



## Powerful objects, difficult dialogues: mobilizing archaeological exhibits for civic engagement

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# Powerful objects, difficult dialogues: mobilizing archaeological exhibits for civic engagement

Bonnie J. Clark and Anne Amati

## ABSTRACT

The causes, experience, and legacy of World War II internment is generally not well known nor understood. This ignorance may have tragic global consequences as some cite internment as a precedent for future decisions regarding immigrant populations. Archaeological items recovered from sites of internment are powerful touchstones for this muted history, connecting people and encouraging empathy. Inspired by a push toward public engagement in higher education and community curation in museums, the University of Denver Amache Project created the exhibit *Connecting the Pieces: Dialogues on the Amache Archaeology Collection* with items from a Japanese American internment camp. Both the process and the resulting exhibit focused on dialogue, critical reflection, and community interpretation. Conceived as a service learning component of an undergraduate anthropology class, the exhibit connected students to community partners with a stake in this history. After three iterations, the resulting exhibits have humanized the history for students and museum visitors and given individuals with a personal connection a chance to discuss a history so often silenced. This exhibit project serves as a model tested through repetition and suggests ways to encourage multivocality in archaeological interpretation.

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Community-engaged pedagogy; participatory heritage; Japanese Americans; WWII internment; archaeology

## Introduction

'I knew no one that would tell me much about their time in internment camps and I didn't know that it made much difference to me.' This sentiment was expressed by the daughter of two of the over 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry removed from their homes and confined during World War II. Singled out because of their race following the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Army, the Japanese immigrants and citizens of the U.S. west coast were among the most prominent of internal exiles in the Allied Countries during WWII. They were by no means the only (Moshenska and Myers 2011; Mytum and Carr 2013). Canada also confined their Japanese population during the war (Robinson 2010), while in Britain, refugees and sometimes their children were interned or transported to the far reaches of the empire (Pistol 2017). A particularly invidious form of negative heritage (Meskell 2002), a personal or generational connection to WWII incarceration has been largely muted both within families and within society as a whole. As we collectively struggle with the tangible and intangible heritage of the global conflagration that was WWII (Archaeological Institute of America 2011; Mytum and Carr 2013), we should be confronting the legacy of internment.

The reticence of former Japanese American internees in discussing this difficult time in their lives has been interpreted as a coping mechanism (Nagata 1993). Yet the collective consequence of these choices is that the largest U.S. population displacement during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has often

been treated as a family secret (Yee 1995). The pattern in the U.K. is similar, and few associated with the community of internees there are engaging in memory work around this history (Pistol 2017). When moving outward from these effected groups, the knowledge of, and dialogue around internment becomes even more muted (Moshenska and Myers 2011; Mytum and Carr 2013). The general public lacks more than a passing knowledge of the causes, experience, and legacy of this breach of civil liberties. The fog around internment is an example of a phenomenon identified by philosopher Miranda Fricker as ‘epistemic injustice,’ a willful ignorance by the majority population of a specific group’s experience (Fricker 2006, 2007; Clark 2018). This mis-memory may prove to have tragic consequences once again, as some in the U.S. public sphere cite internment as a precedent for decisions regarding immigrant populations (Clark 2016). Likewise, a pattern of singling out immigrants and refugees is replaying itself in Brexit-era U.K. (Pistol 2017).

One effort to fight this collective amnesia has been the University of Denver (DU) Amache Project. Since 2008, the Anthropology department at DU has been engaged in collaborative archaeology at the site of Amache, one of the 10 primary confinement camps where displaced persons of Japanese ancestry spent the majority of the war. Amache is located in the High Plains of Southeast Colorado, and like all the camps the location was chosen in part based on its isolation from major population centers and war industry. Built for the express purpose of confining thousands of people, the site came into existence in 1942 and was occupied intensively for three years until dismantled in 1945. The tenth largest city in Colorado during the war, the site became a time capsule of this experience, with an intact road system, remains of internee-created landscaping, and thousands of lost or discarded items. The square mile of the central camp still bears the barbed wire fences that were historically defended by armed troops in guard towers. In 2006, that same area was recognized as a National Historic Landmark, the highest federal designation of a historic site in the U.S.

