominant present still is based upon the design laid down by these ancestors, they seek a conscience-appeasing publicity campaign to excuse those actions from now until 1992. White people must dissolve the past, ignore certain aspects, repeat the adage “bygones will be bygones,” and seek to create a brotherhood when all along they never had any brothers, even among their own kind, where only plunder and competition of the most unsacred kind propelled them and the economic endeavors of their society forward.

Dominant society is still a prisoner of its own forceful hand, of the claims that bind it inextricably to the peoples enslaved, to the socioeconomic relations that today are speeding out of control, crisis after crisis, world war after world war, repression after repression. In the museums, the native Indians who fought in the World Wars I and II are cited as examples, as though that numerical data alone could convince us that the native Indian peoples of America finally were “broken in”: They finally fought in our wars, on our side. (Such reasoning implies that we should take for granted that world wars are good, or at least acceptable because even some few thousand Native Americans participated in those wars.)

Dominant society is but a prisoner of its dreams, and yet it cannot even put into words what those dreams are; it can only call attention to the idea of “complicity” as a means of convincing others (and itself) as to the righteousness of its profane actions. War is profane. Forcibly burying other peoples is not a sacred event, obviously, even if our ancestors practiced it in rituals and sacrifices of their own kind and that of others.

Dominant theories of “conquest” thrive on the idea that our ancestors were defeated in battle, “fair and square” as it were, and that we lost. The theory implies, furthermore, that we are now poor losers because we never accepted the white people’s dominance or our defeat, even though it was obvious that white people dominated (and continue to dominate) through their war mongering and land
grabbing. Such is the ideology of complicity: We participated in battle; we could have won; we did battle; and, therefore, we are equally guilty of the conquest and deserve to have lost. That very victory supposedly was proof that we should have lost and proof of the white people's superior ways, so the reasoning goes.

What do we say in the face of an ideology of dominance that seeks reasons for being and reasons of convincing based on theories of complicity? We must reject all complicity in the construction of dominance. There was no such complicity, and the very presence of theories of complicity are proof in themselves of an admission of guilt on the part of those who use such an ideological tool, not only of past guilt, but rather of ongoing guilt for substantiating present-day dominance. The very policies of domination over the "redskins" continue to paint Indians as savages, uncivilized, untamed, undeveloped, until white people prove that they have dominated them, domesticated them, tamed them over centuries, after almost "having had" to exterminate them.

Now, the indigenous peoples may be given "equal" rights; now they may be granted full citizenship within the concert of nations, but first it must be shown that they actually were as bad as they were made out to be (hence the raison d'être of the violence and extermination policies) to remove any doubts in that respect or suggest that some injustice was done. They fought against the white people and had to be punished. A reason had to be manufactured for almost having eliminated the indigenous peoples completely. At times it appears that the white people finally have realized that it is time to set the Indians free, that they no longer represent a threat to the system, that they will not mount up and ride again in the future.

The Indian policies of past and current American governments represent a carefully constructed case for proving that the near extermination was a necessary evil, that ultimately the Indians were savages. Anything short of this radical approach would have raised doubts that the whites only wanted the Indians for their land. It is clear that the whites also wanted them for their labor power, but in this the Indians would not allow insult to injury and would not give their life's sustenance, their willpower to labor. Consequently, the black peoples were brought from Africa to take the place of the Indians who were interred. There was a point when the Europeans could not "import" enough blacks to tread upon the "liberated" ground taken from the indigenous peoples of this land. They were killed off faster than they could replace them; the destructive capacity has always been greater than the constructive capacity.

"A meeting of two peoples" everyone cries out when talking about the conquest. A meeting of three peoples is more like it, of many peoples to be exact. This love/hate relationship—the triangle of the white people, their rebellious sons the Indians, and their enslaved black sons—continues today. Indians were taken to the brink of extinction and now fight back merely to survive for another day. Blacks have been driven to nonexistence even though they are there pacing the face of America like a caged animal who lost his spots and no longer knows how to regain his spirit nor even what spirit to regain, an African one or an American one (whatever that is), the black people who now kill themselves at an exorbitant rate out of social frustration and personal anguish.

