For most anthropologists of my acquaintance, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-601), better known as NAGPRA, gives rise to mixed feelings. NAGPRA prompts us to examine our profession with a critical eye, to weigh the thoughtless and sometimes shameful behavior of our intellectual ancestors against more recent efforts to set things right. For some, anthropology's role in the systematic collection of human skeletal materials and religious objects summons emotions that approach professional self-loathing. The discipline, they charge, was a willing partner in acts of colonial oppression. Others--a minority, as far as I can tell--have hunkered down to defend science against what they see as the emotionalism and science-hatred of the repatriation movement. My own informal queries suggest that most anthropologists are supportive of the law but uneasy about its possible implications for future research and control over ethnographic collections and information.

The impassioned nature of repatriation debates makes it difficult to find uncontested ground from which one can both assess the direction

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1 For help in understanding the complexities of repatriation, I wish to thank Marge Bruchac, T. J. Ferguson, Martha Graham, Robert L. Kelly, David Hurst Thomas, and Joe E. Watkins. The opinions expressed here, however, are mine alone.
of the repatriation policies and make constructive suggestions about how they can be pursued fairly. This situation is not helped by the insistence of some of movement's most respected proponents that repatriation must be seen primarily as a human-rights issue. Although repatriation has a human-rights dimension primarily relating to the free exercise of religion, the discourse of human rights gravitates toward an absolutism that inhibits necessary discussion about how repatriation claims can best be framed and adjudicated. The discourse of property, also invoked in repatriation talk, has flaws of its own. Clearly, repatriation demands a synthetic approach that blends human-rights and property law with emerging ideas about how intercultural justice can be achieved in postcolonial situations.

Rather than approaching the repatriation movement as a vast exercise in moral indemnification and cultural reclamation, which of course it is, I propose to examine it as an administrative puzzle. The "middle distance" to which my title refers is the perspective of a cultural anthropologist interested in institutions and the ethical dilemmas of pluralist democracy but not directly involved in the demanding particulars of actual repatriation cases. NAGPRA has been in effect for a decade and half, and its social consequences--both intended and unintended--have much to teach us about the possibilities and limitations of collective efforts to undo history.

ISSUES OF SCALE

In broad strokes, NAGPRA can be described as a federal law that gives American Indian and Native Hawaiian individuals, or federally recognized tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations, the right to petition for return of human remains and certain categories of artifacts to which these individuals and groups can establish lineal descent or prior ownership. Federal agencies, as well as museums and public repositories that receive federal support, are required to produce inventories of items in their collections that are potentially subject to repatriation. This information must be distributed to tribes and communities that could conceivably come forward with repatriation requests. Similar rules for disclosure, consultation, and possible repatriation also apply to new discoveries on federal and tribal lands.3

The challenges of complying with the law cannot be fully grasped without first considering the scale of the repatriation enterprise in the United States. Estimates of the total number of individuals whose remains are held in American museums vary widely, the most credible falling in the neighborhood of 200,000.4 Whatever the actual number, we

3 For NAGPRA’s legislative history, see Trope and Echo-Hawk (ibid). For an engaging overview of the history that made NAGPRA necessary, see David Hurst Thomas, Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity, New York: Basic Books, 2000. Space considerations prevent me from discussing the National Museum of the American Indian Act (Public Law 101-185, passed in 1989), companion legislation that provides for the repatriation of remains and artifacts held by the museums of the Smithsonian Institution.

4 For estimates of the number of individuals represented by American skeletal collections, see, among others, Jerome C. Rose, Thomas J. Green, and Victoria D. Green, “NAGPRA is Forever: Osteology and the
know that the remains are numerous, that many are not well curated, and that the records associated with them are highly variable in their completeness and accuracy. At Harvard’s Peabody Museum alone, the staff has had to review the status of 8 million archaeological items, including skeletal materials from approximately 12,000 individuals, to meet NAGPRA's reporting requirements. One can immediately see how complex an undertaking it is to identify these materials and determine whether they can be affiliated with existing Indian tribes.

