

The ONWARD Project and Native Voices

Interventions in Biased 1930s Archival Collections

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ABSTRACT: The ONWARD Project is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to sharing the stories and materials associated with the Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition (RBMVE), a 1930s multidisciplinary expedition through the Southwest. This case study will explore The ONWARD Project's strategies and experiences in compensating for the lack of Native voices and perspectives in the archival materials from the RBMVE. Discussion is framed around experiences with seeking the identities of unnamed people in historical photographs through community outreach at the 2016 Navajo Nation Fair in Window Rock, Arizona. This paper addresses the way in which The ONWARD Project has developed and implemented a collaborative methodology meant to work against lasting effects of colonialism found in archives and specifically, how it brings Native voices back to photographic material.

KEY WORDS: collaboration, photographs, Native Americans, community, archives, storytelling

The ONWARD Project is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that has created a storytelling platform using immersive, cutting-edge technologies in virtual reality. The 3D platform models the land explored by the 1930s Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition (RBMVE) and serves as a base on which to present stories of the expedition, the people, and the landscape of the region. The experiential aspects of the project are in the final stage of development, and soon The ONWARD Project will offer a dynamic lens to diverse audiences, inviting exploration of the multifaceted histories of this legendary landscape. The ONWARD Project's founding vision is dedicated to the inclusion of multiple perspectives.

One of the major challenges for The ONWARD Project is that most RBMVE-related archival collections lack documentation created by the surrounding Native communities, leaving out an essential element of the expedition's story. Telling a comprehensive history of the RBMVE requires that we include people who were considered peripheral at the time of the original research. By seeking

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out Native experiences with and perspectives on the RBMVE, we can juxtapose narratives that may challenge or counter the story that we find in the archival written or visual record. The ONWARD Project achieves this by making photographs accessible to Native peoples in the region in order to add names, voices, and community memory to the expedition stories. Supplementation to the historical record is a continual process, therefore, we consider our current and future work with these collections an extension of the original expedition rather than a separate project.

This article presents some aspects of the work that The ONWARD Project has accomplished in its robust research phase and demonstrates how, since the beginning, it has built upon existing personal relationships by actively partnering with respective stakeholders and communities. Highlighting our recent progress in compiling and recording supplemental empirical information for archival materials, this case study demonstrates that there are multiple perspectives in the history of the RBMVE, some that have gone undocumented until now due to exclusionary colonial practices at the time of the original recording.¹ We address this lack of perspective first by presenting basic information about our project and discussing our initial methodology. We then share our first experience with community-based collaboration, followed by a discussion of how we adapted our methods based on this opportunity. Finally, we explain how we plan to continue building our collaborative crowdsourcing research.

Background

The RBMVE began in the summer of 1933 and continued for six seasons during the Great Depression owing to the work of its savvy director, Ansel F. Hall. The exploration, mapping, and scientific research of over three thousand square miles in Northern Arizona and Southern Utah involved researchers and field staff from across the United States.² It enlisted the help of both Native peoples and traders who had established themselves in the area. Resulting material spanning from written and photographic documentation to archaeological collections to biological specimens have been located by The ONWARD Project researchers in over fifty repositories and family archives.

In 2013, inspired by the myriad story threads within the archival material and the potential to create a unique virtual storytelling platform representing different viewpoints, Elizabeth Kahn founded Rainbow Bridge–Monument Valley Expedition, ONWARD!, now called The ONWARD Project. From the beginning, the project aligned with public history: its original mission statement carried the goal of “bringing together and sharing with the public the tremendous breadth of material

¹ Peter Pels, “What has Anthropology Learned from the Anthropology of Colonialism?,” *Social Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2008): 280–99.

² Ralph L. Beals, George W. Brainerd, and Watson Smith, *Archaeological Studies in Northeast Arizona* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), iii, 1.

associated with this historic 1930s expedition.”³ The mission statement is currently under revision, but the commitment to share stories of the people and landscape through the scope of the expedition remains integral to the project. Years of nurturing family and professional friendships that stemmed from a mutual interest in this network of stories preceded the incorporation of The ONWARD Project. Sharing family histories and exploring the RBMVE material with stakeholders inspired us to find and tell the stories of those who are absent from the written record.

