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Anne-Marie Cantwell

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## "Something Rich and Strange": Reburial in New York City

### **Cover Page Footnote**

As always I am grateful to Bert Salwen, dear and sorely missed friend and teacher for 25 years. This paper on the continuing bond between the living and the dead is dedicated to him. I became interested in the "reburial issue" after he described a reburial ceremony at which he had been present. As an anthropologist, he was always well aware of the interplay between archaeology and the rest of society. I could not have written this paper without the generosity of many who gave advice, or who shared information and research results as well as valuable time for interviews. Special thanks, in alphabetical order, are due Tom Amorosi, Rev. Mark Anderson, Sherene Baugher, Eugene Boesch, T. O. Beidelman, Michael Bush, Bruce Byland, Muriel Crespi (especially for her unpublished field notes and the Poolaw paper), Rev. Warren Danskin, Françoise Dussart, Brian Ferguson, Robert Grumet, Wendy Harris, Dick Hsu, Msgr. Robert O'Connell, Michael Farrington, Arnold Pickman, John Pousson, Anthony Puniello, Waldemar Roebuck, Nan Rothschild, Ed Rutsch, Ellen Tarry, James Taylor, Spencer Turkel, Diana Wall, Annette Weiner, and Msgr. Michael Wrenn. Although thanks are due all those 'acknowledged, responsibility for all errors is due me.

## "SOMETHING RICH AND STRANGE": REBURIAL IN NEW YORK CITY

Anne-Marie Cantwell

*This article describes and discusses three recent cases in New York City in which anthropologists were involved in the identification, sanctification, and reburial of human remains. These examples show how living peoples may reach back into the past and join with the dead to form a desired "imagined community." Also discussed are the roles of anthropologists in these transformations of the dead into symbols of a desired body politic. Anthropologists who once focused on interpreting past social constructions are increasingly finding themselves playing crucial roles in the creation of modern ones.*

*L'article expose et commente trois affaires récentes intervenues à New York et où des anthropologues ont participé à l'identification, à la sanctification et à la réinhumation de restes humains. Ces exemples montrent comment les vivants peuvent remonter dans le passé et se joindre aux morts pour former une "collectivité imaginée" désirée. L'article commente aussi le rôle joué par l'anthropologue dans ces transformations des morts en symboles d'un corps politique désiré. L'anthropologue qui déjà s'occupait d'expliquer les constructions sociales du passé en vient de plus en plus à jouer un rôle crucial dans la création de constructions modernes.*

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
*The Tempest* Act I, Scene II

This paper discusses three recent cases in New York City in which anthropologists were involved, in various ways, in the sanctification and reburial of human remains. The emphasis is on how the participants at these ceremonies were not only reburying the dead but also redeeming the injustices of the past. The ceremonies include a specially prepared joint Methodist-Mohawk reburial service at the Old John Street United Methodist Church for unidentified human skeletal frag-

ments; reconstructed traditional Delawaran ceremonies at New York University and Ellis Island for human skeletal fragments identified as Native American from an undetermined time period; and world wide traditional Roman Catholic ceremonies at St. Patrick's Cathedral and Old St. Patrick's Cathedral churchyard for a skeleton identified as that of African-American Pierre Toussaint (1766-1853). In all three of these sets of ceremonies, anthropologists played crucial roles ranging from excavating and identifying the human remains to initiating and sponsoring their reburial and sanctification. (See Baugher et al. 1991; DeRousseau 1986; Pousson 1986; Taylor et al. 1991 for reports of the archaeological and forensic work done.)

The focus here is on the reburial ceremonies themselves. Although there is a rapidly growing archaeological literature on the "reburial problem," the emphasis to date has largely been on the "problem" and not the "reburial."<sup>1</sup> The ceremonies and their consequences have, therefore, been largely underreported. And yet, these reburials, involving as they do ritual, politics, social change, and social construction, embody questions that are at the very heart of anthropology.

Ironically, many archaeologists find themselves actors in the modern equivalent of the very issues they usually study in the past, i.e., secondary burials and other rituals that focus on the human body after death. We are no longer simply students of past social constructions, but now are active participants in the creation of new ones. Relics are, after all, as Lowenthal notes, "mute; they require interpretation to voice their reliquary role" (1985: 243). Such changes in our interpretive roles merit description and consideration.

Reburial has been a time-honored subject in anthropology ever since Hertz's classic 1907 study. Yet even today, in modern textbooks, customary reburial is still sometimes treated as bizarre and unusual (Huntington and Metcalf 1979: 15, 65). Noncustomary secondary burial, the type discussed here, is generally ignored despite its common occurrence in cases involving, for example, returns to homelands,

transfers to grander mausoleums, cemetery clearings, and transformations into relics (Cantwell n.d. a; but see Gal 1991 for one such discussion). There remains the popular view that burial marks the end of the body's movements across time and space, as well as the common belief that the dead no longer hold an important place in the world of the living.

This is not the case, however, as three recent examples from New York City show. Here, as in other times and places, many people find in the bones of the dead an icon to anchor their vision of a contemporary body politic.<sup>2</sup> These examples show how living peoples transform dead human beings, who may be distant from them in time or descent, into the symbols of a desired community.

Anthropologists have played crucial roles in the creation of these symbols, which have then been used to help promote cohesion, legitimacy, identity, and physical and spiritual healing for the living. The effectiveness of these symbols ultimately derives from the very strong

<sup>1</sup>The literature on repatriation and more specifically the reburial of human skeletal remains is ever growing. Much of it focuses on legislation, ethics, and politics of reburial. See Layton 1989a, 1989b; Davidson and Zimmerman 1990; Ubelaker and Grant 1989; McBryde 1985; Messenger 1989 for a few examples. For the politics of death see Kertzer 1988; see also Bell 1994.