On the Native American side of the equation, many tribes have found themselves inundated by NAGPRA summaries and inventories that they were ill-equipped to evaluate owing to a lack of trained staff. NAGPRA is a classic instance of an unfunded federal mandate that imposed substantial burdens on agencies, museums, and tribes alike. The government disbursed approximately $22 million in NAGPRA support grants to tribes and institutions in the ten-year period between 1994 and 2003. This represents only a small fraction of the actual cost of repatriation, a burden that some observers allege is disproportionately shouldered by Indian tribes. Particularly hard to measure is the


6 On federal grants to support repatriation research and activities, see National NAGPRA, National Park Service, National NAGPRA FY03 Annual Report, p. 8. On the law's economic impact on Indian tribes, see Roger Anyon and Russell Thornton, "Implementing Repatriation in the United States: Issues Raised and Lessons Learned," in Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert, and Paul Turnbull, eds., The Dead and Their Possessions:
impact of NAGPRA on museums that have had to curtail normal activities in order to ramp up the research and record-keeping necessary to comply with the law. At some institutions, including the Smithsonian’s Museum of Natural History, almost all new hiring through the 1990s was focused on repatriation staff rather than employees supporting normal curatorial and educational operations. This doubtless affected the institution's ability to pursue other programs closer to its core mission.

The National Park Service has been assigned the task of administering NAGPRA and monitoring compliance efforts. Its May 2003 report, the most recent available at the time I write, notes that 861 institutions, including 165 federal agencies, had submitted summaries detailing their holdings of unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and items of cultural patrimony. Inventories of human remains and associated grave goods had been received from 815 institutions, including 261 federal agencies. Because the deadline for submitting such information is long past, we may presume that these numbers are close to the definitive number of affected institutions. Inventories published or scheduled to be published in the Federal Register include 27,863 human remains and 564,726 associated funerary objects (including beads and other small objects), 1,185 sacred objects, and 267 items of


7 The National Park Service’s role as NAGPRA’s administrating agency is somewhat awkward because the NPS also controls substantial collections of human remains and other potentially repatriatable items of cultural property. This dual role has occasionally sparked complaints that the NPS’s interests are inherently in conflict. For brief discussion, see National Park Service, Minutes of NAGPRA Review Committee, 21st Meeting, May 31-June 2, 2001, p. 24.
cultural patrimony as defined by the law. Most of these will eventually be repatriated to Indian tribes. Because the law does not require the maintenance of centralized records on completed repatriations, figures on how much has actually been returned to Indian tribes are not readily available.  

An unexpected complication of NAGPRA is that museum objects subject to repatriation are often dangerously toxic to humans after decades of fumigation in storage facilities. Although relatively few detailed studies assessing this contamination have been conducted to date, the ones that have been published convey alarming results. A recent study of toxic chemicals in 17 objects repatriated to the Hupa tribe of northern California, for instance, found high levels of mercury, napthalene, and DDT. Arsenic has been found in high concentrations in objects repatriated elsewhere. This toxicity is manageable if the objects are destined for display cabinets in tribal museums. But many tribes wish to return religious objects to active use. The goal for sacred masks, for instance, may be to use them in ceremonies until they are worn out and discarded in religiously appropriate ways. This clearly poses a substantial health risk to tribal members. Some tribes are contemplating the creation of

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facilities in which repatriated objects can be housed safely while scientists work to develop effective decontamination methods.\textsuperscript{10}

In sum, NAGPRA requires museums and federal agencies to review the attributes and acquisition histories of thousands of items in their care, reconcile records that may be inconsistent or of doubtful accuracy, examine items that may never have been studied in a systematic way, and then (in the case of institutions with large and diverse holdings) to enter into consultation with scores or even hundreds of federally recognized Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian communities. For their part, Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian communities must review scores of NAGPRA reports supplied to them by affected institutions, gather information to substantiate repatriation claims, and reach agreements, both internal and external, about the ultimate disposition of objects that qualify for repatriation. It should be clear from this brief sketch that in its ambition and scale repatriation is a formidably complex enterprise, bringing together what Max Weber identified as the technical expertise and codified rationalism of bureaucratic legal systems, on the one hand, and on the other the most primordial of community sentiments, including a people's feelings about its dead.

\textsuperscript{10} The contamination issue is discussed during the public-comment period at a NAGPRA Review Committee meeting in 2001. Leigh Kuwanwisiwma of the Hopi Tribe notes that the Hopi had temporarily halted repatriation of items that would otherwise be used by them, pending the implementation of procedures for decontaminating artifacts. See National Park Service, Minutes of NAGPRA Review Committee, 21st Meeting, May 31-June 2, 2001, p. 34.
IDENTITY, AFFILIATION, AND LEGAL STANDING