One such friendship that blossomed is between Elizabeth Kahn, The ONWARD Project founding director, and Lithuania Denetso (Navajo), who is conducting extensive historical research focused on her grandfather, Max Little-salt, a packer and translator for the RBMVE. Over the years, The ONWARD Project has been honored to work closely with Denetso and her family. Ahead of each trip to the original expedition area, we go through the proper channels to obtain permissions for entry from the Navajo Nation, and we are grateful that they continue to permit us access. The Denetso/Littesalts have been instrumental in the progress of The ONWARD Project, as it is by their gracious partnership and generous gift of time that we have been able to safely access the canyons. With their intimate knowledge of the area where the family has resided, cultivated, and raised livestock for generations and where a significant portion of the original expedition took place, they have become invaluable chaperones, teachers, and literal trailblazers. They have treated us as family with every visit to the area and they are part of The ONWARD Project family as well. Going forward, we continue building partnerships rooted in mutual trust with each new stakeholder we meet, remaining open to the capacity for each relationship to help guide the project in a unique way. Friendships and an expanding network of partnerships have been instrumental in locating and incorporating the viewpoints of both those who participated in the expeditions in the 1930s as well as the people who have inhabited the area long before and since.

The ONWARD Project has nurtured long-standing relationships and developed new ones over the past six years that have allowed us to make an accessible, accurate, and interesting portrayal of the RBMVE for a general audience.⁴ Descendants of expedition members have contributed personal journals, letters, scrap-books, and much else, bringing individual personalities to the wider story. Additionally, through collaboration with Native communities with ties to the region, we pursue a multi-perspective approach.⁵ This means not only telling stories about

3 “ONWARD Mission,” The ONWARD Project website, <https://ONWARDproject.org/mission?statement>.

4 We look to work on museum and cultural studies that discusses how museums and cultural sites adapt to a globalizing and increasingly digital world. See Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

5 This is motivated, in part, by collaborative work on techniques for exhibiting native cultures. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).



Descendants of an expedition guide and packer, Max Littlesalt, hosted The ONWARD Project team during a trip to Navajo Nation in 2015. Left to right: Cory Kahn, Charlie Littlesalt, Elizabeth Kahn, Lithuania Denetso, Allison Fischer-Olson. (Photo by Peter Kirby)

the expedition members who were documented clearly by name in the archival materials, but also seeking out the stories of those who were present, participating, observing, and experiencing, but not asked to record.

The ONWARD Project relies heavily on archival materials recorded in an era when pervasive colonial thought and agendas dictated parameters of knowledge, and in turn, defined who could be bearers of history.⁶ For example, RBMVE director Ansel F. Hall considered the photographic documentation of Navajo people and lifeways to be one of the important achievements of the field program in the first few years.⁷ However, methods for ethnographic fieldwork at the time did not encourage the recording of stories or names of people, or reciprocal sharing with the source community. The failure to document people's names, stories, or perspectives served as a literal silencing of Native voices, and the narratives of the

6 Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand call attention to issues of this nature in the Critical Archival movement in "Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1-8; also see Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002): 1-19.

7 Ansel Franklin Hall, "The Field Program of the Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition," *RBMVE Bulletin* 8 (1936).

people in the photographs have been muted in archives ever since.⁸ Although absence or silence in historical records says a great deal in itself, we are using Indigenous methodologies to inform our practice of filling in gaps in the original records. Our methods for collaboration, which are discussed in more detail below, are shaped by head of research and community outreach, Allison Fischer-Olson, who adapted a methodology to guide our work based on the work of Indigenous scholars Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Daniel Heath Justice, with influence from others such as Margaret Kovach.⁹

Methodologies

We look to collaborative endeavors to include Native experiences and stories that have been superficially present in or even absent from the archives. As there have been several Native nations with ties to the RBMVE region over time, we expect each collaborative relationship to be unique according to the wishes of each group. We prioritize respect for each community's sovereignty, authority, and self-determination over their history, knowledge, and representation.¹⁰ For example, if there are existing initiatives or priorities for research developed within a tribe, we want to find ways to work within their frameworks or programs already underway, as they will more likely lead to work that has value for the community.¹¹ In this paper we address one project with the Navajo Nation, specifically, but our methodology is also embedded in The ONWARD Project philosophy in general. In order to bring the original research back to the communities and locate people with connections to the RBMVE, The ONWARD project directly engages groups in the expedition area. Based on the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* laid out by a group of Native and non-Native professionals working in archives, we aim to meet and surpass best practices for collaborating with Native communities in cultural heritage and representation projects.¹²

8 Ron Maldonado, "An Overview of the Prehistoric Past: One Man's Perspective" (Lecture, Santa Monica, CA, September 25, 2016).