The work of the DU Amache Project, like many long-term engagements, has occupied many locations along what Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson have described as the collaborative continuum (2008). A key element of success has been the inclusion of a wide variety of individuals in the actual fieldwork at both the site and the associated museum. University students serve as the core crew, and are involved as an element of a course taken for credit. But from the outset, the project also included high school students from the local and descendant communities, descendant volunteers, and former internees themselves. The incorporation of a wide variety of stakeholders<sup>1</sup> in the actual fieldwork was both deliberate and opportunistic (Clark 2017).

The diversity of the crew encouraged a collaborative environment and enriched everyone’s field school experience. The objects recovered through archaeological investigations such as fragments of ceramics brought from home, modified items like buckets fashioned from tin cans, even the taps from shoes repaired during a time of rationing, transformed into powerful touchstones for this muted history, encouraging investigation as well as empathy for participants. Conversations that began with ‘What is this?’ could quickly transform into imaginations of life in camp drawing from archaeological context, historic documents, and the life experiences of the crew.

Inspired by our collaboration at the trowel’s edge (sensu Silliman 2008) and drawing on museological studies of intercultural interaction in museums, DU faculty and staff created a second life for these archaeological items in the DU Museum of Anthropology. As with the field school, the co-curated exhibit, *Connecting the Pieces: Dialogues on the Amache Archaeology Collection*, would spring from pedagogy, but provide a platform for engaging different stakeholders in this history. Scaffolded to encourage dialogue and reflection, curation teams of students and community members interpreted specific objects collected during archaeological research at Amache. Each curator wrote their own label in their own voice, providing a form of multivocality. Interactives built on these evocations, encouraging exhibit visitors to continue the dialogue expressed in the labels. Started as a single intervention, the success of *Connecting the Pieces* led to multiple exhibit iterations, as well as a travelling and virtual exhibit.

As noted by Barker (2010), although museums were once the primary venue for the interpretation of archaeology, they were supplanted by the academy as the 20<sup>th</sup> century passed. Yet there is a movement to reclaim museum galleries as an avenue for collaboration using archaeological materials. This case study suggests that archaeologists striving to engage with public memory would be well served to consider museum exhibits, especially ones that leverage powerful items to start difficult dialogues. For readers interested in participatory heritage practices (c.f. Kryder-Reid 2018), this exhibit presents a pathway to the exploration of thorny topics by people from different backgrounds. Finally, it is another exemplar (c.f. King, Lyndel and Janet Marstine 2006; Kreps 2015) of how university galleries can be leveraged for engaged pedagogy and museological experimentation.

## Crafting the exhibit

The planning and implementation of the exhibit were shaped by two different, yet complementary movements in the academy and the discipline of anthropology. The first is the push toward public engagement in higher education. Supported by conferences, journals, and institutional structures like the University of Denver's Center for Community Engagement to advance Scholarship and Learning (CCESL), this movement is anchored in a commitment by individuals and institutions to apply academic research to real world needs. This commitment to research in the service of 'public good' has a natural pedagogic application, in community-engaged or service learning. Courses with an engaged component promise students a chance to see the results of their academic labors bear fruit in the real world. If not thoroughly integrated with course goals, cast as an act of charity, or done in an environment of poor communication, student engagement beyond the academy can be shallow or worse, undermine community connections (e.g. Blouin and Perry 2009). However, if those flaws are avoided and the work is underwritten by the application of scholarship to the issue at hand, engaged or service learning enriches both the student experience and the community relationships (e.g. Zimmerelli 2015; Little and Shackel 2014; Hunt, LeMaster, and Quintiliani 2013; Shackel 2013; Nassaney and Levine 2009).