<sup>2</sup>I have already written at length on the significance of bone in the construction, as well as the destruction, of societies, especially in times of political upheavals (1990, 1989, n.d. a), and will not repeat those arguments here. In those instances, the focus was on government sponsored use of the dead either to create new or to destroy old world orders. Don Fowler argues that "Manipulations of the past by nationalistically motivated ideologues and chauvinists are also, however, a matter of playing tricks on the living. They serve to convince the governed that those in power rule legitimately..." (1987: 239). The significance of the bone in the three cases discussed here is, as will be demonstrated, somewhat different. However, the questions about "the intellectual and sociopolitical contexts in which archaeology is conducted" (1987: 229), although relevant to the present discussion, are beyond the scope of this paper and will be addressed in future discussions.

power that the dead, especially through their bones, hold for the living.

### **Charged to Live in Harmony with One Another**

In 1986, workmen repairing damage to the west wall of the Old John Street United Methodist Church, a designated New York City landmark, found human skeletal fragments. The pastor, the Rev. Warren L. Danskin, contacted Sherene Baugher, then with the City Archaeology Program at the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (NYCLPC), setting in motion a series of events that culminated in a joint Mohawk-Methodist burial service later that year.

At the time of the discovery, Baugher consulted Thomas McGovern of the Hunter College Anthropology Department who identified the bones "as adult human remains...[that] had been in the ground for at least one hundred years and perhaps much longer" (Baugher et al. 1991: 5). Since at that point it was uncertain whether the bones were Euro-American or Native American, Baugher contacted Michael Bush, Executive Director of the American Indian Community House (AICH) in Manhattan to discuss the situation. Baugher, Bush, and Danskin "agreed that the main concern of all parties involved was the proper treatment of the human remains" (Baugher et al. 1991: 5), and that the bones would be reburied on church property. A decision was also made not to use invasive testing, such as radiocarbon dating, on the remains.

In addition, Baugher, with volunteers from Landmarks and AICH, conducted an excavation in the church basement to see if additional human remains would be disturbed by the ongo-

ing construction. "Throughout the project," Baugher noted "the ethical and religious concerns of the American Indian and Methodist communities were of prime importance. All concerned parties wanted to protect and preserve the human remains, to treat them with dignity, and to assure a proper reburial" (Baugher et al. 1991: 7).

When interviewed recently, Danskin said that the archaeological excavations began with prayers. A Native American crew member passed a packet of burning tobacco and each person present took it and prayed, aloud or silently. Danskin himself prayed for the wisdom to make good use of what was found, hoping that the discoveries would enrich relationships with Native Americans. His thoughts were, he emphasized, with the Native Americans. When asked if the tobacco offended Methodists present, he told me that it did not since it was being burned as part of a religious service.

The excavation, although productive for understanding the church's history, did not yield Native American artifacts, additional skeletal material, or further information to help identify the bones already uncovered. Those skeletal fragments were later examined by Bobbi Brickman of the Hunter College Bioarchaeological Laboratory who wrote that "conclusive evidence is not available as to whether the remains...are from one individual or from six separate individuals. There is not enough evidence to determine the sex, race (White or Indian) or the exact age of the individual at the time of death" (Baugher et al. 1991: 156). In addition "[s]ome of the bones contained old shovel cut marks indicating that the bones had been either reinterred or accidentally moved at least once prior to their being unearthed by construction

workers in 1986" (Baugher et al. 1991: 8). It was not clear whether these bones were those accidentally left behind in 1817, when skeletal remains of parishioners were removed from the church vaults and reburied elsewhere (Baugher et al. 1991: 110), or from an earlier Native American presence in the area since researchers had "ascertained that prior to 1640 this site, because of its environmental setting, may have been occupied by American Indians" (Baugher et al. 1991: 109; see also page 11). With these uncertainties in mind, Danskin and Bush planned a joint Mohawk-Methodist service for November 22, 1986.

The reburial service was a variant of a Methodist "Love Feast," an informal worship service. According to Danskin, approximately 100 participants, including four or five Native Americans (mainly from AICH), sat in a circle in the downstairs meeting room, as opposed to the sanctuary. The bones were in a small wooden box visible to all. The meaningful nature of this service to the United Methodist Church was underscored by the presence of C. Dale White, Resident Bishop of the New York Area, as well as a number of other local United Methodist clergy (the clergy were all in street clothes). The significance to the Native American community was emphasized by the participation in the ceremony of Frank Nottoway, a Mohawk religious leader, who flew in from Kahnawake, Canada. Baugher, who was also present, stated that "[t]he significance of the event from my point of view is that moral and ethical decisions guided our efforts, superseding scientific considerations" (*The Washington Post* 1986: C7).<sup>3</sup>

As is customary at a Love Feast, there were prayers and traditional Christian hymns, such as "Be Present at Our Table, Lord," "Shall We Gather at the River," "How Firm a Foundation," as well as "Many and Great, O God," the latter sung to the tune of a Dakota funerary song. Bread and water, as distinct from the Eucharist, were shared by all the participants. There were also "testimonies," i.e., spontaneous prayers, and calls for favorite hymns. Many of these testimonies, according to Danskin, were strong statements about the power of God and concern for the rights and well-being of Native Americans in modern society. Danskin added that Bush, who is himself Mohawk, commented that he never thought "white people" would say such things. Bush later said (personal communication, 1991) that he thought the ceremony was important. The service continued with a litany of recommittal, an adaptation of a traditional Methodist ceremony, that included verses praying "Unto you, almighty God, we commend the souls of these two [sic] unknown persons, as we re-commit their bodies to the ground" with the response "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of life in the world to come" (Anonymous 1986: 3). The Methodist part of the service concluded with "Passing the Peace," an informal worship including embraces, hand shakings, and words of shared blessing.