9 Allison Fischer-Olson explores collaboration with Native communities in the context of museums and the necessity of working against the darker legacies of the field of anthropology in her thesis, which develops the ideas that she put into use in The ONWARD Project. "Imagining the Way Forward Through Museum Space: Approaching Working Relationships Between Museums and Indigenous Communities" (MA thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2014).

10 Katrine Barber discusses the importance of these guiding principles in the context of the field of public history in "Shared Authority in the Context of Tribal Sovereignty: Building Capacity for Partnerships with Indigenous Nations," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 4 (November 2013): 20–39.

11 This strategy was suggested by Kelcy Shepherd, manager of Digital Public Library of America, in the presentation, "Addressing the Great Digital Divide: Strategies for Integrating Community Archives into the National Digital Landscape" (Presentation, New York University, New York City, NY, October 20, 2017).

12 First Archivists Circle, *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, <http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>. For more on the conference that developed these protocols, see Karen J. Underhill, "Protocols for Native American Archival Materials," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 7, no 2 (Fall 2006): 134–45.

As mentioned, our methodology looks to the work of Indigenous scholars Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou, Māori) and Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) for insight into how critical studies of decolonization of literature and research can be useful in guiding goals for collaboration in other media, in this case digital public history. We strive to create space for narratives that encompass resistance, express Indigenous presence in the past and present, and imagine them into existence going forward. From Justice, we borrow a decolonization imperative, that story and imagination are key—stories bind past, present, and future, while imagination serves as an expression of self-determination.¹³ Stories and imagination are primary components of The ONWARD Project. Margaret Kovach (Sakewew p’sim iskwew, Plains Cree and Sauteaux) elaborates on the benefits of storytelling when working with Indigenous communities, arguing that formal interviews with structured questions can be confining, whereas storytelling is a research method that gives control to the participants.¹⁴

Secondly, from Smith, we employ an explanation of what it means to decolonize scientific research methodologies.¹⁵ Due to the nature of the original expedition and those of the same era or before, we specifically work against the darker legacies of anthropology as a field that left many Native communities traumatized from the loss of cultural materials, knowledge, and ancestors during the era of intensive museum collecting in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The museum collections resulting from the RBMVE are no exception, although they were in compliance with the laws surrounding the collection of cultural property at the time. What we now consider to be theft of Native property was coupled with damaging narratives perpetuated by ethnographic museum installations and publications.¹⁶ Even the expedition members we study were largely concerned with chronicling their own experiences and recording their research findings, and included Native peoples only as subjects of research, not as people who could reliably retain and share their own histories.¹⁷ Refuting the idea that to decolonize research means to reject Western knowledge, Smith states that, “it is about centering our concerns and

13 Daniel Heath Justice, “Go Away Water! Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Process,” in *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, ed. Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 150.

14 Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 94–108.

15 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 2012), 2–4.

16 Amy Lonetree chronicles this history through the discipline of anthropology, representation of native peoples, museums, and US history in *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 9–16. Additionally, several essays in the volume *Objects and Others: Essays on Museum and Material Culture* detail the evolution of the field of anthropology in studies of notable early anthropologists and institutions. George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museum and Material Culture* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

17 For information about native conceptions and ways of retaining and relating to history, see Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.”¹⁸ Smith’s strategy, to begin one’s understanding of a topic with Native knowledge at the center and to subsequently incorporate other knowledges in an outward direction, makes clear to us the degree to which we must collaborate in order to responsibly present multiple narratives within a project that spans multiple perspectives and epistemologies and seeks to offer nuanced representation of them all.

Our approach, then, is to remain flexible in our ability to accommodate narratives centered around epistemologies other than our own, retaining space for Indigenous-centered narratives to connect to others, rather than attempting to explain or define them. We want our project to be a platform that can be utilized by stakeholding Native communities to imagine, project, and record themselves into the past and future of the region. Fostering positive relationships with groups so that they tell their stories on their own terms and for their own ends is an important step in putting our methodologies to use.