A second body of research and practice that informed the exhibit comes from the discipline of anthropology – the resurgence of public or applied work. Indeed, Alison Wylie, a philosopher of science, suggests community engaged archaeology is a new paradigm of practice, one with significant ramifications for the future of the field Wylie (2008). A similar philosophical change is taking place in museum anthropology, where collections encourage community engagement and relationship building (Jones, Tisdale, and Wood 2017; Kreps 2015; Silverman 2015; Wali 2015; Latham and Wood 2013; Duggan 2011; Brown and Peers 2003).

The *Connecting the Pieces* exhibit reflects the insights, in particular, of Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue (MAPFORID), an initiative undertaken by a consortium of European museums (Bodo, Gibbs, and Sani 2009). Two MAPFORID projects specifically informed the DU exhibit project. In *Choose the Piece*, groups who were not typical museum goers (immigrants to Modena, Italy) were invited to 'adopt' one of 30 archaeological objects. They were encouraged to connect the history of the object to their own biography and at the conclusion of the project were given certificates of adoption. *Tongue to Tongue*, a project of the University of Turin museum, similarly involved community members who chose an object from the collection. The resulting exhibit presented the interpretation developed by community members in dialogue with museum curators, who also contributed to the exhibit (Bodo, Gibbs, and Sani 2009).

The goals of the first *Connecting the Pieces* ran the gamut from quotidian to ambitious. The exhibit was opened in May and coincided with multiple external events, including Colorado's Archaeology and Historic Preservation month. That timing meant the exhibit could be promoted alongside all of the other month's events by the foremost institution devoted to the history of the state, History Colorado. May is also when the Denver-area Japanese American community joins together in a yearly pilgrimage to Amache to honor those buried at the site and connect over a

shared interest in or tie to this history (Otto 2009). The exhibit was promoted at the 2012 pilgrimage and participants who came from out of town were encouraged to visit the museum while they were in Denver. Finally, the exhibit ran through the 2012 DU Amache field school and visitors were invited to join the crew at the site during the four weeks of research, especially the field school open house day.

The more ambitious goals were primarily geared to the process of creating the exhibit. The first was to make connections between students and those with a stake in this history. We anticipated this would involve bringing together students with individuals different from them, likely in age and in personal connection to internment history. This was in part driven by feedback from a previous project by Clark's students in an Advanced Seminar course, 'American Material Culture.' Those students served as docents for an object from Amache during a community event. Feedback from students indicated that although they were inspired by the engagement, some perceived their role as having misplaced authority. Despite being identified as 'docents,' they sometimes knew less about their assigned items than those with whom they were interacting, a position that made them rightly feel uncomfortable.

For the exhibit, students would be teamed with people who had personal expertise or interest in this history, thus students could focus on what their growing skills in object and research interpretation could provide. Additionally, we envisioned that working together on the exhibit would create a space for dialogue across the personal differences of the team members. This dialogue, it was hoped, would not only touch on the facts of this history, but also larger implications including the impact on the Japanese American community, the fragility of civil liberties, and what it means to be 'American.' Each team would produce two labels, one written by the student and one written by the community member. Both labels would be displayed in the exhibit, demonstrating multiple ways of seeing the archaeological objects as well as the dialogue between individuals. Visitors to the exhibit would learn about internment history, join the dialogue by contributing to the interactive elements of the exhibit, and hopefully continue the conversation beyond their visit to the gallery.

## The process

Recruitment for the exhibit began at an early 2012 event co-sponsored by the DU Amache Project and the local chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. The event was devoted to the history of internment and provided a good opportunity to connect with potential community partners. Several of the more evocative items collected from the Amache site during 2008 and 2010 field schools were placed on a table at the event with the sign, 'Adopt an Amache Object.' Additionally, Clark personally recruited other contacts from her network of individuals and organizations developed through the ongoing collaborative archaeology field work at Amache. Finally, several volunteers were recruited through a flyer shared with Denver-area Japanese American organizations and religious congregations. The majority of community curators for the 2012 exhibit were Japanese American, although a few were Caucasians with their own personal connections to internment or specific interest in the topic. Two of the community partners had themselves been interned at Amache. Of the remainder, some had been interned at other camps, and a few were descendants of internees. In one case we had an intergenerational grandmother-grandchild community curator team.