This triangle of existence must be brought into human comprehension to understand that so-called meeting of two cultures that everyone will be debating until 1992. There are very dominant ideas hidden here: the mere calling of attention to the two cultures (Europe and indigenous America) is subtle but effective; it is yet another way of negating the black people's place in history as though they did not even exist. Blacks are no longer a problem to white dominance, and do not even seem to merit consideration or attention. They are under control now. Back then, black people were an imported commodity. They still represent a reminder of commodity economies at their worst: the elimination and establishment of "free" labor. Let us not forget that the blacks were exterminated as well, but survived for other reasons.

There are many hidden ideas that dominate our very dominance. We must take time to think them through, to rethink all of the issues buried within the ideology of dominance. We must break out of dominance, and that begins within the realm of ideology. Reburial undoubtedly is one of those issues. Unfortunately, even the way we think, the way we approach these issues, is from the start a lost arrow, a shot in the dark. We succumb unknowingly, unwittingly, to the subtleties of dominance, and we reproduce the very ideologies of our dominance, while we believe to be liberating ourselves, that we are breaking out of the syndrome of dominance when in fact we are becoming buried deeper in that dominance. Symbolically we want to
reifying our dead ancestors, and we wind up burying ourselves alongside them. That idealism within human history is not new; such idealism is what dominance has been based upon for millennia. We must examine the very ideas of protest that lead us into ideological and philosophical debate, because although we might imagine ourselves to be throwing off chains, in fact we are but tightening the winch of human suffering.

Science as a Reason for Digging:
The Fetishism of “Discovery”

Economics was one of the main reasons for the Europeans having put the Indians underground in the first place. Now, science is being cited as a reason for bringing the Indians up from the dead. The Indians were buried because they were thought to be savages, uncivilized, and without a spirit (a Christian spirit anyway). Now, they are being fostered in their spiritual thinking, while knowledge is cited as a reason for exhuming them. Abstractions such as “science,” “knowledge,” “progress,” or “history” are quoted as reasons for substantiating the archaeologists’ actions. This attitude makes those who are against their exhumation and their artifacts into reactionaries, going against history and progress, ignorant.

It is clear that many academics are not certain of even their own disciplines at times, of what it means for humankind. This can be seen at times in the academic’s fear of affirming anything that is not footnoted or quoted from someone else to substantiate an individual claim to knowledge. Academics strive to be sacred and fear becoming profane. Such inaction ultimately is reflected in their ambiguity of action; always hoping to justify what they have done even though they already know what that is.

Scientific research becomes at times a judicial inquiry of our past no matter which side we might take. It becomes a passing of judgment, a placing of the blame, or a shunning of any blame, a cry for long overdue justice, or a rejoinder intoning “I did not do it”; the conquest was not my fault. Obviously not in actions, but ideologically, such attitudes are supported today in affirmations that the conquest might not even have occurred, that the majority of Indians died from the diseases brought by Europeans to the “New World.”

Scientific research emerges as a kind of “who-done-it” inquisition of history, where we only have to await the pointed finger placing the blame to determine the nature of the punishment. It is clear that Western society is generally to blame. This society did the burying; it created the study of archaeology, and now it seeks to devise ways to substantiate its own actions by citing the scientific spirit in general for the countless misdeeds of the spirit of conquest (all too often drenched in another peoples’ blood).

To remain buried or not to remain buried, however, is certainly not the question; it is but the tip of the iceberg. The question is whether to remain dominated from womb to tomb. The socioeconomic aspects of Western society not only turn the dead into the profane, but turn the living into the profane (when both are sacred). Our spirit is sacred to us, and for that reason we covet it. Our belief in spirit, within the framework of dominant society, becomes something profane, which proponents in the system take advantage of to force us into inaction. Today’s society not only haunts the dead but haunts the living as well. We are all sacred, but we are treated profanely under societal dominance.