There were several aspects, however, that were new to the Love Feast. The first, near the beginning of the service, was a Litany of Thanksgiving, an abridged form of a traditional Iroquois prayer, offered by the Rev. Mark An-

<sup>3</sup>In a recent discussion of the John Street reburial, Baugher told me that, as an anthropologist aware of the dangers of ethno-

centrism, she did not herself wish to be ethnocentric by imposing her own scientific views upon the belief systems of others.

derson, currently pastor of the United Methodist Church in Branford, Connecticut. The prayer began "Dear Creator, we who have gathered together see that our cycle continues. You have charged us to live in harmony with one another and with all your Creation," with the response, "We are grateful and give thanks. We have our elders and our new faces, the cycle gathered is one" (Anon 1986: 5).

The "cycle gathered" was indeed one for Anderson. His father, a scientist born on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, is of Mohawk, Tuscarora, and Cayuga descent, and his mother is of Swedish descent. Today, nearly five years later, he describes the service as an extraordinary event for which he still gives thanks. Anderson bridges the two worlds and the two traditions represented at the ritual and takes great pride in both of them. He spoke movingly to me of the effects of racism on Native Americans, including himself, and of his great pride, as a Methodist pastor, that his church, by this ceremony and by the presence of high ranking clergy, had confronted racism both within and outside the church. The ceremony was, he felt, "a positive affirmation of Indian people" and part of "a healing process" over historical wounds. For him, as with Bush and Danskin, the identification of the bones was not important, what mattered was the way in which the bones were handled. In this instance he told me that he felt that everyone involved agreed to deal with the bones in "holy and sacred ways to the joy of all those participating."

The other special aspect of the Love Feast was the prayers offered by Frank Nottoway, the Mohawk religious leader. After the Passing of the Peace, Nottoway prayed over the

unidentified human remains in Mohawk and English and conducted a Tobacco Ceremony, sprinkling shredded tobacco leaves over them. He is quoted as having prayed to the ancestors "to take away our diseases, our worries and anything that may be of trouble to us" (Gutis 1986: 41). His prayers were followed by the reburial itself. Raynor R. Rogers, president of the church's Board of Trustees, went down through a trapdoor and buried the bones beneath the church.

This was an ecumenical ceremony prepared specifically for the reburial of the unidentified bones. The ceremony's very power derived from that declared uncertainty. It would have been very different indeed had the bones been identified either as those left behind from earlier church vault clearings<sup>4</sup> or as Native Americans. The reburial was conducted at a local level with members of the United Methodist hierarchy (one with Mohawk ancestry), the AICH, the NYCLPC, and a Mohawk religious leader participating. Although the modern Delaware are the descendants of the Native Americans resident in New York at the time of the European invasions, the Mohawk are, in more recent times, a Native American group with a strong local presence, with large numbers living and working in the city today.

In this case, the agency archaeologist, by her presence and actions, affirmed the importance of both Christian and Native American belief systems as well as of the rights of Native Americans to be consulted and to be active participants in such matters. For the Methodist clergy, there was a spiritual attempt to deal with racism

<sup>4</sup>See Baugher et al. 1991: 33, 49, 59 for accounts of earlier church reburials of such bones.

within the nation and the church. For Nottoway and Anderson, the healing aspects were important. For the participants, it did not matter whose bones were being buried. The ceremony provided fellowship, a shared ecumenical service, a recognition of the political and religious rights of Native Americans, and opportunities for spiritual, physical, and social healing for all.

### **"We Are Their Children that Have Left Our Home"**

In 1984, renovations began on the main building at Ellis Island in preparation for opening a museum of immigration. Ellis Island is a National Park Service (NPS) property, and NPS archaeologists were involved in all phases of the project. A year later, construction workers restoring the Great Hall unexpectedly came upon fragments of human bone in the disturbed context of a column footing (Pousson 1986: 236; John F. Pousson, personal communication, 1991). This discovery was the impetus for ceremonies involving the National Park Service, especially cultural anthropologist Muriel Crespi of the Washington office and archaeologists Dick Hsu of the North Atlantic Regional Office and John Pousson of the Denver Service Center, and Delawarean peoples from Oklahoma and Canada, the descendants of the original residents of this area at the time of the European arrival.

At the time of the original finds, the late Harry Shapiro of the American Museum of Natural History made an initial assessment of some of the bones and suggested that they probably represented a non-European, non-agrarian, non-urban people (John F. Pousson, personal communication, 1991). In 1986, Jean DeRousseau of New York Univer-

sity made a more intensive assessment of the skeletal material. Prior to her examination, however, NPS arranged for the bones to be sanctified in DeRousseau's laboratory by Linda Poolaw, Vice-President of the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma, who represented the three branches of the Delaware.

Poolaw, who was also at the subsequent blessing ceremony at Ellis Island, writes movingly of her concerns that these rituals be correct. She did research and consulted 90-year-old Bessie Snake, a close relative and Delaware spiritual leader. With Snake she planned "the honor of viewing the bones" (Poolaw 1987: 28). Before leaving for the first visit to NYU and Ellis Island and to meet with Hsu and other NPS officials, Poolaw (1987: 29) wrote that she

had been smoked and had visited a sweat lodge. All the cleansing prayers had been said and I was on my way to visit the bones. On the plane I rehearsed, over and over, my instructions from Bessie, the prayer she told me to say, the cedar she had prayed over and blessed for me to burn for the remains. Instead of a responsibility, it felt more like a burden.

I wondered who I was to think that I could do this spiritual rite that had more significance than I could imagine. Way above the clouds, looking down on the ground I was trying to imagine my ancestors crossing over all that land from the East Coast. How difficult it must have been...I was nervous the morning I woke to view the bones. I prayed the prayer over and over again...I imagined that this was where my roots are and my people, the remains of the people I was to view in a few hours being proof of that...I really needed some answers about why the bones, hundreds of years old, were found now.