The student participants came from the same course as referenced above, 'American Material Culture,' which is geared to teaching students how to research and interpret tangible history. The students engaged in the exhibit project as a service learning component of the class. Researching and producing the exhibit label for their Amache object was just one of their projects for the course. (See Appendix A for a description of the project as included in the course syllabus).

Rather than arbitrarily deciding exhibit partners among the students and community members, a graduate teaching assistant suggested we let the objects bring teams together. That way the team members would have a common interest from which they could better build their collaboration. Faculty, staff, and students involved in the Amache project identified potential objects for the exhibit from those collected during the 2008 and 2010 field schools. Objects chosen ideally met at least two of three criteria: they were visually appealing, able to be interpreted in multiple ways, or highlighted key elements of the internment experience. The project staff shared a powerpoint of high quality photographs and short descriptions of the selected objects with community members and students who then chose their preferred objects to interpret. The resulting teams were based on shared preferences, although priority was given to community members' interests. In the cases where a community member selected an object not selected by any of the students, a student would be assigned to that object.

Team meetings took place several weeks into the term to allow students time to build some expertise in object analysis. Course content devoted to internment history, the research of the DU Amache project, exhibit label writing, and service learning also prepared students for the project. The first real engagement with their chosen objects took place at the first team meetings. The 2012 community and student curators selected eleven items for the exhibit including a child's barrette, an inkwell, fragments of tar paper, a jar of seeds, a marble, a broken base from a sake jug, a fragment of a Minnie Mouse charm, two Go game pieces made from white shell and black stone, a broken glass candy jar in the shape of an army tank, stones from the Arkansas River, and ceramic fragments possibly from a sake cup. Project staff encouraged the teams to hold and look closely at their artifact (Figure 1). Curators were also provided with information regarding where and how their item(s) was recovered from Amache and the object analysis results written by students enrolled in a previous course in Historical Archaeology.

The curation teams were given some questions to help guide their conversation (see Appendix B). Students teamed with former internees (whether from Amache or the other camps) found that much of their time was spent in listening to their partner's personal histories and memories. Those stories were often only tangentially associated with the object at hand. Student reflective journal entries about this meeting suggest that they understood that departures from the agenda served a higher purpose. Not only did it make this history present and real for the student, it gave their partners a chance to discuss a history so often silenced.

Following that meeting, students had a full class period to do additional research on their object, often including specific avenues that came from the meeting with their community partner. Each student used an analysis grid derived from the approach advocated in Elliot



**Figure 1.** 2012 exhibit team meeting with student, former amache internee, and her niece who holds their group's object – a child's barrette. Image courtesy of the DU Amache Project.

(1994). Students examined their object using the lenses of materials, construction, function, provenance (connections to places and people), and value. They were pushed to begin with the clues provided by the objects themselves, then related objects, then outside documentation (often historic photographs, but also other primary materials such as the Amache newspaper and period catalogues). Based on both their research and their meeting, each student wrote text for an object label and identified graphics to be included in their exhibit.

The student labels and the community member labels were turned in at approximately the same time and guided by the instructions handed out at the team meetings (see Appendix B). Project staff assessed the student labels focusing on content and style, as well as their coherence with community member labels, while allowing for the unique voice of each student to remain. Students were provided detailed feedback which shaped their final label content. Community members were given more freedom in their label writing with only a length guideline. Their labels were generally only lightly edited. Any content changes on community partner labels were sent to them for approval.

