



Things to the Rescue

Decolonizing Archaeology and the Academy Simultaneously

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This contribution outlines the key role that Indigenous Material Culture has played in creating a space in which Western Academic epistemologies have been challenged. With the passage of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990, museums and universities in North America were required to return all human remains and their associated grave goods to their affiliated tribal governments/communities. The passing of NAGPRA brought into clearer focus the differences between how Indigenous peoples thought of material culture – as being alive – and that of Western academics who viewed them as inanimate objects for study. Accepting this form of Indigenous knowledge has forced archaeologists to question their own epistemologies and moral ecologies resulting in an uneasy acknowledgement that archaeology and by extension the academy writ large is itself part of settler colonialism; a process that continues to impact indigenous and colonial communities. Despite the destabilizing impact of decolonizing the field, it has proven salutary for both archaeology and the academy resulting in incremental, but significant changes. Increasingly archaeology carried out in North America involves collaboration between Indigenous communities. My presentation will outline some best practices stemming from collaboration with Indigenous communities and a new appreciation for the importance of things. This comes at a time when the academy is under intense pressure to reject calls for decolonization by politicians who are loath to address the legacy of uncomfortable colonial histories.