At NYU, Poolaw "smoked" the bones, using the cedar brought from



home, now burning and wrapped in tissue. DeRousseau, in a recent interview, recalled that the participants, who included Crespi, Hsu, and Pousson of the NPS and a Comanche friend of Poolaw's, "ran" smoke over themselves. According to Muriel Crespi (personal communication, 1991), smoking is a traditional purification rite and a way of restoring spiritual balance. DeRousseau remembers Poolaw speaking in English to the bones, voicing pleasure in meeting them, apologizing for disturbing their rest, expressing a desire to know more about them and a hope of their agreeing to that desire, as well as promising to return them to their resting place. DeRousseau told me that she found the ceremony a very moving experience and one that made her see bones as dead humans. Poolaw writes of the blessing that "I came home a little older than when I left" (1987: 30).

DeRousseau identified three individuals, two likely female. She was unable to make a conclusive racial identification because of the fragmentary nature of the remains but said that they could well, although not necessarily, be of Indian origin because of observed dental traits: the lack of cavities and overbite as well as the presence of heavy wear on the teeth suggesting, in one instance, that the teeth were used for "some cultural activity as well as for food processing" (1987).

According to John F. Pousson (personal communication, 1991), radio-carbon dating of samples of two of the individuals (undertaken with permission of the Delaware and with the promise, subsequently fulfilled, that any human remains not used be united with the bones) by the Arizona Accelerator Laboratories gave dates of A.D. 1835  $\pm$  70 and c. 50 B.P. (see also Philip

1990: 49). It is not clear, however, whether the dates are reliable, and Dick Ping Hsu (personal communication, 1991) argues that although the bones themselves come from a disturbed context, the full weight of the total evidence—an intact Native American shell midden from the vicinity of the area where the human remains were found (see also Pousson 1986: 236–238), the physical characteristics, especially the dentition, noted by both Shapiro and DeRousseau, and no records of European burials—argues strongly for a prehistoric Native American rather than an unrecorded historical European burial.

Because of a concern that the ceremonies be traditional and in the Delaware language, and a consequent concern over the advanced age of some of the Delaware language speakers and ritual leaders, a consecration ceremony was held June 28, 1987 before the planned final reburial and monument dedication ceremonies scheduled for a later date at Ellis Island. Representatives from all three branches of the Delaware (the Western Delaware Tribe and the Cherokee Delaware both of Oklahoma and the Canadian Delaware Nation of Ontario) were present at this pre-burial ceremony, as were NPS representatives with Poolaw acting as liaison, working closely with Hsu (Crespi 1987).

According to Crespi, Delaware participants were aware of the uniqueness of the ceremony and wanted it to be an appropriate one. Poolaw worked with the tribal historian researching archaeological and ethnographic accounts of historical burials records so that the ceremony would be traditional (1987: 2). At the ceremony, some of the Delaware wore ceremonial clothing and traditional face markings, others were in street clothes. Representative

"prayer-givers" from each of the Delaware groups wrapped samples from the fragments of the three individuals being blessed in deerskin and placed tobacco and corn in the bundle, which was then painted. The three oldest Delaware, each followed by his group, went to the part of the island that faces Manhattan. "Looking west, with the bundle at their feet, the prayer-givers apologized for disrupting their ancestors and promised to provide a proper and speedy burial that will set them at rest" (Crespi 1987: 2). After other private prayers that included smoking the participants to restore their spirituality, they returned the bundle to the administration building. The Delaware were grateful to Hsu for his handling of the situation (Crespi 1987: 3). Edward Thompson, 83, of the Cherokee Delaware, in describing the ceremony to a reporter said "We're preparing them to live forever and ever in tranquility" (Bloom 1987: 21).

Poolaw (1987: 30) in thinking over the whole experience, wrote that

two days after our return home I visited the graves of my parents. I prayed that prayer Bessie taught me and began to feel good. I sat on the tailgate of my truck for two or three hours pondering over the events that had taken place...So many good things are happening for the Delaware now...We all seem to be getting along well. Could the finding of the bones mean that we were to be together once again, to carry out a spiritual event in our homeland, to prove that we have drifted and can come back together for a common cause: I was so busy trying to reconstruct, to research, to do things just right, when the meaning was there all the time. We are their children that have left our home, left our ways, our values and customs along the trails leading to Oklahoma and Canada...I believe there is more to be learned over the next months concerning the Ellis Island bones. I will be patient and I know it will all come together.

The reburial itself, scheduled for some time in the future when the construction activity is completed, is in the planning stage. According to Hsu, it will take place on a part of the island that is original land, not landfill, removed from the heaviest foot traffic. Hsu is working with the Delaware in designing the monument that will embody the three clan totems—bear, turtle, and eagle.

As at John Street, healing, in various forms, was an important consequence of these ceremonies. They brought about the reunion of the dispersed Delaware people who had left the area under tragic circumstances and had, as a result, been suffering from both external and internal conflicts (see Grumet 1989: 100-101 for accounts of recent conflicts). The ceremonies at both Ellis Island and NYU were conducted by members of the Delawaran diaspora who returned to their original homeland for these rituals and who worked together from texts, including ethnographies and oral history, to reconstruct traditional burial rites in the Delaware language (Crespi 1987) for what are likely the remains of Native Americans. In burying their dead, they forged strong bonds among the living. As Crespi notes, the services were important to the Delaware for a number of reasons: they helped restore the spiritual well-being of the ancestors as well as that of their modern descendants; they reaffirmed and strengthened their social identity by bringing members from three branches of the diaspora back to an area that was once part of their ancestral territory; and they acknowledged publicly the early Delaware presence here (Crespi 1987: 3). The symbolic significance of publicly recognizing an early Delawaran presence in this area and doing so at Ellis Island, the na-

tional symbol of subsequent American immigration, should not be underestimated for Native or other Americans. These ceremonies, although planned and conducted by the Delaware, were helped logistically and financially by the NPS following its guidelines and goals. That these important statements were made with the support of a federal agency, the National Park Service, is in itself significant.<sup>5</sup> The planned final ceremonies should be equally powerful.