The overall exhibit design was created by two DU graduate students whose upcoming thesis work involved community collaboration in museums. These graduate students were active consultants throughout the process, beginning with community partner recruitment. Design was also shaped by both student and community curators who discussed options for displaying their objects in the exhibit and some provided specific ideas. For example, the student curator interpreting the stone and shell Go game pieces crafted a Go game board and also brought in black river rocks and white shells to provide context for the objects' manufacture and use (Figure 2). The intergenerational community curator team built a model of an Amache barrack. The model provided context for interpreting fragments of tar paper and engaged even more family members in the exhibit process (Figure 3).

In addition to a guest book that asked for visitors to share their thoughts on the exhibit, the back wall was devoted to the interactive elements with an overall prompt 'Join the Conversation.' The majority of the space featured photographs of the objects in the exhibit framed by the question, 'What do these objects say to you?' Additional prompts inspired by the historical and social context of the exhibit, included 'What does it mean to be an American?' and 'Where was your family during World War II?' Visitors used sticky notes and pens available nearby to respond.

## Results of the 2012 exhibit

The first iteration of *Connecting the Pieces* either met or exceeded our expectations on many fronts. Data from reflective student journals suggested that many of the civic education goals of



**Figure 2.** Former Amache internee engages with the go exhibit designed by a student curator. Image courtesy of Wayne Armstrong.



**Figure 3.** Community curator discusses her tarpaper exhibit at the opening reception. The model barrack behind her was built and designed by her granddaughter (in the background) and her husband. Image courtesy of Wayne Armstrong.

the project did come to fruition. One student wrote that her work on the exhibit humanized this history. ‘It wasn’t just dates and words anymore, but actual objects that families used.’ Another student echoed this sentiment. Engaging in dialogue with her partner, a woman who was confined as a child at the Heart Mountain internment camp, made what had previously seemed ‘ancient history’ come alive.

Some of the meetings were more difficult, including one between a student and community curator who was a toddler when her family was interned in Arkansas. The community curator had no personal memories of her time in camp because she was so young. When asked by the student what she had learned about the experience from her family, the partner fell silent. She then shared with the student that her parents, like so many who experienced internment, refused to talk about it. Although this was uncomfortable, it was a very powerful teaching moment. The student involved wrote about how this exchange made it clear to her just how difficult this history remains for many whose lives were forever changed by it. She wrote of the exhibit,

It is a channel for some to grieve, share, celebrate, remember, and honor the past. No matter what stage of recognition each person is at, the exhibit provides a way to acknowledge all of these feelings and try to understand them.

As is often the case with service learning, the students also felt inspired to produce quality work. One student wrote, ‘There is a very different feeling between having finished a test or a paper than having finished an exhibit, which can be observed by many people to help pass on education and understanding.’ Another wrote that she was inspired by the challenging project. ‘It was not just about analyzing and interpreting the significance of artifacts, but about using our knowledge of objects to give back to the community.’ In that same vein another student wrote, ‘I think the most rewarding part of this project was knowing that we paid homage to people who lived through Amache or any other Japanese internment camp.’

A substantive critique of service learning is that students often gain much more from the experience than do community members. We had a number of indications in 2012 that the exhibit was a positive experience for the community curators too. One of the community curators brought her granddaughter into the exhibit design process. She wrote in the exhibit guestbook, ‘This was a wonderful experience. . . The exhibit is amazing, personal, and enlightening.’ Another wrote, ‘This is a great exhibit. Glad to be part of the effort to make positive something borne out of tragedy.’ The exhibit opening was well attended with over 75 people taking part, including a number of the student and community curators. At the reception, one community curator

thanked Clark for the opportunity to contribute to the exhibit. As he pointedly said, ‘No one ever asked me before.’

Feedback in the guestbook indicated that the exhibit also impacted public knowledge of this history. As one visitor wrote, ‘Taking people to understand the reality of WWII and not simply getting them lost in what the history books say about victory is a task that we should undertake. You have done it wonderfully. Thank you.’ Likewise, visitors participated in the interactive elements, adding their voices to those of the co-curators. One of the student favorites was this note left in response to one of the exhibit objects, ‘This makes me celebrate with joy for the sake of the owner who says with his bow tie, “I am not a prisoner of politics because I am my own person whom the barbed wire cannot contain.”’