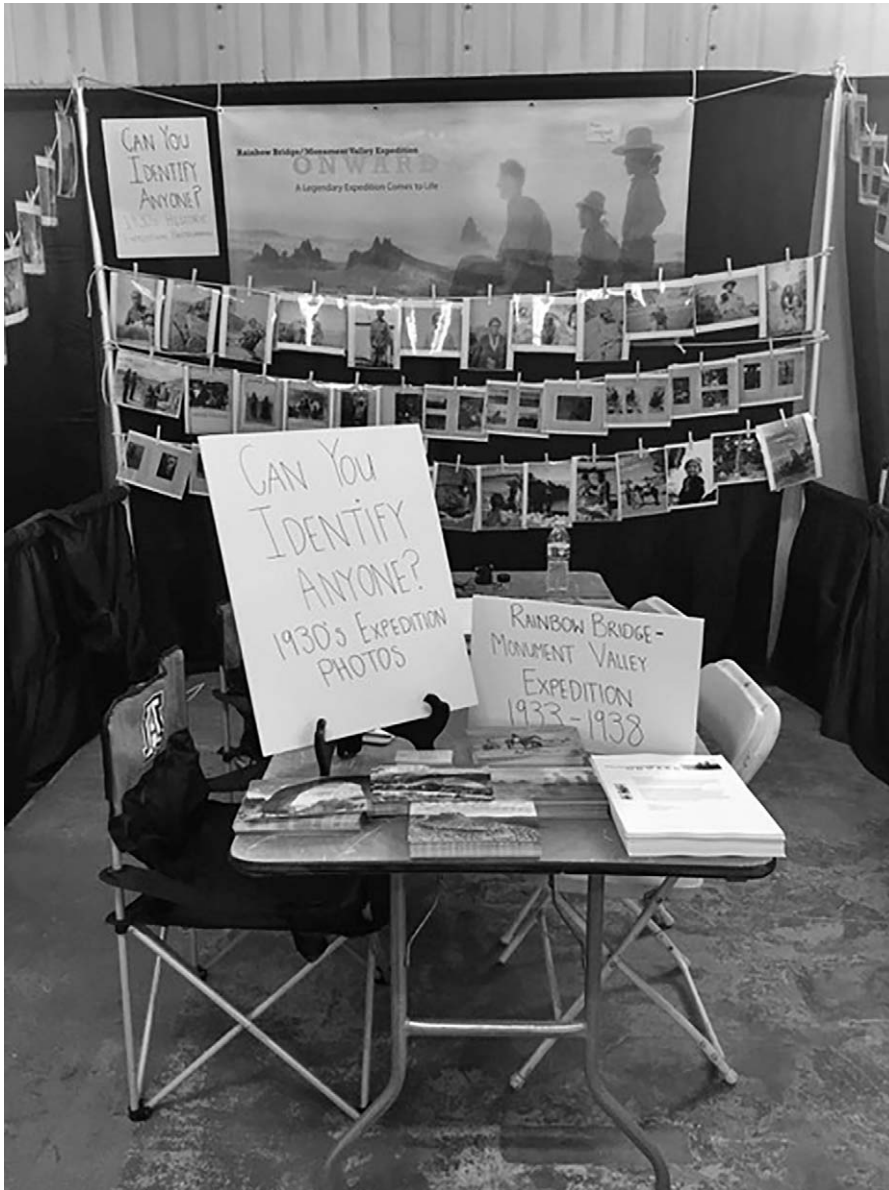
The Project

One of the first opportunities we had to build connections within a community and move toward collaborative work was participation in the annual Navajo Nation Fair. In May 2016, a team from The ONWARD Project traveled to the Navajo and Zuni Nations to meet with individuals about acceptable and desirable ways to work with their respective communities. We traveled to Zuni Nation to spend time talking with Jim Enote, then director of A:shiwí A:wán Museum and Heritage Center, about possible ways we could work together going forward. In another stop on the trip, Ron Maldonado, friend, consultant, and former Navajo Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), met us to provide introductions. In Window Rock, Arizona, the capital of Navajo Nation, Maldonado introduced us to Manuelito Wheeler, the director of the Navajo Nation Museum. After presenting the project and the work ahead, and discussing how it could be of use to the Navajo Nation Museum and the people of Navajo Nation, Wheeler suggested that The ONWARD Project participate in the Navajo Nation Fair at the end of the summer. Since people come from every corner of the reservation to attend the fair, we saw this as an invaluable opportunity to engage numerous Navajo people.

