(Re)visiting (New) Mexico's Ancient Origins: Ancestral Native Kinship Beyond Classical Civitas

Kendall Lovely

Abstract: This paper focuses on the foundations and legacies of anthropology in the American Southwest, building from previous classical reception scholarship which considers the ways in which classicism interacted with colonialism in the early anthropology of Lewis Henry Morgan and his contemporaries. Due to Morgan's studies, lands in Northern New Mexico, then a recent acquisition of the United States, appeared alongside interests in classical archeology for the first annual Archaeological Institute of America report. Yet this examination seeks to revisit Morgan's conceptions of civilization and to recenter Indigenous kinship and connection to these lands. Through Indigenous feminist revisioning, this revisioning asserts the importance of methodologies in ethical care against the colonial abandonment of Indigenous peoples to static stages of antiquity.

Keywords: kinship, civilization, Critical Indigenous Studies, Southwest anthropology, curation.

Introduction

Coloniality is a key part of constituting classicism, as it defines civilization through its literal and conceptual border-making. Toward a practice in Indigenous (re)mapping, I approach this border-making through first identifying the influence of a hegemonic classicism as constructed and perpetuated alongside the development of American anthropology.[1] This early anthropology, both archeological and ethnographic, relied on both material and epistemological Indigenous dispossession. Indigenous experience is intimately defined against and tied to colonial imposition or intrusion as part of both historical and ongoing exploitation in "modern," that is, recent centuries. "Indigenous" asserts a political status (often racialized) that can only be read as a modern and ongoing condition related to this coloniality. At the same time, "Indigenous" people must be considered as people in the present who are structurally dispossessed of ancient pasts and futures within colonial projects. Recently, classicist Dan-el Padilla Peralta has posited classicism as a form of valuation, albeit contested over space and time, but most prominently built from a racial capitalism linked to settler-colonial dispossession. For Padilla-Peralta, an over-represented classicism results from this valuation—a "historical-material process," not simply ideological. Padilla-Peralta's critique posits race, empire, and settler-colonialism at the heart of this historical-material process.[2] Ultimately, my project concerns epistemic injustice, not just with concerns rooted in knowledge structures, but with material implications as well.

[1] I refer to "classics" and "classical studies" interchangeably in this essay with both referring to the professional field focused on defining canonized aspects of the Ancient Mediterranean within a constructed "Classical Tradition" or classicism in this hegemonic sense. For further critique regarding use of indigeneity and Indigenous Studies in classics, see Lovely 2025.

[2] Padilla Peralta 2025, 1-2.

My broader project traces the extraction of Indigenous knowledge and materials by classically-trained early anthropologists in New Mexico and surrounding regions.[3] In recognition of the colonial underpinnings that surrounded such extraction, I argue for a reframing of ancestral sites not as mere "ruins" or remnants of a past civilization, per the nineteenth-century conceptualizations that came from the intersecting foundations of American archeological pursuits in both domestic territories and abroad. Rather, these are *active* sites connected to still-living peoples. This reframing takes into account ways in which Native peoples map their own relationships, or kinship, to their ancient pasts, while critiquing the distancing and dispossessive aspects of anthropological categorization, including the field's constructed kinship concepts.

Perhaps better known for his impact on the field of anthropology, and cultural evolution within it, through his studies of the Iroquois Confederacy, Lewis Henry Morgan also played a formative role in colonial exploratory interests in the American Southwest. Previous scholarship by classicists has focused on the impact of classics in his *Ancient Society* (1877), his more comprehensive comparative publication, and already draws on the relationship between classicism and ideas of cultural evolution.[4] I focus for now on his later publications that bring his travels to Central America and the American Southwest into consideration alongside Greek and Roman archeology through the first report of the Archaeological Institute of America. While there are some immediate influences from classicism, I also draw attention to how his adaptation of a classical *civitas,* rendered from a Ciceronian political reception into a cultural evolutionary meaning, serves as a conceptual framework for material dispossession in the context of American colonial and imperial exploitation. I pay attention to the particular groundwork that Morgan brings to New Mexico's San Juan River Valley Basin and the greater Chaco area as an origin of ancient American civilization, which worked to establish American archeologists as inheritors of its legacy at the cost of the people who still live there.

In this case, Morgan's display of knowledge of the region derived from military surveying and bridged romantic interest in ruins and ancient pasts with scientific systemization. This collecting of information also figures into another level of mapping in line with the AIA's goal to both "quicken the interest in classical and Biblical studies, [and] to promote an acquaintance with the antiquities of our own country."[5] The AIA would first establish schools in Athens and Rome, then Jerusalem at the turn of the century. Where the AIA's first annual report joined Morgan's Southwest anthropological study with papers on the ancient Mediterranean, this was not merely a random juxtaposition. The AIA would

[3] My overarching research scope focuses on the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. However, my case study for this article centers the late nineteenth century as a starting point, when New Mexico was a US territory and not yet entering into statehood, which factors into this case study's context of colonialism.