Originally our intent was that the exhibit would only be displayed in the DU Museum of Anthropology (DUMA) gallery. However, following the opening, we received a request from a neighboring university to host *Connecting the Pieces*. This took some revamping, but DUMA staff and students were able to transform it into a travelling exhibit. A second request came from the archives at another local university to host it in their library. Feedback on the travelling version of the exhibit suggested it continued to do its work of critical reflection. One student visitor wrote this about the exhibit,

I remember how these items for this collectively forgotten part of history spoke to me and made me *feel*. The innocence in the Bakelite butterfly barrette and marbles, the tradition in the piece of broken sake cup, the hope in the jar of pumpkin seeds, the dignity in the ink jar and newspaper, the uncertainty and shame in the eviction posters, the intelligence and order in the Go tokens, the persistence mingled with futility in the bucket of tar – all of them vibrating with humanity.

## Continuing the dialogue

Because of the success of the 2012 exhibit, a second exhibit was planned and included in funding requests for the next DU Amache field school. Inspired by requests for the exhibit from other venues, in 2015 the exhibit was planned, from the start, to have a travelling component. As before, student curators derived from the course ‘American Material Culture’ and community partners for the exhibit were recruited at events and through organizations associated with the Japanese American community. Scaffolding for student training and the framing of the co-curator meetings also was similar (see Appendices A and B).

Rather than repeating the first exhibit interactive, we collaborated with poet and former Amache internee, Lawson Inada. Inada led students and community members in a haiku-writing workshop, inspired by the poetry written in all of the internment camps. He named the group the ‘Amache Haiku Society’ and all the workshop participants added their contributions to a haiku tree (Figure 4). The tree remained in place throughout the exhibit, and visitors were encouraged to add haiku of their own. It was a very popular interaction, encouraging active and creative reflection on the history and experience of internment, as well as the power of the objects on display. Visitors wrote haiku inspired by specific objects as well as the bigger themes addressed in the exhibit.

Below are four highlights from the haiku tree:

The iridescent shell  
Shimmering brightly under the lights  
Reflecting back a culture not forgotten

Abalone  
Hard to chew  
But tastes like home



Figure 4. Visitor to the 2015 exhibit opening contributing his haiku. Image courtesy of wayne armstrong.

Bits and pieces of  
Daily lives from a  
Distant time but a close

Place, Amache  
The children are  
the ones  
to pass down  
the history

With funding from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Denver, the 2015 exhibit content was translated into two long-lived products. The first was a travelling exhibit. Content was consolidated into 9 freestanding, retractable banners. Easy to ship and assemble, the format allows for a very flexible arrangement. The exhibit can travel either with or without the accompanying objects. As of Spring 2018, the exhibit has been housed in a wide variety of venues throughout the United States, including a middle school, a college campus, a national park, and the visitor's center at Heart Mountain, another of the WWII era Japanese American confinement centers.

The content of the 2015 exhibit was made available to an even wider public by creating an on-line version of the exhibit. Hosted on the web portal of the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology, it is among a number of virtual exhibits curated by DUMA: <https://go.du.edu/amache>

A third iteration of the exhibit was mounted in the Fall of 2017. It followed the pattern of the first two exhibits, except that some students worked in teams with their community partners, rather than just one-on-one. Student feedback suggests this did not diminish student engagement with their community co-curators. Based in part on the expertise of our graduate student assistant, the interactive for this exhibit involved historic photographs of camp displayed without explanatory captions. Visitors were encouraged to write their reactions to the images on a blank frame surrounding the pictures. In response to an image of a crowd of people eating outside at multiple tables, one visitor wrote, 'We don't eat as a family anymore, we eat with our friends.' Another visitor, reacting to a photo of three women standing in front of a snowman twice their size with a large basket on its head, wrote, 'brief distraction from real life.' The structure of the interactive allowed for visitors to respond to previous comments as well. On a picture of internees

working with a guard tower in the background, one visitor wrote: 'USA is and continues to be a fascist nation ~ an American.' Another visitor crossed out 'fascist' and wrote in 'FREE' and still another visitor inserted 'sad' in front of 'American.'