In September 2016, The ONWARD Project team arrived at the fair with seventy historical photographs from the archive that feature unnamed Navajo people.¹⁹ In preparation for differing comfort levels for sharing information with us, we provided several options: people could use sharpies to write anonymously on the

¹⁸ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 113.

¹⁹ The ONWARD Project collected photographs from and with the cooperation of four stakeholders with extensive photographic collections from the expedition: The Fowler Museum at UCLA, The Center for Southwest Studies at Ft. Lewis College, Museum of Northern Arizona, and the family of expedition member Brad McKee.



The ONWARD Project booth at the Navajo Nation Fair in 2016. (Photo by Madi Fair)

laminated photo copies, fill out a form to relay longer stories or give context to a photo, or leave us their contact information for further conversation about a photo. We also brought voice recorders and a videographer for those who wanted to tell a longer spoken story or provide an interview. The team strung the laminated photos up in our booth, placed photograph albums on the table, provided pens, and not knowing what to expect, waited. To our delight, groups of Navajo people and families visited the booth to see the historical photographs. As word of the booth with the old photos traveled through the fair, people came steadily for the two days



Navajo fairgoers look at historical images at the booth and talk with The ONWARD Project team about what they see. (Photos by Madi Fair)

that the booth was set up. Visitors to the booth were as excited to see the photographs as the project team was to share them. This experience demonstrated how sharing images helps the community tap back into past memories and knowledge.

Our first visit to the fair was a resounding success because the archival photographs elicited dialogue, remembering, storytelling, sharing, and connections between people and generations.²⁰ We brought archival material to the fair to intervene in the static past that Native peoples are often forced to occupy in narratives and representations to the public due to the power imbalance present in archives and other knowledge producing institutions.²¹ The goal was to push back on past methods that privileged some experiences over others, which encouraged omissions and erasure and that influenced what history was recorded and disseminated.²² With goals similar to that of Jennifer Jenkins's tribesourcing, we hope to bring forward the voices of Native groups involved in the RBMVE by presenting communities with the opportunity to narrate their stories.²³ Information shared with The ONWARD Project will now live with the respective archival images, both in our documentation and in some cases in the original repository, as well as in the homes of the fairgoers we met, as we gave copies of images to people who recognized their ancestors and wanted a photo to keep.

Although we hoped for as many identifications of specific people or places as possible, we did not initially consider how much interest there would be in other elements of the images, such as clothing, hairstyles, modes of transportation, and daily tasks. For many who did not recognize a relative, the images were still gateways to personal memories. One fairgoer, Derrick Terry, pointed out that each memory and conversation "brings about a whole new story." Some stories that Navajo people shared with us were tangential to our project but provided contextual information. After spending time in the booth with his children and showing them what he did as a young boy at their age, Terry explained in an interview that the photographs brought a "flood of emotions." "When I was nine, I'm trying to raise animals. I'm chasing after cattle," Terry recalled when looking at a photo. "If we didn't gather up cows we would gather up horses. And if not horses, it's sheep,

20 Benjamin Filene addresses how projects such as StoryCrops elicit similar reactions and comments on how the public are attracted to microhistories. "Passionate Histories: 'Outsider' History-Makers and what they Teach Us," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 1 (February 2012): 11–33.

21 Amy Lonetree explains how representations of Native peoples in exhibitions have kept them in a static past in "Acknowledging the Truth of History: Missed Opportunities at the National Museum of the American Indian," *The National Museum of the American Indian*, ed. Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2008), 305–52.

22 For more on the topic of power imbalance in knowledge producing and maintaining institutions, see Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power," 1–19; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures*; Barber, "Shared Authority," 20–39.

23 In an NEH proposal to repurpose films from the mid 1900s, Jenkins devised the term *tribesourcing* as a methodology "that invites Native narrators [to] re-narrate" mainstream educational films in indigenous languages. We use this concept to think about re-narrating photographs in biased historical archival collections. Jennifer Jenkins, "The Afterlife of Film: Tribesourcing Southwestern Materials in the American Indian Film Gallery" (National Endowment for the Humanities Funded Project, March 2017).



