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Introduction

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Introduction

Kiley E. Molinari

During the 2022 meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society (SAS), in Raleigh, North Carolina, numerous students and scholars from across the United States met to discuss, learn from, and listen to presentations focused on the theme: “Public Interest and Professional Anthropology in the South.” While the theme promotes professional anthropology, one of the unique characteristics of the SAS is its welcoming and encouraging recruitment of both undergraduate as well as graduate student presenters. Depending on the location of each year’s SAS meeting, faculty may travel with students to the conference and offer them the support needed for their first paper or poster presentation. This gives undergraduate and graduate students an important opportunity to share their research and findings in various stages with the larger scholarly community to not only practice and promote their work, but to also engage with the feedback provided by others in the discipline.

This *Proceedings* edition specifically promotes student presenters from the 2022 meeting in Raleigh, including the undergraduate paper prize winner, Matt McDermott, and the graduate paper prize winner, Cheyenne Bennett. Each year, students at the undergraduate and graduate levels have the chance to submit their original research and analysis in the form of a paper to the annual paper prize competition. Those students, then, also present their

papers at a conference session. While the winning students are awarded a monetary prize and their papers are archived on the SAS website, they are not always published in this capacity. This edition promotes the papers of these early career scholars, and showcases their hard work conducting fieldwork and interviews, and exploring both digital and physical landscapes across their respective sites and interests.

Throughout much of anthropological research, fieldwork plays a vital role in how information is gathered. It is a method in which anthropologists are trained via coursework, reflexive experiences, and the guidance of their advisors and peers as they start out in the field. Taking that next step of incorporating what you learned in the classroom and entering the “field” can be nerve-racking for students conducting their first ethnographic fieldwork. This can especially be the case when some of your first experiences are interwoven with a timeline during a global pandemic. One learns about interviewing people in person, and practicing participant observation at events, ceremonies, and meetings in which there is an emphasis on *being there* and *being physically present*. Suddenly, anthropologists were expected to complete fieldwork in a fully, or partially, digital landscape during the pandemic.

Two of the authors in this edition speak about how their fieldwork was interrupted by Covid 19, whether that was delaying more in-person interviews or participant observation until it was safer, or having to complete final interviews through Zoom and phone calls. Even with the hurdles of their first fieldwork experiences, all authors persisted through their research to bring us papers on landscapes and belonging, placemaking and commemorating, agency, and expression in three different

communities across not only the southeastern region of the United States, but into international digital worlds.

Cheyenne Bennett explores how the damming of the Little Tennessee River in 1979 led to the spiritual, physical, and immediate displacement of multiple communities who had lived in the Tennessee Valley for multiple generations, when referencing farmers and fishers, or since time immemorial for the Cherokee peoples living there. She uses Margaret Rodman's multivocality approach to examine the narratives surrounding how belonging, or a lack of belonging, shapes how an individual chooses to participate in the newly developed landscape of the Tellico Reservoir. Her ethnographic fieldwork is the first to examine the political ecology of the Tellico Dam.

Matt McDermott focuses his research on the role of individualism within the Wiccan religion. Through his interviews and participant observation he studies how one of Wicca's key characteristics is a lack of commitment to dogma and how that then allows followers to bring unique aspects of their personalities into their specific practices and beliefs. His paper gives an interesting perspective on Wiccan followers and their creative practices of religious expression, and his interviewees provided many provocative insights into their experiences within the larger Wiccan community.

Maximilian Conrad's paper examines digital spaces, specifically two websites, the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the Fraternity of American Descendants, to better understand neo-Confederate heritages across transnational boundaries. He focused his research on images and texts found within the websites, coded them using QDA Miner Lite software, and then organized the findings into

themes regarding what neo-Confederate heritage means to certain organizations. Conrad's paper pushes scholars working in neo-Confederate spaces to move beyond the borders of the United States.

All anthropologists remember their first fieldwork experiences. We recall the highlights, the struggles, the awkward moments of participating in a new, unfamiliar, cultural event, or finding our pace in our first questions with an interviewee. We adapt and adjust and go into the next project with a little more experience. This edition of the *Proceedings* allows students to share their work with a larger audience outside of their universities and academic circles. It will also help amplify the community voices heard throughout their papers. These students, who are currently pursuing their master's degrees, or have graduated and are now working for a professional organization, will continue to hone their anthropological research methods as they forge their paths in the field.