## Assessing the community impact

Assessing the impact of collaborative pedagogy on students can be incorporated into class assignments (e.g. Zimmerelli 2015). That was the case with this exhibit; students wrote several prompted reflections throughout the class. Gauging impact on partners is more difficult and generally speaking, claims of community impact are often based on anecdotal evidence (Blouin and Perry 2009). To better assess if *Connecting the Pieces* met its goals for interaction with members of the Japanese American community, the authors reached out via email and written letters to the community curators from all three versions of *Connecting the Pieces*. The correspondence asked community curators to respond to a series of questions, including: Did your understanding of, or appreciation for, your selected object evolve through the project process? Were you able to engage in other meaningful dialogue with your student partner(s)? and What impact did participating in this project have on you?

Multiple respondents noted that the project inspired them to connect with family members. One individual, who served as a community curator for both the 2015 and 2017 iterations of the exhibit, shared that she chose objects based on what piqued her interest. Her parents, grandparents, and great grandparents were incarcerated in Tule Lake and Rohwer and looking back she believes the objects she chose were the result of 'intuitive choices that guided me to a different and deeper level of stepping into my family members' shoes during their time in camp.' Another community member wrote that the exhibit prompted her to reread her mother's journal from her time at Amache and to look through old family photos.

One community curator participated in all three iterations of the exhibit with different grandchildren each time. She was incarcerated at Rowher with her parents but she was too young to remember and her parents did not speak of it. 'I actually did not know I was in camp until my 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies teacher said I was.' Prior to her role as community curator, she was already making presentations on Japanese culture and WWII incarceration to her grandchildren's classes. After each exhibit she incorporated the research she had done with her grandchildren into the presentations. The project has been an opportunity for her to spend one-on-one time with her grandchildren while also engaging them in their own family's connection to this important history.

In response to the question about engaging with the student curators, a former Amache internee shared that her dialogue with her student partner 'made me realize the younger generation knows more about history [than I thought] and appreciates it.' The community curator reflected that 'it was good to see that students were really interested in history and I was able to help preserve and document history.'

A community curator for the 2015 exhibit whose grandparents, parents, and siblings were incarcerated at Amache, shared that she was taught not to speak about Japanese things or anything connected to the war. Her interactions through the exhibit led her to believe that this history is important to all people, not just those involved at the time or their descendants, but everyone. 'Now, having been involved with this project, I don't feel the need to keep a low profile and I would like everyone to know about this history.'

## Conclusion

The authors of this article don't claim to be particularly innovative in suggesting that heritage professionals embrace museum exhibits to engage memory (c.f. Scott 2012). For example, some advocates of community-engaged archaeology specifically cite the museum as an important locus for this work (e.g. Hantman 2004). What we hope our contribution to this thematic issue of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* has provided is an explicit model tested through

repetition. Scholars of both public archaeology (e.g. Carman 2011) and reflexive museology (e.g. Vergo [1989]2000) have questioned whether such interventions can ever be dialogic. Our experience suggests that multivocality in archaeological interpretation truly is possible. A dialogue begun in the process of exhibit creation can be continued not just in exhibit text, but directly with and between visitors as well. Such a dialogue needs to be carefully framed and encouraged, beginning with partner recruitment. As heritage professionals, our skills with the tangible can support this dialogue by providing the context of how such items enter the archaeological record or how they can be used to encourage visitor reflection.

Also germane to explorations of public memory is the exhibit's success in moving a topic sometimes seen as the history of one ethnic community into the center of the American story, one that exhibit participants come to understand as a shared legacy. Having a civil conversation about internment – what happened, why, and perhaps most importantly, how it can be avoided in the future – is not easy. Yet here is where the tangible history, those bits and pieces from a place and a time, can serve us well. Archaeological items are time machines. They connect us to those who lost or discarded these items long ago. But perhaps more importantly, these items can connect people in the present across age and ancestry. In that way, these heritage items not only reclaim historical memory, they enable new memories, ones related to an engaged, intercultural public sphere.

