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# 31 Facts about Physical Anthropology in Northeastern Archaeology

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## 31 FACTS ABOUT PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN NORTHEASTERN ARCHAEOLOGY

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This conference concerned man in the Northeast (1). The work session "Physical Anthropology in the Northeast: Some Solutions and Many Problems" was enormously successful in reflecting the current status of physical anthropology in Northeastern archaeology. Although the session was not as well attended as the one, say, on "Style: Behavioural Implications" (with 7 participants, 3 of them conference facilitators and only 1 a Northeastern archaeologist), attendance did equal or exceed that of "Typology: Some Points about Variability" or the one on "Prehistoric Agricultural Expansion," both present discussed the nature of this physical activity. Perhaps the most important criteria given by archaeologists, physical anthropologists, or both, affecting physical anthropology are : you can't do physical anthropology without skeletal remains (2); you can't do physical anthropology without a population of remains (3); and skeletal remains aren't preserved in the Northeast (4).

Dietary remains aren't preserved either (5), but in any case, hypotheses of biological relevance can't come from archaeological remains but must come from skeletal material (6). The converse is also true; hypotheses of archaeological relevance can't come from skeletal material but must come from archaeological remains (7). For example, archaeological population demography comes through assessment of house forms, if they exist, or through ecological models postulated for a particular culture (8). Population pressure--either manifested in smaller area/larger groups or larger (growing) groups/same size area--explains culture change in the Northeast (9). Physical anthropology, if skeletons are found, can only tell us sex, age, stature, number of

cavities, and degree of arthritis (10). This latter study of the history of disease is called paleopathology (11).

Session participants concluded that no new methodology needs to be incorporated or developed for the Northeast. Archaeological interpretations of the archaeology, used as a basis for biological interpretations, must be done by specialists, i.e., archaeologists; the archaeological data base is a given (12). Recovery of skeletal material as other archaeological remains is also a job for the archaeologist. After all, anyone can excavate a skeleton who has excavated a pot (13). Out of the ground, however, skeletons aren't artifacts so their care and analysis must be left to the physical anthropologist for physical anthropological purposes only (14). Archaeology is the study of the past through artifacts (15). Archaeologists, because of their specialized training, should not attempt studies of ethnographic populations, much less studies of their biology (16). Not only are methodological problems resolved between physical anthropology and archaeology, but so too the division of research problems. For example, whether or not there are artifacts dating from 70,000 BP in New York is a problem for archaeologists to decide (17). Current knowledge of human paleontology would have little to contribute to Northeastern United States Neanderthal studies, unless, of course, some fossil bone were recovered. Likewise, the enigma of whether New England stone chambers were made by Celts or other pre-Columbian Caucasians is an archaeological problem (18). Physical anthropologists may be able to assist by examining skeletal collections for indicators of racial admixture in Amerindian groups, but can one apply the modern theory of genetics to other than the ear wax situation (dry versus wet) in living Amerindians? Archaeological questions such as "When did the PaleoIndians leave and where did they go?" concern the evolution of point types and are again removed from physical anthropological interest (19).

When it doesn't cost anything, a physical anthropological report makes an interesting appendix to the archaeological report (20). But the actual physical anthropological analysis should be published in standard biological journals. After all, what does an osteon count have to do with the distribution of pot sherds (21)? When it doesn't cost anything, an archaeological report makes an interesting background summary for the osteological report (22). But, as for the physical anthropological analysis, the archaeological analysis should be published for other archaeologists. What does the distribution of potsherds have to do with osteon (?) counts (23)? As for conferences, if it is requested, a section on physical anthropology should be included in any regional archaeological meeting (24). If requested, a section on archaeology should be included in any topical conference in physical anthropology (there are no regional concerns in physical anthropology-- only topics or site-specific populations) (25). Communication with the general public through newspapers or other public media is really not relevant for scientific studies nor does it have any real place in science (26). If the public wishes to believe anthropologists dig up dinosaurs, that is a problem for journalistic studies or education (27).

In sum, then, the physical anthropology section could not come up with a five-year plan. There are no new problems in Northeastern Archaeology (28). The tuberculous spine exists; scalping marks appear on a skull; and while more populational studies would be nice to have, there is no expectation that skeletal populations will be recovered. The Northeast is so highly urbanized that it is unlikely any new physical anthropological information will be forthcoming (29). Although contract archaeology is increasing in the Northeast, the nature of applied archaeology restricts its value for genuine research (30).

There is, however, some disturbing activity represented by some participants at that conference which may have profound effects on the future of physical anthropology and Northeastern archaeology. Dena Dincauze, whose expertise is in Northeastern archaeology, indicated in her keynote address an interest not in when and where horticulture was introduced to the region but in the "cultural and ecological DYNAMICS" of such a subsistence change. She described the potential of the Northeast for studies of "human modes of ADAPTATION to small-scale environmental heterogeneity" and suggests the application of energetics to "generate models exploring the adaptive value of technological variability in time and space." Anthropologists interested in the biological basis of and interactions with culture in human action were seen to attend other work sessions. In one case (Ethnohistory and Contact), these anthropologists even went so far as to suggest that clinical and ethnographic (living) populations-- Amerindians, Euroamericans, Afroamericans--may have relevance to Northeastern studies of pre-and proto-history (31). These are but a few examples which signal subversion of traditional archaeology and physical anthropology in the Northeast over the next several years. Such subversion will confuse the division of anthropological disciplines dealing with the Northeast. Unless checked, the Northeast will become an area for ANTHROPOLOGICAL studies based on the premise that because Northeastern archaeological anthropological studies concern human organisms, these studies should have a founding in biological anthropology. Rather than remaining a back-yard resource convenient for residents, the Northeast is apt to become a significant area for testing anthropological hypotheses of human biological and cultural adaptation which are generated both within and without the region. Worse yet, the title of this paper would have to be changed to "31 Fallacies about Biological Anthropology in the Northeast."