[4] See Varto 2018; of related interest, see also Kennedy 2018 in the same volume, which delves into the also classically-influenced (and environmentally-deterministic) culture area concept that was championed through early museum display at the Smithsonian in the late nineteenth century. The culture area concept remains pervasive in the categorization of Native arts (i.e. Southwest, Plains Indian, Eastern Woodlands, etc.). This has a broader history, which I cover more in depth elsewhere (Lovely 2019), but Kennedy offers a useful starting point in tracing classical reception and impositions of racial ideas in anthropology relevant here.

[5] *First Annual Report of the Executive Committee with Accompanying Papers Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Archeological Institute of America* (1880, 8). The executive committee at the time consisted of Charles Eliot Norton (president), Martin Brimmer (vice-president), Francis Parkman, H.W. Haynes, W.R. Ware, W.W. Goodwin, Alexander Agassiz, O.W. Peabody, and E.H. Greenleaf.

further its mission regarding American antiquities and found its first American school in the United States' Southwestern territory a few decades after its first annual report, in 1907.[6]

Where Morgan draws from the prevalent nineteenth-century language of "ancient" and "ruins" when discussing still-living sites and peoples, he participates in a co-constructed discourse between classical studies and American anthropology that maps *civitas* based on settler and imperial observations. Morgan at first premises *civitas* as meaning a state-based political organization.[7] Yet, he also associates *civitas* with civilization, or the highest order of his stages of cultural evolution, which progressively advanced from savagery to barbarism to civilization.[8] *Civitas* was then a defining characteristic as opposed to more kinship-based (*societas)* social states.[9] Morgan imposed his readings of classical material in redefining social orders and kinship categories in place of Indigenous knowledge and kinship. Morgan's conception of the stages of civilization pervades ongoing and global understandings of the preservation of the past, starting with the first annual AIA report's introductory material that precedes Morgan's article. "The study of American archeology relates, indeed, to the monuments of a race that never attained to a high degree of civilization, and that has left no trustworthy records of continuous history," asserts the report's introduction.[10] The imposition of these hierarchical terms related to ruins and antiquity constitutes material colonial dispossession, but the latter part of this article will shift toward visions of Indigenous futurity that realign the ongoing presence of Indigenous people, deemed mere ancient but unknowing vestiges in the lead up to the inaugural AIA report, and their reassertions of relationships to their ancestors. Following scholarship that centers Indigenous feminist practices of (re)mapping and visiting, this paper emphasizes ethical care against the colonial abandonment of Indigenous peoples to static stages of antiquity.[11]

WHAT IS SACRED?

While I myself am Diné, I was raised in an urban setting outside of the San Juan Basin and greater Chaco Canyon region referenced in this article. However, I will start by centering the voice of a Diné relative, artist Jessie Weahkee, who does have ties to the particular lands discussed. Over the past year, I have curated a digital exhibition titled *Red Coral Stories*.[12] My digital exhibition project situates a cross-cultural borderlands and space of exchange

[6] Lewis and Hagan 2007.

[7] In this political sense, as I will explain further, Morgan perhaps derives some meaning from Cicero.

[8] Morgan quotes Horace's *Satires* at the outset of *Ancient Society*, which speaks to a notion of succession from primitive life stages as Morgan set out.

[9] Morgan 1877.

[10] *First Annual Report of the Executive Committee with Accompanying Papers Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Institute* (1880, 18).

[11] Goeman 2013; Tuck et. al. 2022. Goeman's (re)mapping is a practice of spatial justice that critically reassesses colonial frameworks while asserting Indigenous relationalities to space.

[12] *Red Coral Stories* (2023), www.redcoralstories.com; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