### "Servant of God"

On November 1, 1990, All Saints' Day, John Cardinal O'Connor of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York put the first shovel into the churchyard soil at Old St. Patrick's Cathedral on Mulberry Street, thereby beginning the exhumation of Pierre Toussaint (1766-1853), a candidate for sainthood. The exhumation was approved by Judge Phyllis Gangel-Jacob of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, who in giving permission wrote:

Mr. Toussaint lived a long and apparently virtuous life. The papers submitted say he was a "model of charity" who gave money to the poor and nursed the ill during the plagues of yellow fever and cholera which swept this city in the era before antibiotics and the miracle drugs of today. In those times the only consolation may have been the miracles of faith and trust. Indeed for the thousand [sic] of victims of the scourge of AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, melanoma and other apparently incurable diseases

the same may be true today. Pierre Toussaint is said to be the father of Catholic Charities, a man who "practised virtues to a heroic degree.[sic] Should he achieve sainthood, Mr. Toussaint will be the first black to be canonized in America. It is rare that this court has an opportunity to participate in such an historic event, if only tangentially. (8/28/90 Supreme Court of the State of New York Index number 175031/90)

The exhumation was an important step in the Church's efforts to present the Cause for Canonization of Toussaint to the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican and was conducted under the supervision of Msgr. Robert O'Connell of St. Peter's Church on Barclay Street. O'Connell, as pastor of the church where Toussaint had been a parishioner and daily communicant, is in charge of the promotion of the Cause in the United States, and Msgr. Michael Wrenn of New York is head of the Historical Commission that documents Toussaint's life. Although according to Church doctrine, a saint is anyone who is now in heaven, only those canonized, that is officially declared by the Church to be in heaven, are called Saints and can be the objects of *public* veneration by the entire Church (Msgr. Robert O'Connell and Msgr. Michael Wrenn, personal communications, 1991; see Woodward 1990 for a discussion of the complex canonization process and the role of miracles acquired through the saint's intercession with God in this process).

Toussaint was born a slave on the Berard plantation in Haiti and came to New York in 1787, when the Berards fled the political upheavals there. He became a hairdresser to fashionable New Yorkers and used his earnings to support and buy the freedom of his own family members, as well as to support the impoverished Mme. Berard (later

<sup>5</sup>The NPS brought the Delaware into the process at an early stage by contacting the Western Delaware following recommendations of the National Congress of American Indians whom they had first consulted (Dick Ping Hsu, personal communication, 1991).

Nicolas) who, on her deathbed in 1807, gave him his freedom.

Toussaint later devoted his efforts and his earnings to help the poor, the sick, and the dying, and was well known among both the rich and the poor. In his own lifetime he was frequently referred to as a saint (his first biography [Lee 1854] was written a year after his death). His death was widely reported in the press, and the lowering of his coffin into the Mulberry Street churchyard was witnessed by a large crowd made up of widows and orphans whom he had helped, as well as society figures (Lee 1854; Sheehan and Odell 1955; Tarry 1981). In the years since his death, visitors from all walks of life have visited his grave to pray for help. Several women watching the exhumation told me that they often came to the cemetery to pray to Toussaint and had received many favors.

If Toussaint is canonized, he would not only be the first saint from the New York Archdiocese, he would also be the first laic, as well as the first African-American saint from the United States. Small wonder then that his Cause is of special interest not only to the Archdiocese but to the Vatican as well. As part of the canonization process, O'Connell, as Vice Postulator, was responsible for Toussaint's exhumation and the verification of his remains, both of which were important to the Cause. The Archdiocese wanted to remove or "translate" the bones to the Cathedral, to encourage prayers to Toussaint asking him to reveal his presence in heaven, by interceding with God for a miracle. Should the miracles occur and the canonization be successful, the Church would then need primary relics, i.e., fragments from his bones, to help the devotions of the faithful (see Bentley 1985; Brown 1981; Geary 1978; Sox 1985 for the importance of relics in

Christianity and see Anonymous 1967 for the role of the Communion of Saints—the linkage of the living with the dead—in Catholicism). As O'Connell said, "If Toussaint is canonized and some kind of public veneration begins, then we can say for sure these are not some dog's bones or those of some local peddler" (Goodstein 1990: A3).

Initially gravediggers from Calvary cemetery were in charge of the exhumation, but they had some difficulty in locating Toussaint's grave (the Toussaint family owned two plots). Concerned that everything be done properly and that there be no doubt whatsoever about the identification of the skeletal remains, O'Connell, after consultation with the Westchester County Medical Examiner, brought in the Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team (Bruce Byland, Robert DiBernardo, Arthur Goldman, James Taylor, and Spencer Turkel) under the direction of Taylor of Lehman College.

Working with modern cemetery records, the team began excavations. They located the remains of an elderly male of African descent and removed the bones for study. Combining standard forensic techniques as well as a computerized superimposition of the skull upon a provisionally identified photograph of Toussaint, the team was able to say that "THE REMAINS OF SKELETON 6 FROM GRAVE 3 WERE CONCLUSIVELY IDENTIFIED AS THOSE OF MR. PIERRE TOUSSAINT WITHIN A REASONABLE SCIENTIFIC CERTAINTY" (Taylor et al. 1991: 17; see report for details of analysis; emphasis in original).

Byland, an archaeologist at Lehman College, described the jubilation that the entire team felt when the positive identification of Toussaint had been made (personal communication, 1992). The

superimposition had taken over seven hours and they were about to give up, when they suddenly got a perfect match of skull and photograph, each confirming the identification of the other. Byland said that for the entire team (only one of whom had a Catholic background) the match was "an epiphany." They had all been very involved in the project and were all very excited about taking part in what they saw as an historic event, the making of a saint.