## Note

1. In casting all of these participants as stakeholders, the authors follow common usage of this term among archaeologists, generally meaning individuals with a stake in an enterprise or situation (c.f. Silverman 2011; Wright 2015). This is a different and more vernacular understanding than the explicitly business sense of a stakeholder as someone who 'can affect or is affected by an organization' (Freeman 1984:vi; for its use in a heritage project see Kryder-Reid et al. 2018).

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## Notes on contributors

*Bonnie J. Clark* serves as an Associate Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Denver (DU), as well as the Curator for Archaeology of the DU Museum of Anthropology. She received her Ph.D. in Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley where she was inspired by the collaborative research of her

colleagues and mentors, especially Dr. Kent Lightfoot. In 2005 she first visited Amache, Colorado's WWII-era Japanese American internment camp. After three years of community consultation and with support of fellow DU faculty and staff, Dr. Clark launched the DU Amache Project with a 2008 field school in historical archaeology and museum studies. In collaboration with the Amache community, the DU Amache project strives to responsibly research, interpret and preserve the site's tangible history. As of this writing, the project has resulted in 10 MA theses, three co-curated exhibits, and many scholarly publications including articles in the journal *Historical Archaeology*. The project has also been featured in the *Pacific Citizen*, the national newspaper of the Japanese American Citizens League, as well as *Archaeology* and *American Archaeology* magazines. For more information about the DU Amache project and Dr. Clark's other research, please, visit <https://portfolio.du.edu/bclark>.

**Anne Amati** as Museum Coordinator for the University of Denver Amache Research Project oversees museum projects, trains and supervises students and volunteers, and coordinates the Amache traveling exhibit. Ms. Amati is also the NAGPRA Coordinator and Registrar at the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology and carries out legal aspects of the museum collection, including loans, acquisitions, and NAGPRA compliance activities. She is an adjunct instructor for the University of Denver Department of Anthropology and works closely with students on collection management and exhibit projects.

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## Appendix A: Excerpt from syllabus for ASEM 2449, American Material Culture, Spring 2012

**Exhibit Project:** You will work in teams with community members to create an exhibit using objects derived from archaeological research at Colorado's Japanese American internment camp, Amache. This project will provide a number of experiences to students: 1) You will engage in dialogue with your community partners about object research, about objects of internment, and about how (and why) to present this information to the public; 2) This project gives you a chance to synthesize data in a polished and succinct way guided by editorial feedback; and 3) You can use your newly acquired skills (in object research and exhibit writing) to draw attention to an element of US history that is often misunderstood or avoided. You will reflect on this experience in your service learning journal.

## Appendix B: Agenda for student/community partner meeting

*Connecting the Pieces: Dialogues on the Amache Archaeology Collection* Community Partner Meeting

This meeting is designed to introduce the partners in the Amache Object exhibit to each other and to their object. This is also an opportunity to strategize about your exhibit labels. We will also be taking a photograph of each exhibit team and their object.

Each object will be accompanied by two labels, one written by the DU student partner and one by the community partner. The labels should be approximately 300 or less words in length.

### Agenda:

#### Introductions –

- What do you hope to gain from this project?

#### Read object information sheet & Examine object together

##### Discuss object

- What interests you about this object?
- What important stories about Japanese American life, internment, or US history might this object help tell?
- Does either partner have a personal interest or family connection to this object, internment camps, or World War II history?
- What additional research might you each want to pursue about this object before writing your labels?

##### Discuss exhibit

- Are there any physical features of this object that should be highlighted in the exhibit?
- What basic information should exhibit visitors be told about this object? (For example, should visitors know where in Amache the object came from?)
- What is the likely key message of each partner's exhibit label?