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Assignment 4

Critical Review for *Bones of Contention*

This film was written by Danielle Peck and Alex Seaborne, narrated by Sara Kestelman, and was produced and released by Seaborne in 1995. *Bones of Contention* generally focuses on the issues and conflicts about the collections of Native American's bones by American scientists, museums, and archaeologists, and a strong urge from Native American tribes to repatriate the bones back to their tribes.

1. There are three main points illustrated throughout the film, which are from three total different perspectives. First of all, claimed by many of the modern Native Americans (and archaeologists themselves as well), that the early collections of Native Americans bones in the name of "scientific curiosities" are indeed another aspect of colonial practices, their ancestors were mistreated both alive and after their death; they don't want scientists to inform what their people truly are, instead some Native Americans chose to believe in their own oral traditions; and most of all, the bones of their ancestors should be repatriated to their tribes. The second point is from the perspective of some archaeologists, claiming that by studying the bones of the Native Americans, they can reconstruct a story-telling of the past, not only for the euro-Americans, but for the Natives as well, while the laws like American Graves Protection and Repatriation of 1990 would greatly affect and disturb their researches. The third point was held by some Native Americans and Scientists together, that they should balance out the scientific researches and tribes' need of bones repatriation, by allowing certain institutions to research on the bones, working as tribal members (consolvers) in Indigenous/community archaeology excavation, and .working with museums to organize display of Native culture and past; by doing so, these people believe that this could lead to a win-win result: scientists/archaeologists would get their researches results while Native Americans could learn about their past and regain a strength and pride for their own culture through the research results.
2. For the individuals involving in the topics, since I have pretty much summarize the main points and each side's statement above, I would briefly name several individuals and their positions in this issues. For the first point of view, most of the individuals are Native Americans, like Bronco Lebeau, a Lakota tribal member, they insist that they would always keep denying those requests from "western/modern societies" of researching their ancestors' bones, they have their own worldview and beliefs of creation, and they do not want their traditions keep getting disturbed. For the second point, most individuals involving are archaeologists and scientists like David Van Horn, Richard Jantiz and Doug Owsley, they think the decision and law of repatriation is not good for their researches, and they believed by examining the bones they can solve many contemporary issues by conducting method like Minor Genetic Defect and study of Paleopathology; they also point out that the repatriation of bones are quite complicated since many of the bones would fail to fit in the modern tribes now living in the regions where they were collected, and some of them were even not Native Americans. The individuals holding the third perspective are Omaha people and Karl Reinhard in the film, who try to work together and let the university to research on the bones of Omaha ancestors, in order to find out certain historical diseases like diabetes and population decline, and regain hope and pride for Omaha tribe by learning those findings.
3. This film is quite political if one want to view it this way, besides the issues over the implements of certain laws, the archaeological findings indeed can change some of the

stereotypes of tribal communities. For instance, one finding in Reinhard's case shows that Omaha tribe had more advanced medical technology comparing to the euro-American colonials at the same period, which allows them to fix the arm hurt by severe bullet wound. This is a strong political implications for both scientific community and indigenous communities from my own perspective.

4. This is film in my opinion, does not tend to display with bias for any of the group. It give relatively same time and opportunities to allow each individual to express their statement and reasons. However, one may say this film has a favor on the third opinion, probably because it is the most balanced and "reasonable" solution for the issues regarding to the repatriation of bones, at least I found myself agree with their ideas. While I still can understand the other two statements and why those people hold such opinions.