The exhumation itself was followed closely by numerous bystanders eager to see the bones of one many already consider a saint. Some would sneak in under the police barricade to take soil from the grave fill and either quickly shove the soil into plastic bags before running away or, in some cases, eat it as they scooted away. In no cases did I see police or cemetery officials try to stop them. In trying to locate Toussaint's grave, several others were disturbed and three skeletons were removed, two by the Calvary cemetery workers (other skeletons including that of Toussaint's wife, Juliette, were examined and left in situ). Following the instructions of the court order as well as the procedures of the Church, the remains of these three individuals were reburied. They were each put in a new wooden coffin and all three were then lowered into the plot from which they had earlier been exhumed. O'Connell, who as Vice Postulator was always present at the excavations, put on his priestly stole and sprinkled the coffins with holy water and blessed them using the graveside prayers of the traditional Catholic liturgy including "Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them...May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace." (These

same prayers were repeated a few weeks later by O'Connor when Toussaint's translation took place.) The gravediggers then filled in that part of the plot and the archaeologists, who had paused during the reburial, resumed work on Toussaint's remains.

On December 4, 1990, the remains of Pierre Toussaint were brought to the 5th Avenue St. Patrick's Cathedral in a hearse from Maceo Thomas' funeral home (Cantwell n.d. b). Toussaint was accompanied by Thomas himself and Ellen Tarry, a prominent African-American Catholic and author of a biography of Toussaint (1981) commissioned by the Archdiocese. The coffin was met at the 51st Street entrance by O'Connor, other clergy (all in church vestments), members of the Office of Black Ministry, members of the laity—African American and European American—as well as many involved in the exhumation, such as Judge Gangel-Jacob, the Calvary cemetery grave diggers, and anthropologists Byland, DiBernardo, Taylor, and Turkel. On its arrival at the Cathedral, the coffin, bearing a plaque with Toussaint's name, dates, and the title "Servant of God" (the designation for those being considered for canonization) was incensed and sprinkled with holy water by O'Connor and borne to the crypt under the main altar. The anthropologists had arranged the skeletal remains in anatomical order on foam rubber in the casket, and covered them with the same material. The casket was opened briefly in the crypt for O'Connor to see the remains. O'Connor later described the viewing as the thrill of a lifetime. For Wrenn, who was also present, the viewing was a vivid and humbling reminder of Toussaint's holiness. The three clergymen, O'Connell, O'Connor, and Wrenn, spoke frequently of their admiration of and

gratitude to the anthropologists and of their respect for science. Toussaint, now buried with the Princes of the Church under the main altar, is the only lay person and the only African American to be so honored. Since Toussaint's translation, those in need of hope and solace can be found kneeling at the *prie dieu* at the crypt entrance. On any given day, a score or more come, pray, and take home a prayer card, or biographical booklet. According to Cathedral ushers, these supplicants are from a variety of ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups (Cantwell n.d. b).

African Americans play a prominent role in the Cause. Waldemar Roebuck (Director of the Pierre Toussaint Guild), Ellen Tarry, Maseo Thomas, and the Office of Black Ministry have joined with prominent Irish-American clergy to promote Toussaint's canonization to the Vatican. Catholics from all backgrounds are involved, however. Some feel that Toussaint, a happily married devout layman, who was born a slave in what is today an impoverished land, is just the sort of candidate who would appeal to John Paul II. The Pope is reported to be concerned, as were some of his predecessors, that there have been few canonizations of Catholics from poor countries or of blacks from outside Africa (Carper 1991: 11; Woodward 1990). In fact, Woodward notes that although earlier efforts to canonize Toussaint had died out in New York, they had not in Rome (1990: 12-22).

The promotion of Toussaint is not without controversy. Woodward is quoted as saying that Rome feels O'Connor has moved too fast—by burying Toussaint in the crypt, he turned the grave into a pilgrimage center as though Toussaint were already a saint and not simply a candidate for sainthood (Carper 1991: 23). O'Connor denies

this. Some black clergy as well as laity feel that Toussaint is an inappropriate candidate because he was not a revolutionary. For them, he not only accepted his slavery but also helped his owner and is, therefore, an "Uncle Tom," chosen for complaisance, and should not be honored. Others like Roebuck and Tarry (as well as O'Connell, O'Connor, and Wrenn) deny this, and point out that his very faith, goodness, and humility are the basis for his candidacy. At a recent Communion Breakfast honoring Toussaint, several African-American women told me repeatedly how excited they were about his Cause, how proud his canonization would make them feel, and how pleased they were to be recognized and included in the Church. At the Mass that preceded the breakfast, O'Connor noted his pride that the remains of a black man had joined those of the clergy in the Cathedral and that the reburial was a vivid reminder of the scandal of racism in the Catholic Church. In fact over and over again, the Cause of Pierre Toussaint is being used to redeem such past scandal. It should be noted, however, that Wrenn, O'Connor, and O'Connell emphasize that Toussaint was an extraordinary man and his saintliness, and not his color, is the reason for his Cause.

At both the John Street Methodist Church and at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Christian clergy confronted racism within their churches and attempted to expiate it. In other ways, the reburial of Pierre Toussaint differs considerably from the two earlier cases, as does the role of the involved anthropologists. At John Street and Ellis Island, no complete skeletons were recovered and the particular identities, tribal affiliations, if any, and histories of the individuals represented by the bone fragments remain unknown. In a sense, these are accidental icons—the fragments

were recovered by chance in disturbed contexts in the course of construction activities. In both cases, archaeologists working for government agencies contacted members from particular Native American communities. These actions helped bring about the reburial and blessing ceremonies that were prepared and conducted by Native American and Christian ritualists. To some extent, these services were the result of the modern social and political environments in which anthropologists and government agencies participate, and they reflect contemporary concerns within the profession over the "reburial issue" and the rights of Native Americans and other peoples to participate in constructing their pasts.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Pierre Toussaint, the anthropologists played less initiatory roles. Here, it was the religious specialists who chose and brought in the archaeologists for a court-approved exhumation to locate and identify the remains of a known individual. The Church required a "scientific" identification, which as it turned out the archaeologists were able to provide. Although they and their families were present at the reburial services, the archaeologists were there as guests of the Archdiocese and were not involved in any part of the planning. Notwithstanding the varying reasons leading to these three non-customary secondary reburials, in all three instances the im-

portant symbolic statements expressed were about the modern world.