At the heart of most repatriation cases is the question of cultural affiliation—that is, whether a community requesting the return of artifacts or human remains can show that it has, in the language of NAGPRA (Sect. 2 [2]), "a relationship of shared group identity which can be reasonably traced historically or prehistorically between a present day Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and an identifiable earlier group" from which the material was taken. One can immediately see countless possibilities for uncertainty and disagreement. What exactly do we mean by group identity when confronting what James Clifford calls "a living tradition's combined and uneven processes of continuity, rupture, transformation, and revival"?\(^{11}\)

In many repatriation cases, of course, affiliation is easy to establish. A group can show a close historical connection to materials taken from areas that it now occupies, and which it has occupied for centuries. But as repositories resolve the easy cases, they will face ever harder ones, especially as the time depth between object and petitioning group increases. This is an issue contested in the widely publicized "Kennewick Man" case (Bonnichsen v. US). In concurring with the federal district court decision denying a request to repatriate the remains to a consortium of Indian tribes in the Northwest, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that there is no established affiliation between Kennewick Man and the tribes that claim him—or, beyond that, to any existing Native American group. If the Bonnichsen ruling

stands, it is likely to invite additional litigation testing the temporal limits of cultural affiliation.

Equally complex is the question of legal standing in repatriation claims. NAGPRA specifically provides for the return of remains and funerary objects to lineal descendants of the deceased. If no direct lineal descendants come forward, the law allows other individuals or groups with the same cultural affiliation to pursue repatriation. As Tamara Bray and Lauryn Guttenplan Grant point out in their assessment of an important repatriation case involving the Smithsonian, such a broad definition of standing "potentially expands the scope of this legal principle far beyond its traditional bounds."\(^\text{12}\)

Just as NAGPRA grants a broad right of standing to federally recognized groups, it explicitly marginalizes tribes that lack this important status. Fortunately, this hasn't prevented some museums from voluntarily repatriating human remains to unrecognized tribes who present compelling evidence of descent or cultural affiliation. Federal agencies, in contrast, have less latitude to repatriate items to unrecognized groups, however deserving, because this is perceived to be inconsistent with the government-to-government relationship between Indians and Washington. Tragically, this means that some of the Native American peoples most devastated by the colonial experience are least likely to benefit from NAGPRA.

Perusal of transcripts of the public meetings of the NAGPRA

Review Committee, held approximately twice a year since the law went into effect, suggests how strongly Indians from federally recognized tribes oppose inclusion of unrecognized groups in the repatriation process. A key reason for this opposition, as the minutes of the 1997 NAGPRA Review Committee meeting delicately put it, is "the potential that standing for groups in repatriation issues might extend into other areas not related to NAGPRA." Evidently this refers to the important role that receiving repatriated items might have in validating a group's authenticity, thus bolstering its case for federal recognition.13

From a legal perspective the most significant feature of NAGPRA is its high level of conceptual pluralism, far beyond that which is characteristic of American jurisprudence in general. The law declares that cultural affiliation must be substantiated "by a preponderance of the evidence based upon geographical, kinship, biological, archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, folkloric, oral traditional, historical, or other relevant information" (NAGPRA, 7a [4]). This puts folklore on an equal footing with science, the result being, as the anthropologist and legal scholar Robert H. McLaughlin

13 National Park Service, Minutes, NAGPRA Review Committee 13th Meeting, March 25-27, 1997, p. 9. Elsewhere in the same transcript, the archaeologist Joe Watkins, summarizing the deliberations of the Seven Tribes of the Anadarko Agency, Oklahoma, conveyed the groups' concern that "to repatriate to nonrecognized tribes could potentially assign rights and authority to groups that have come into existence without a legitimate claim of continuity" (Ibid, p. 15).
observes, that "the repatriation process is thrown open to radically different ways of understanding culture, history, and ownership."  

Such a dramatic liberalization of evidentiary standards acknowledges the profound differences that exist between cultures. In that sense it is a democratic move. Yet when all kinds of evidence are held to be equally valid, the law risks stumbling into a relativistic quagmire hostile to anything approaching consensual truth. In the face of this broadened spectrum of evidence and logics, how do contending parties establish a common yardstick for reasonableness?

The records of NAGPRA Review Committee meetings and interviews of museum professionals with considerable repatriation experience provide occasional glimpses of how challenging it can be to reconcile widely divergent perspectives. An attorney who has represented one of the nation's largest museums in repatriation discussions told me of an encounter in which a tribal elder cited evidence given to him in a religious vision. "On what basis was I supposed to question the accuracy of his vision?" the attorney asked. At a 1997 Review Committee Meeting, a spokesperson for an Iowa tribe declared that "no remains are unidentified or unaffiliated" because "Native American people know who they are."  