Derrick Terry and his family speak with the director of The ONWARD Project, Elizabeth Kahn. (Photo by Madi Fair)

you know. And I'm his age" indicating his nine-year-old son.²⁴ The historical images effectively summoned the past to that place and time, September 2016 in Window Rock, most often in the form of story serving as a gateway to the past. Often, parents and grandparents stood in the booth with their children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, and talked about what they personally saw in the images. For some, this was a relative whom they could name and label on the photograph. For others, they looked at an image and recalled their childhood. Watching these interactions made us realize that our expectations were guided by a narrow definition of identity. Finding out the names of individuals is

²⁴ Derrick Terry (Navajo Nation Fair attendee) in discussion with The ONWARD Project, September 2016.

important for our overall project, but that is not the only way to reinforce, reclaim, or build identity. People demonstrated that even the most discreet or mundane parts of an historical photo can evoke a sense of familiarity and belonging. Their recognition of themselves within the photo served as an affirmation of both their own identity and the person in the image. This recalling, with subsequent sharing of these stories and knowledge, contributed to the continual process of reclaiming community memory.²⁵

Like the Community Archive project described by Michelle Caswell, The ONWARD Project seeks to bring materials back to the Native nation so that they may correct, validate, contest, or generally take control over their own history, providing access where they have previously been disregarded.²⁶ Navajo people collectively retain the most important and meaningful parts of their histories and knowledge.²⁷ Rather than setting our sights on the creation of an accessible repository as with the Community Archive movement, we focus on compiling material found in numerous repositories and sharing it with the respective source community. During these collaborative engagements we support self-representation by connecting with people tied to the expedition or region by recording insight, context, and stories related to the material for use in the overall storytelling project.

Reflections

Our first experience at the Navajo Nation Fair provoked internal conversations about our methodology and use of photographs among the project researchers. After going to the fair, we understood the importance of physically bringing the archival material back to the landscape and people, as well as naming the Native participants. If labeled at all, archival photographs associated with the RBMVE that depict Navajo people are labeled as “unknown Navajo,” while many other native people are recorded generically as “Indian” or “Indian boy,” often without a reference to what community the person is from. As we have learned over the last few years with the development of critical archival studies, in the words of Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand, “naming is a form of legitimating. Naming is power. Naming is a way of demarcating and defining and delineating and harnessing.”²⁸ Not to name, then, is to marginalize. We will continue to seek out names of all those who witnessed, were involved in, or were affected by the RBMVE.

The challenge of our project is to recover Native voices where they have historically been silenced. Thus, one facet of The ONWARD Project’s effort to collaborate is to talk with community members face to face and to reunite the material

²⁵ Maldonado, “An Overview of the Prehistoric Past.”

²⁶ Michelle Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives in the Fight to Against Symbolic Annihilation,” *The Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (2014): 26–37.

²⁷ Raymond Darrel Austin, *Navajo Courts and Navajo Common Law: A Tradition of Tribal Self-Governance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 7.

²⁸ Caswell, Punzalan, and Sangwand, “Critical Archival Studies.”



An example of a historical photo from 2015 with notes from Navajo fairgoers identifying a possible relative. The writing on this photo reflects several conversations with different individuals about the man pictured. (Photo by RBMVE member Robert B. Branstead, 1933. Used courtesy of The Center of Southwest Studies at Fort Lewis College)

with the people and places of origin.²⁹ Many fairgoers came through the booth and recognized their relatives in the images displayed. They spoke with us, often reminiscing about their ancestors, pointing them out, and saying their names aloud. They wrote down the names of their mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc., and began the process of returning voice, and thus authority and identity, back to those individuals within their histories, stories, and narratives.³⁰ Ron Maldonado underlines the importance of this act when he explains that speaking the names gives voice not only to the relative doing the physical speaking, but also to previous and subsequent generations.³¹ The voice itself carries stories and knowledge within because Navajos have primarily relied on oral traditions for

29 Ruth B. Phillips, "Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Toward a Dialogic Paradigm: Introduction," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers (New York: Routledge, 2003), 155–70; Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Karl A. Hoerig, "From Third Person to First: A Call for Reciprocity Among Non-Native and Native Museums," *Museum Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2010): 62–74.

30 It should be noted that voice and authority are not given but recognized as being inherent in a person. This process has been referred to as "reclamation" by Lynette Russell in "Indigenous Knowledge and Archives: Accessing Hidden History and Understandings," in *Australian Indigenous Knowledge and Libraries*, ed. Martin Nakata and Marcia Langton (Canberra: Australian Academic & Research Libraries, 2005), 141–47.