### "Archaeologists Will Inherit The Earth"

Fabian in his critique of social anthropology writes that it "takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West (and its anthropologists) if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of the Other" (1983: 35). This is, in many ways, what is happening to archaeologists who are involved in the claims by Native Americans and other peoples for the return and reburial of human skeletal remains of individuals they believe are their ancestors. Archaeologists, by training, tradition, and, frequently, temperament, are often better equipped to deal with past lifeways than modern ones. But now they are finding themselves encountering their "objects" of study—the dead—in very different ways, almost as though they are, as Fabian would say, "coeval" (1983: 34).<sup>7</sup> Many, including those discussed here, have responded to these encounters with grace, professionalism, and intelligence.

If Lowenthal is correct in saying that "archaeologists will inherit the earth" (1985: 238), it is equally correct to say that we are learning that we must share that inheritance. We are increasingly aware that we are but one of a number of parties (whose numbers

<sup>6</sup>Parenthetically I might note that these decisions are not necessarily the same ones that other archaeologists might have made. The human remains, because of their context and fragmentary nature, could have, as has been the case so often in the past or even today, become part of the general faunal assemblage. But they did not: they were reburied. It is the symbolic value given these bones by and for the modern peoples that is significant.

<sup>7</sup>This is obviously not the first time that archaeologists have been involved in controversies over the political uses of the past, the "Mound Builders Controversy" (Silverberg 1974) being a noted example. There are many others (see Silberman 1990a, 1990b; Fowler 1987; Messenger 1989; McBryde 1985; Layton 1989a, 1989b; Miller 1980; and Lewis 1975, among others, for additional examples).

and interests change through time) who are concerned with the past. The luxury of our irrelevance is gone as government agencies, community groups, and other parties, many with legitimate concerns and interests, request or demand a role in our proceedings. Excavations recently undertaken in lower Manhattan, as of this writing, of an 18th-century African cemetery, identified as the "Negros Burial Ground" on historical maps, provide a case in point.

These excavations, supervised by Michael Parrington, are part of a larger scale archaeological project and were initially under the overall direction of Edward Rutsch of Historic Conservation and Interpretation, Inc., but have since come under the management of John Milner Associates. Michael Blakey of Howard University is now the Scientific Director of the project. The site is the planned location of a new federal office building being constructed under the authority of the General Services Administration (GSA). Over 350 burials have already been excavated from the cemetery which was used by New York's African community, free and slave, during the colonial period (Michael Parrington, personal communication, 1992).<sup>8</sup> Today's New York African-American community has become very concerned about the exca-

vations. David Dinkins, the city's first African-American mayor, has taken an active interest in the site, as have other city, state, and federal office holders, concerned citizens, community activists, and the local anthropological community, including the organization known as Professional Archaeologists of New York City (PANYC). State Senator David Paterson of Harlem has set up the Task Force for the Oversight of the Negro Burial Ground. The Task Force was one of the sponsors of a crowded Town Meeting at Trinity Church on April 23, 1992. Participants at that meeting affirmed earlier requests (see for example Anonymous 1992) that the federal government rebury the human remains on the site, designate the site as a National Monument or National Historic Landmark, provide an appropriate memorial and exhibit at the site,<sup>9</sup> make reparations for damages to human remains resulting from construction activities, and provide a leadership role for African-American anthropologists, historians, and other scholars in the analysis of the site.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The cemetery, associated with a potter's field, was also used for American prisoners during the Revolutionary war. In the 18th century, this site was outside the city proper and was described in Valentine's 1865 *Manual* as being "unattractive and desolate, so that by permission the slave population were allowed to inter their dead there...So little seems to have been thought of the race that not even a dedication of their burial place was made by the church authorities, or any others who might reasonably be supposed to have an interest in such a matter" (quoted in Dunlap 1991: B5).

<sup>9</sup>Peggy King Jorde, of the Mayor's Office and Dinkins' liaison to the project, has been very involved in overseeing the project including working with the community on a design presented to the General Services Administration for an exhibit. King Jorde, in describing the exhibit she hopes will be a reality, says "First of all, I'll be on the outside and I'm going to see this incredible, awesome exhibit. It's going to be evening and its going to glow and attract people from all over the world. There will be this area where you'll be able to stop and contemplate and reflect on what life was like for black people of the time" (Taylor 1992: 9).

<sup>10</sup>At this site, as in the ones discussed above, we see the bones of these 18th-century New Yorkers becoming symbols for a desired 20th-century New York, one where the injustices of the past are recognized and redeemed. Dinkins has said that if "the honorable intentions an-



Archaeologists in New York City and elsewhere are learning that our interpretations of the archaeological record are becoming part of modern social constructions. Although all participants in the three cases detailed above agreed on the importance of the ceremonies and appeared to find the results rewarding and meaningful, that is not always the case. Cooperation, good will, shared interests, and agreement are never givens in any situation. There are times ahead when archaeological interpretations are challenged by nonarchaeologists (who may also differ among themselves), or used in ways with which we disagree (see Sutton 1988 for conflicting historical views of anthropologists and Australian Aborigines; see Silberman 1990a, 1990b and Fowler 1987 for discussions of the practice of archaeology in political contexts). Most important, we have to remember that the past is no longer an "academic country" (if it ever was) with archaeologists as its only citizens. It is also a "political country" with fluid borders and a diverse and involved citizenry, many of whom have legitimate interests and claims. The days ahead will be exciting, troubling, and, quite possibly, rewarding as we explore this shared territory.