In distinguishing between the sacred and the profane, there can be no handbook of burial rights in which we can find the basics on “what to do” in such cases. The sacred and the profane is a living experience, an ongoing struggle, and can be analyzed only case by case in relation to the reasons behind each human action. When humankind controls its history, the very concepts of struggle of the sacred and profane will disappear. Then humankind will know what to do, not only about its dead, but about the living members of society.

We say: Keep our dead buried. Even beholding their art and artifacts may make it difficult to comprehend the reason for their having been there (or their very being), or understand the reasons for our being as we are, even though we may behold what we will become in their image.

One cannot expect the riddle of the sacred and the profane to be solved in an academic conference. Obviously, no one does expect that. Its resolution will come upon the fields of life and death in society; the ways of life in all cultures. As we dwell upon death and the remains of the sacredness of lives gone by, we must relate such knowledge and questioning to the future. Would that it were possible to reduce this pondering to a beautifully-worded resolution emerging
from this conference, regarding an agreement to keep the dead buried or bring them up for study. Some have argued to keep those who are alive today ignorant of the past, whereas others wish to exhume the dead so that they can teach us about life now. We insist that we already know our past, and we know it well. Thus, the debate as to whether to leave lie or not to leave lies misses the question of life: How are we to live today? Of course, we must let them lie. The question is: How should we live?

After all is said and done, what we are trying to solve is our own existence, to determine our own future, to control our present development. Of course, we must look back so as not to walk blindly and ignorantly into the future. We argue, however, that to this end we do not need to study any more remnants or bones of past societies; we do need to study their societal relations. The crux of the matter is to know what to do about the present, as we struggle even now to maintain our past intact, as we beseech once again the dominant peoples to tread lightly upon this sacred ground called earth.

As we make our demands let us not overlook our current needs. Because of our own ideological blinders, we also sometimes misunderstand what we are searching for. We too may be destroyed at that very moment of beholding the past in a conceivable (but unbelievable) third holocaust. We may be extinguished just as we “discover” from whence we came; and hence we may go, into a single moment of destruction, greater than any destruction before witnessed.

Dominant society maintains the myth of “discovery.” Western society discovered the “new” continent, and is about to celebrate the 500th anniversary of that “discovery.” It “discovered” the Indians; it “discovered” science and now it wants to “discover” scientific knowledge about the Indian, whom it not only “discovered” but trampled. We must fall prey no longer to such arguments in which they seduce us into thinking that they still have much to “discover” about us. May they leave us alone, and go their own way.

Final Comments: Indigenous Heritage Conservation

The name of “science,” in abstracto, must not be invoked as a reason to exhume past cultures of native Americans. Likewise, we must not allow those who oppose such an argument to be labeled against “science” and “knowledge,” against history and “progress.”

The study of native, original, indigenous cultures must be placed in the hands of the indigenous peoples and their representatives, with no interference by the dominant societies. The artwork and artifacts excavated and placed in museums and universities should be returned to the indigenous peoples through their representatives. The governments of the various nation states involved should finance the building of proper museums run by indigenous organizations.

The existing hundreds of thousands of skeletons and bones within museums and universities in the United States and elsewhere must be reburied as soon as possible according to the strictest terms of indigenous philosophy and culture within guidelines established by the Indian representatives themselves. A native indigenous peoples’ commission should be founded with independent funding to oversee the issue regarding past indigenous cultures and their heritage conservation. Efforts of this nature should be coordinated on an international level, with other governments, such as that decision handed down in the Mexican case, with the declaration of such Indian works as “national patrimony,” and in the case of the pyramids of Teotihuacan, with the declaration of these as the “patrimony of humanity.”

Research should be initiated as to the historical process of the development of indigenous peoples’ cultures to comprehend the state of Indian cultures and the kind of treatment that living Indians are receiving (Indian Societies and Indigenous Peoples: The Quick and the Dead). Indian peoples today represent a living and breathing culture that has survived centuries despite many serious obstacles throughout history. Our tenacity and pride have been invaluable in our struggle to regain our rightful place in history. As the World Council of Indigenous Peoples’ “Solemn Declaration” states: “We vow to control again our own destiny and recover our complete humanity and pride in being Indigenous people” (3).

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