In actual practice, however, differences of opinion within or between tribes tend to counterbalance implausible claims. Repatriation disputes often end up on the docket of the NAGPRA Review Committee, a mix of scientists and native leaders. The decisions rendered by the


Review Committee suggest that respect for conventional truth standards prevails when ownership or affiliation are disputed. Although there continues to be a real potential for the erosion of standards of proof in repatriation cases, the track record thus far does not suggest a radical departure from common sense as that admittedly vexed term is understood both in Anglo-American and Native American societies.

IMPACT OF REPATRIATION ON NATIVE SOCIETIES

An aspect of NAGPRA that has received surprisingly little attention is its impact on the peoples who are its intended beneficiaries. The handful of articles that have been published on this theme tend, perhaps predictably, to focus on how indigenous communities are uplifted and strengthened by the return of ancestral remains. Yet conversations with curators and indigenous professionals close to repatriation cases suggest that the picture is more complicated. Because the repatriation process has few precedents in the experience of native communities, it confronts them with difficult questions and sometimes forces changes in the traditions it is ostensibly designed to preserve.16

For example, few indigenous groups have traditional rituals suitable for reburying the remains of their ancestors. In some cases, tribes have concluded that repatriation and reburial should not be undertaken at all. The Zuni of New Mexico exemplify this position: after being informed that the Museum of New Mexico was holding human remains and grave goods collected on Zuni lands, the tribe decided that reburial would be deeply troubling to tribal members, who would be uncertain of the clan identities of the deceased and therefore unable to choose appropriate reinterment rituals. The Zuni stated that the materials should remain in the museum as long as they were treated respectfully—meaning, among other things, that they should not be put on public display. Some Oklahoma tribes whose members are predominantly Christian have apparently sought traditional ritual specialists from neighboring tribes to officiate at reburial ceremonies, on the grounds that it would be inappropriate to rebury non-Christian Indian ancestors using a Christian rite.

A handful of ethnographers have begun to document the subtle cultural changes that repatriation can foster. Michael Harkin, for instance, reports that among Indians of the Northwest Coast repatriated objects are seen by younger tribal members as property of the community, whereas older members are more likely to see them as legitimately belonging to specific individuals or family groups. Tribal members who are practicing Christians may also disagree about

observations about repatriation's power to evoke inter- and intra-tribal conflict are presented in Orin Starn's moving account of the repatriation of the brain of the Yahi Indian Ishi; see *Ishi's Brain: In Search of America's Last "Wild" Indian*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2004.
the propriety of celebrating and displaying powerful religious objects from the tribe's pre-Christian history.\textsuperscript{18}

An example drawn from an international repatriation case is provided by Steven Rubenstein, an ethnographer of the Shuar people of the Peruvian and Ecuadorian rainforest. Rubenstein tracked the 1995 repatriation of a dozen tsantsa or shrunken heads from the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) to the Shuar Federation of Ecuador, an inter-community organization that plays a pivotal role in contemporary Shuar politics. The initiative for repatriation came not from ordinary Shuar people, who haven't taken heads on a regular basis for at least half a century and who traditionally saw the shrunken heads as having little spiritual significance after the rituals associated with their preparation were completed. Instead, it seems to have been a bilateral process in which curators of the NMAI, committed to purging all human remains from their collections, came into contact with well-traveled Shuar Federation leaders responsive to American Indian insistence that human remains are invariably "sacred." The NMAI offered to return the heads to the Shuar even though it was not legally required to do so. The act of receiving the tsantsa under highly charged circumstances imbued them with symbolic capital that the Shuar leaders then utilized effectively to


strengthen their political influence at home. As Rubenstein puts it, "The repatriation of the heads does not merely reverse the Western appropriation of Shuar objects; it effects a Shuar appropriation of Western meanings." In this and other case studies, then, one sees intriguing evidence that the "recovery of tradition" associated with repatriation may actually destabilize and transform tradition.

REPATRIATION OF THE INTANGIBLE?