31 Maldonado, "An Overview of the Prehistoric Past."



At the Navajo Nation Fair, relatives identified family members in this historical photograph taken by a student from the Expedition. (Photo by RBMVE member Charles B. McKee, used courtesy of his descendants)

transmission of knowledge, values, and history. To take voice back, Maldonado contends, one must “make that sound to let people know that they had a culture and they had the ability to speak.”³²

Additionally, Navajo conceptions of language, as described by anthropologist Gary Witherspoon, provide insight into the significance of speaking names out loud. Witherspoon explains that the Navajo language is generative within the worldview: “in the Navajo view of the world, language is not a mirror of reality; reality is a mirror of language.”³³ This observation of the inextricable link between language and cosmology within the Navajo worldview essentially means that

³² Ibid.

³³ Gary Witherspoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 34.

language, or, in this case, the act of speaking, is a production or reproduction of reality, rather than merely a description of that which exists already.³⁴ In terms of The ONWARD Project's work at Navajo Nation Fair, when a person with a Navajo worldview speaks the name or the story of a person, the act is an effective validation and expression of existence.

Physical photographs from generations past are rare and important to families who may never have seen a photo of some of their relatives.³⁵ Terry went on to reinforce the point that pictures are special because Navajo history has been documented primarily through oral tradition.³⁶ We understand that bringing back images of relatives and landscapes to communities can help regain or re-create memories, and it puts the narrative into the hands of the subjects of the images or their descendants.³⁷ When doing archival work involving cultures or collectives whose historical bounties lie in oral history, part of doing due diligence as a researcher is filling out that which cannot or has not been documented within mainstream systems. This means looking to the oral when the visual or written was privileged and combining analysis of photographs with oral histories.³⁸ In order to do this, we *must* ask descendants, or we will never get the full story.

Next Steps

Our main goal for this type of crowdsourcing has been to ask the community for assistance with naming people or places in photographs, and to contribute information and stories in order to better contextualize the material.³⁹ We were able to continue this work at five additional events between 2017 and 2019. For example, at the invitation of the Denetso/Littlesalt Family and the Naatsis'Aan Chapter organization we attended the Eehanih Pioneer Day near Navajo Mountain for three successive years to reach residents in the original study area. Something that we did differently at subsequent outreach events after the first Navajo Nation Fair was to invite archive staff from partner institutions that hold the original material. Representatives left more informed of the relationship between some of the collections

³⁴ Witherspoon, *Language and Art*, 34.

³⁵ Maldonado, "An Overview of the Prehistoric Past."

³⁶ Terry, Interview.

³⁷ Alison Landsberg, "Prosthetic Memory: The Ethics and Politics of Memory in an Age of Mass Culture," in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

³⁸ We recognize that the photographs are a product of colonialism and the image within the frame is only a curated portion of the whole story. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss our full methodology regarding photographs as historical sources, but we look to Martha Sandweiss for general guidance in this regard; see *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). For more examples about how the materiality of photographs can be useful in memory projects see Mary Langford, "Speaking the Album," in *Locating Memory: Photographic Arts*, ed. Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

³⁹ These and other goals of crowdsourcing, as well as additional discussion, are outlined in Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 17–69.

that they oversee and the respective source community, and thus, how to better serve them going forward. The five crowdsourcing events in which we have participated so far in Navajo Nation have been useful not only for gaining new information, but for building positive relationships with the Navajo Nation Museum and greater community. They have also helped us gauge how we should proceed in our continued collaboration with them.

We will continue to engage people directly as much as possible. In our future collaborations with other Native groups with ties to the region, we plan to use the same strategy of bringing relevant materials to the respective source, listening to communities' thoughts and concerns, and from there, working together to find ways of supporting self-representation in the larger project if they would like to be included. In some cases, face-to-face collaboration will not be the best strategy, as descendants of those involved in the RBMVE are dispersed all over the country. In order to broaden our audience, we developed an online crowdsourcing web page to seek identifications of unnamed expeditioners and Native people and to provide access to digital images. We recognize that by using this strategy sometimes we will share information and materials but will not receive information that we can use for our public project.