#### **"Who Knows The Fate Of His Bones?"**

What is clear in the cases discussed here is that in divided communities, in troubled times, living peoples may reach back into the past and join with the dead in creating an "imagined com-

munity" (*sensu* Anderson 1983)<sup>11</sup> that mirrors their vision of the world in which they wish to live. In so doing, they frequently redeem the torments and tribulations of that past. As living peoples "renegotiat[e]...the status quo" (Sutton 1988: 265) by turning to the past, non-customary secondary burials increasingly play important roles in such renegotiations and redemptions (Cantwell 1989, 1990, n.d. a). And in these renegotiations, archaeologists, wittingly or not, prepared or not, may play complex roles with serious ramifications. Thomas Browne's 300 year old query, "who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried?" ([1658]1968: 115), is apposite today as the combination of cultural resource legislation, government regulations, a concerned and active public, and a changing professional view has led to increasingly frequent disturbance and reburial of human remains. The fate of such bones is worthy of serious professional inquiry.

The immediate fate of the three sets of identified and unidentified bones, of those accidentally and intentionally found, has led not only to reburial but to a transformation of these bones into symbols of healing for the divided and ailing modern communities that reburied them. What the future consequences will be, as these bones become enshrined in history and myth, is of course unknown. A few guesses might be safely hazarded, however. Of the three cases discussed here, it is likely that both the Ellis Island and St. Patrick's Cathedral reburial sites, one celebrating Native Americans and the

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nounced...[concerning reburial] lead to the honorable actions we expect, we can help erase the dishonor the city brought upon itself two centuries ago" (quoted in Dunlap 1991).

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<sup>11</sup>If the dead are added as a variable to Anderson's "imagined community," that community would then be a secular version of the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of the Communion of Saints (Anonymous 1967).

other African Americans, will become pilgrimage centers.<sup>12</sup> Both sites are already popular tourist spots, with enormous religious and historical associations for the general public, drawing visitors from all over the world. If Toussaint becomes canonized, his burial site will likely be even more popular than it is today as more people pray to him for health and salvation. Upon his canonization, fragments of his bones may be removed from the crypt to be used as relics to help the faithful in their devotions. At Ellis Island, the completion of the planned monument marking the reburial will be a highly visible and charged symbol of the Delaware presence in the area before the European immigrations began. Although it is difficult to predict its effect on the Delaware people, the monument and any interpretive displays that may be added would celebrate and underline not only their but all Native American history and importance. Ellis Island is already a secular American shrine to the immigrant experience. This reburial site would be visited by school children and by visitors from the rest of the country and abroad, a vivid reminder of the significance of the Native American experience.

It is more difficult to predict the longterm significance of the John Street reburial. The ambiguity of the bones that provided the stimulus for the ecumenical service would equally argue against their becoming a focus for a shrine. The ceremony itself, however, may possibly affect a current dispute on the suitability of including a Native American rite in the official Methodist Book of Worship. Some hesitate to add

non-Christian prayers and smoking to their liturgy, and the Native American community itself is divided on the issue (Steinfels 1991). The fact that this ceremony was a joint Methodist-Mohawk one, while the ceremonies at NYU and Ellis Island as well as the planned reburial at Ellis Island were Delaware, may raise questions in the future. Both the Delaware peoples, whose ancestors were here at the time of the European invasions, and the Mohawk, who today have a strong presence here, have participated in local ceremonies of unnamed human remains. Both groups have lived in this area, although not at the same time, and have had, as a result of the effects of contact, difficult relationships in the past (Newcomb 1956; but see Grumet 1989: 105 for modern times). Whether there will be conflicting claims in New York in the future over rights to rebury the dead is of course unpredictable.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>At a 1989 World Archaeological Congress meeting in Vermillion, South Dakota, that focused on reburial, I asked a member of the International Indian Treaty Council, himself a member of a western tribe, whom to contact should a situation involving reburial of a Native American arise in New York City—the Shinnecock, the Delaware from Oklahoma, or Canada or New Jersey, the Six Nations, or the locally based American Indian Community House, which provides services for Native Americans all over the country. I was told that New York City presents an especially difficult case because of the dispersal of the Delawarean peoples. But he argued vehemently that it was not for archaeologists but for the Native Americans to decide themselves which group should be involved. When I asked again whom to notify, he answered that it didn't matter which Native American group was contacted, what was important was that a Native American group be involved. When I asked Rev. Anderson about potential conflicting claims over Native American skeletal remains, he assured me that what mattered was that Native Americans were involved and that tribal affiliations were not important. For the Ellis Island ceremonies,

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<sup>12</sup>As would, of course, the proposed monument and exhibit for the 18th-century African cemetery in lower Manhattan.

It is important to remember that the bones from the burials described here were introduced into the modern world, and were then blessed and reburied, by strangers. Grieving spouses, parents, children or friends present at the original interments are themselves now long dead and buried. This is the second burial for these bones, which have outlasted their own flesh, their own memorials, and their own mourners. The consequences of these reburials for today's participants are obviously quite different from those for the mourners at the primary interments. They relate to modern issues of social identity and social justice, as well as spiritual and ethical concerns. Participants at any given reburial may not necessarily be there for the same reasons and, in fact, may achieve dissimilar although not necessarily contradictory goals. For many, these ceremonies, like all burials, are occasions to simulate a desired world, be it in the past, the present, or the future. That desideratum may, again, although not necessarily, differ from participant to participant. But in their discovery and reburial, the bones of these long dead have, with the active participation of anthropologists, undergone the sea-change of which Ariel so sweetly sang. The full significance of these and similar transformations, and the role that anthropologists play in them, is just beginning to be explored.

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however, it was important to the Delaware that it be a Delawaran ceremony (Dick Ping Hsu, personal communication, 1992).

the continuing bond between the living and the dead is dedicated to him. I became interested in the "reburial issue" after he described a reburial ceremony at which he had been present. As an anthropologist, he was always well aware of the interplay between archaeology and the rest of society.

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Anne-Marie Cantwell

Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology

Rutgers University

Hill Hall

Newark, NJ 07102

Mailing address: 14 Stuyvesant Oval,  
New York, NY 10009