One far-reaching effect of NAGPRA has been its power to provide a new vocabulary for disputes over the intangible elements of native cultures--stories, religious beliefs, music, art styles, and biological knowledge. These, of course, are not directly affected by NAGPRA, but the law's success in reframing relations between Native Americans and museums has made the law's language and procedures an obvious model for emulation. Inevitably, then, we have seen the publication of essays and position papers implying that ideas, like items of cultural patrimony, can be owned and therefore repatriated. This notion is best expressed in a document issued by a consortium of Apache tribes in which Apache leaders lay claim to "all images, texts, ceremonies, music, songs, stories, symbols, beliefs, customs, ideas and other

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19 Steven L. Rubenstein, "Shuar Shrunken Heads and Problems with Power on the Colonial Frontier." Unpublished, ms., 2003. I'm grateful to Rubenstein for allowing me to quote from his essay. The case raises difficult questions that cannot be explored here. For instance, although the tsantsa were probably prepared by the ancestors of the contemporary Shuar, the source of the heads was most likely the neighboring Achuara people. If the tsantsa are thought of as artifacts, they were rightly returned to the Shuar. If they are primarily thought of as human remains, though, don't they belong to the Achuara?
physical and spiritual objects and concepts” relating to the Apache, including any and all representations of Apache people.20

As I have argued elsewhere, musical and artistic styles or traditional knowledge don’t answer to the same rules as objects, which by definition can be in only one place at a time. The infinitely replicable quality of information raises two interrelated questions: How does one determine the ultimate origin of ideas, images, musical expressions, and environmental knowledge? And even if we can identify the communities that gave birth to these intangibles, what would be the social and political costs of controlling their movement?21

NAGPRA has itself contributed to native anxiety over the movement of information because the law requires substantiating evidence to support repatriation claims. In a 1997 conference on NAGPRA held in Santa Fe, a Laguna Pueblo official named Paul Pino identified the problem this way. "One of the things that really concerns me," he said, "is again, how much does the government have to know, and how much do the officials have to know with regards to the use and purpose, what these objects are for? Again, we're stuck in that position where disclosure means, you know, losing what safeguards we have with regard

Museum professionals and NAGPRA administrators are working hard to respond to these disclosure concerns, but they face a genuine dilemma: how to meet nationwide standards of legal transparency without forcing Indians to reveal information they regard as sensitive and confidential? For Indians, one injury potentially becomes two: in order to recover things they believe should always have been theirs, they are asked to give away something else, their religious secrets.

This emerging interest in information marks the next frontier for the global repatriation movement. Advocates for the implementation of legal regimes designed to protect folklore in its many forms speak admiringly of the Tunis Model Copyright Law (1976) developed by UNESCO and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The model law offers a number of useful avenues for the protection of folk heritage in its many forms, but it also allows severe penalties for "distorting works of folklore in any manner considered prejudicial to the honor, dignity, or cultural interests of the community from which it originates." Although the defense of a people's dignity is an admirable goal, one must weigh the value of punishing group libel against the cost of limiting free speech. It is doubtful that the model UNESCO law would pass free-speech tests in the United States.

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22 Transcript, Southwest Tribal Peoples NAGPRA Conference, October 9-19, 1997, Santa Fe, N.M., Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, p. 30. For further discussion of the dilemma of whether to reveal sensitive oral history information in order to preserve it, see Joe E. Watkins, "Beyond the Margins: American Indians, First Nations, and Archaeology in North America," American Antiquity 68 (2003): 282.

23 Paul Kuruk, "Protecting Folklore under Modern Intellectual Property Regimes: A Reappraisal of the Tensions Between Individual and Communal
A more recent UNESCO foray into heritage protection is the *International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, passed in 2003 and awaiting formal ratification by member states. A key provision of the convention is that each signatory nation must prepare "one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory." By this the convention apparently mandates formal documentation of every element of intangible culture--the multiple dimensions of language, religion, art, music, dress, technology, folktales, and local knowledge of the environment--for each social group encompassed by the nation's borders. (To an anthropologist, such prodigious list-making is strangely reminiscent of nineteenth-century anthropology, which assumed that disappearing cultures had to be documented prior to their inevitable demise.) UNESCO's program is echoed elsewhere, particularly in India, by ambitious campaigns to "digitize heritage" in the expectation that this will help to defend national cultures from transnational corporations determined to seize local knowledge by taking advantage of global intellectual property conventions such as TRIPS (The World Trade Organization's *Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights*).

This is an instance in which formal rationality and substantive rationality are launched on a collision course. In formal terms, the preparation of heritage inventories is a necessary precursor to legal protection. How can we protect something if we haven't identified what it is? Yet given the zero-sum nature of government budgets, the monumental bureaucratic labor required to prepare these lists is likely

to siphon off scarce resources that might otherwise benefit traditional communities in practical ways—education, health care, and so forth. In one of the cruel ironies so characteristic of modernity, we face the prospect that that heritage might be "preserved" at the cost of the very people who embody that heritage in the first place.