The ONWARD Project will continue to work with respective tribes or community members in order to identify what material is appropriate to share with the public, and what should be available on a restricted basis or not at all. As the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* outline, many considerations for best practices stem from the understanding that some materials or knowledge were not meant to leave a Native community.⁴⁰ In the events described above, we addressed this issue by vetting the photographs to be shared publicly with trusted consultants, such as Denetso/Littlesalt family members and Ron Maldonado, to ensure that we did not display inappropriate material. Further, The ONWARD Project plans to incorporate a digital archive as one part of our storytelling platform. With community guidance, contributed material will be made accessible as part of the larger compilation of RBMVE related material.⁴¹ Ideally, we would like

⁴⁰ First Archivists Circle, *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*.

⁴¹ It has been suggested that our project is aligned with those which are called digital or virtual repatriation projects, such as described by Kimberly Christen in "Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation," *The American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 185–210. Though there are similarities in terms of goals for providing access to materials dislocated from source communities; enabling preservation of culture, tradition, and community memory; and others, The ONWARD Project does not consider the work it does a form of repatriation. Although we aim to make respective collections accessible to stakeholding communities we collaborate with, we acknowledge that ultimately the original physical collections are still held by repositories and are utilized in our project with their permission. We choose to share authority over compiled materials and narratives within the scope of The ONWARD Project, and support goals of self-representation, self-determination and sovereignty. However, legal ownership and authority over physical collections is not being transferred, and thus repatriation is not occurring. For more information on this see Robin Boast and Jim Enoté, "Virtual Repatriation: It Is Neither Virtual nor Repatriation," in *Heritage in the Context of Globalization: Europe and the Americas*, ed. P.F. Biehl and C. Prescott (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013).

to establish a way to make restricted material available privately to respective tribes or members who would like access, perhaps through an online portal. This would include material in the original expedition records deemed sensitive by community consultations. Information about sensitive material would be relayed back to the original repositories for amendments to their own records and cultural awareness.

As the name of our project suggests, we do not consider the work we are doing to be independent of the original expedition, but rather a continual accumulation of the historical records in order to realize the full multifaceted potential of the expedition. We hope to avoid perpetuating past problematic and exploitative engagement with Native communities by following their own preferences or protocols. For example, The Hopi Tribe's Cultural Preservation Office (HCPO) has established a "Protocol for Research, Publication, and Recordings: Motion, Visual, Sound, Multimedia and other Mechanical Devices," which is published on their website.⁴² This document states how they will and will not engage in research in order to protect their privacy and intellectual property, including instructions for submitting a proposal. After having preliminary conversations establishing interest with Hopi Tribal Council members and HCPO personnel, we will submit proposals to HCPO that outline potential collaboration on the project. We are also tapping into our network of friends and trusted advisors in order to meet people in the San Juan Paiute Tribe. In any case, it is important that our collaborations benefit the community or contribute to their own goals and agendas.

Within the larger scope of The ONWARD project, the stitching together of community memory, person-by-person and story-by-story, is a facet of the ongoing work. We will continue to seek out partnerships and build relationships based on trust and mutual respect with those who express interest. We will also branch out further by traveling to different parts of Navajo Nation, as well as other Native nations with ties to the original expedition area, including Hopi, San Juan Paiute, and Zuni. Ultimately, The ONWARD Project moves forward with the intention of finding ways to make our work and platform useful to the Native communities that we work with, as well as informative and interesting to the greater public. This work is important because it extends the original expedition research by documenting histories of the Southwest while pushing back on the extractive and dismissive methodologies of the 1930s. With a critical ear to the past, and a reconciliatory and hopeful ear to the future, The ONWARD Project is amplifying the muted voices in archival documents.

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⁴² "Protocol for Research Publications and Recordings: Motion, Visual, Sound, Multimedia, and other Mechanical Devices," Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, <http://www8.nau.edu/hcpo-p/ResProto.pdf>. In the same spirit, but perhaps less of a how-to, "Museum Collaboration Manifesto" by Jim Enote, Director of A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center, has published on the museum's website reflecting the Zuni Community's attitudes toward collaboration and representation, <http://ashiwi-museum.org/collaborations/museum-collaboration-manifesto/>.

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For more information about The ONWARD Project, visit www.onwardproject.org. If you or someone you know has questions or information about the Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition, e-mail us at info@onwardproject.org.

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