Perhaps this view is too dark. Looking at the UNESCO convention more tactically, we see the world community acknowledging that the cultural productions of folk communities are vulnerable to alienation. If UNESCO's approach to heritage protection is not entirely convincing, at least it puts the subject on the world's agenda, implicitly challenging the dominance of global media companies, the pharmaceutical industry, and other corporate interests that continue to use intellectual property law as a cover for what critics of economic globalization denounce as legalized theft.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The return of human remains and sacred objects to indigenous peoples is one facet of a world-wide movement committed to reconciliation with communities that suffered historic wrongs, mostly at the hands of colonial governments. The sociologist John Torpey, a perceptive observer of this movement, suggests that a new focus on undoing the injuries of history—what Torpey calls "reparations politics"—has arisen because our visions of a utopian future have largely exhausted themselves. If we cannot agree about the shape of the future, the movement's logic suggests, we can at least try to repair the past.\(^{24}\)

As Torpey and others point out, advocates for restitution and reparations almost inevitably find themselves wedded to the racial and ethnic categories that they blame for the injustices of colonialism. One frequently hears the demand that unidentified or unaffiliated human remains be "turned over to American Indians, who should determine what happens to them." Such declarations accept the legitimacy of the category "Indian," which in other contexts is denounced as a fabrication of the European colonial mind. In a similar fashion, ideas about cultural patrimony articulated by native leaders sometimes seem less grounded in traditional rules of ownership than in romantic European notions of primitive collectivism.

Although NAGPRA surely benefited from the global turn to reparations politics, its effects are more practical and, to my mind at least, more justifiable than many other proposals for effecting reconciliation with indigenous groups. The dignified treatment of ancestral remains, especially identifiable ones, is an expression of simple decency that can sometimes help to resolve painful memories. More sensitive policies addressing the disposition of newly discovered human remains force scientists and administrators to acknowledge the moral claims and political sovereignty of native communities. The return of religious objects may revitalize elements of traditional religion. The practical utility of many of the religious objects returned under the terms of NAGPRA is probably the strongest argument against characterizing the law as an expression of "retentive cultural nationalism," to use a phrase associated with the work of John Henry Merryman, although there can be little doubt that cultural nationalism

is a powerful impetus for the worldwide repatriation movement.\textsuperscript{25} It is too soon to judge whether NAGPRA has set the stage for a wholesale effort to return all material culture and folkloric knowledge back to their perceived points of emergence.

For anthropology, NAGPRA represents the kind of adversity that some have turned into opportunity. The institutional relationships fostered by the law, including joint stewardship committees and consultation arrangements with regional Indian tribes, have paved the way for joint research projects between anthropologists and native communities. A newsletter published in Tucson, Arizona, for instance, describes a project in which archaeologists have collaborated with knowledgeable members of four Indian tribes to juxtapose oral histories and archaeological data about the San Pedro Valley of southeastern Arizona. In many ways the five versions of prehistory were difficult to reconcile. Yet there were also intriguing commonalities that have led the project archaeologists to rethink their view of the region's past. Among other things, they have begun to consider the possibility that the prevailing genealogical model for the emergence of today's Indian tribes should be replaced by a more "braided" pattern based on the continual exchange of people, technologies, and language. Many anthropologists are convinced that over the long run collaborations such as the San Pedro Valley project will produce better anthropology than all the thousands of bones and grave goods held by the nation's museums.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26} T. J. Ferguson, Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, and Roger Anyon, "One Valley, Many Histories," \textit{Archaeology Southwest} 18 [1](2004): 13.
A curator at the Smithsonian with considerable experience in repatriation once told me that she has been surprised to find Indian people fascinated by the scientific data she and her colleagues gather before returning bones for reburial. This information often encompasses the individuals' age, sex, physical condition, and sometimes the cause of death. When taking possession of the bones, Indians have told her that this information "makes the dead seem more like real people." She commented ruefully that if anthropologists had done a better job of communicating this kind of information to Indians and the general public before NAGPRA was passed, the law might not have been needed.

NAGPRA, in other words, is pushing us to do what we should have been doing all along. Like most complex laws, it falls short of perfection. It leaves difficult questions unanswered, gives rise to conflict among native peoples, and encourages the unsound belief that all elements of culture, including intangible ones, can somehow be restored to their original source. Yet NAGPRA also opens a new chapter in the history of anthropology that is already proving as vital to an understanding of the human trajectory as the earlier chapters that it closed. Few will miss those earlier chapters.