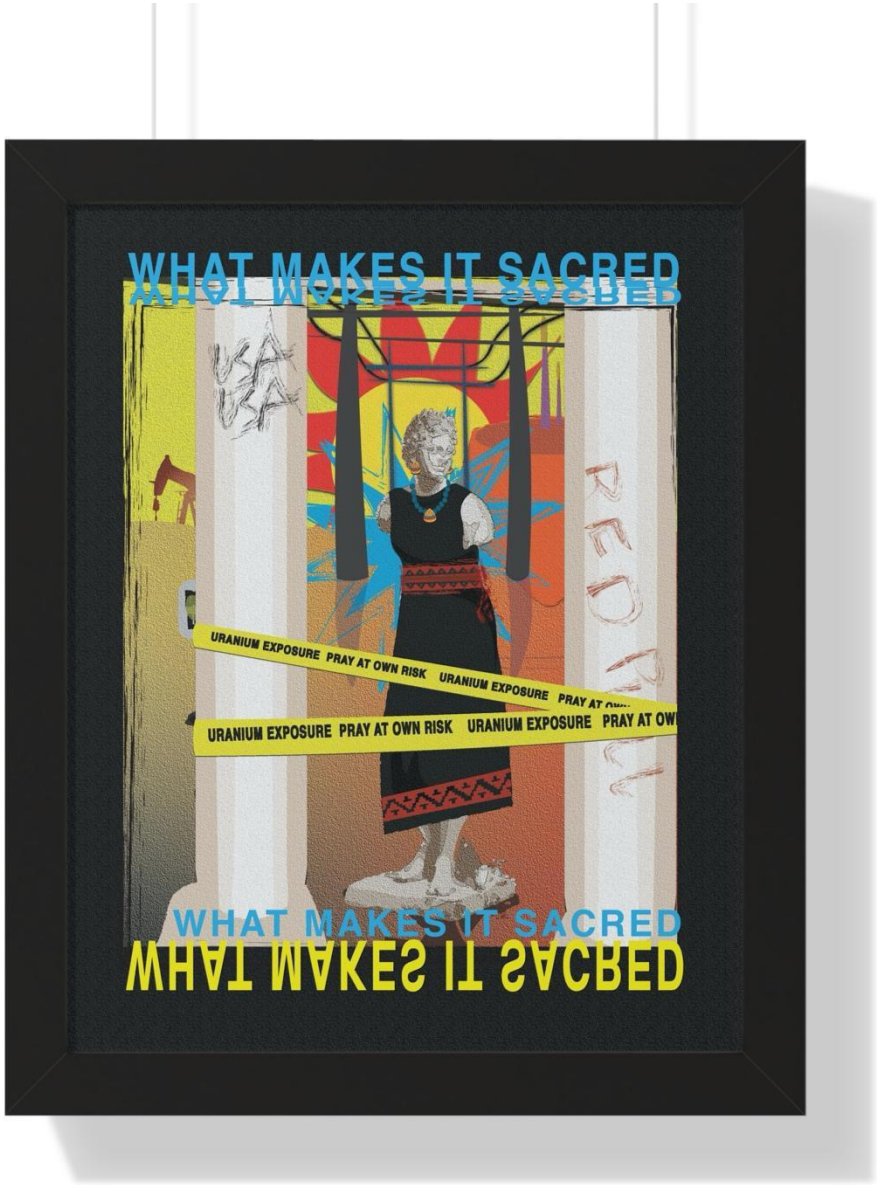

Fig. 1: "Dziłth'na'o'dithłe" (2021), Jessie Weahkee (Sleepyrock).
Image courtesy of the artist.

between the Ancient Mediterranean and Native lands of the US Southwest, which resists the unilateral imposition of Western civilization frameworks and conquest.[13] In addition to world-renowned artists such as Anna Tsouhlarakis (Greek, Navajo, Creek), I included Native creatives who are emerging and less well-known—that is, to the art world, museums, and galleries. My curatorial practice follows the work of Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck, Haliehana Stepetin, Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing, and Jo Billows in their co-written essay, "Visiting as an Indigenous Feminist Practice" (2022) emphasizing care and ethics in research relationship building.[14] Although one may be a guest, visiting entails being responsible for a place, even if one's presence there is impermanent, and the co-authors stress that such visiting is inherently anti-capitalist and queer in practice.[15] One need not possess all intimate knowledge of a place to be invested in its futurity, but relationship building occurs through community-based care, reciprocation, and mutual respect. Since there is no monolithic voice from Native communities, *Red Coral Stories* offers a variety of perspectives of some of us Natives with ties to the lands known as the US Southwest. The featured work, "Dziłth'na'o'dithłe," (2021) by Cochiti, Diné, Zuni, and Chicana artist Jessie Weahkee, who goes by Sleepyrock as her artist name, asserts Indigenous presence on these lands. This assertion serves as a reminder that despite the surveying and subsequent collecting efforts enabled by nineteenth-century early anthropologists, Indigenous peoples have maintained continuous relationships. The continuity of these relationships complicates archeological mapping that replaces living relations with extractible resources as key features. This artwork's Indigenous perspective serves as critique of the legacy of those surveyors' documentation projects (Figure 1).

Weahkee's digital painting centers a Venus statue reimagined as the *Diné* (Navajo) ancestors, White Shell Woman and Changing Woman. She wears a *Diné biil,* or traditional woven dress, and turquoise bead with shell jewelry set. A rising sun and star pattern behind the sacred woman sit behind power lines, and a power plant and oil rig also jut into the background edges. The statue itself stands between Greek columns, which have been tagged "USA USA" on the left and "REDRUM"—"murder" backwards—on the right. The reference to murder underscores the overbearing presence of extractive industries that have come with US claims to the land and the closely connected prevalence of violence toward Native women. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement often seeks to highlight these connections between land and gendered body violence that have impacted Native peoples for generations.[16] Caution tape stretched between the columns and in front of the Venus statue reads, "URANIUM EXPOSURE PRAY AT OWN RISK," while the line "WHAT MAKES IT SACRED" repeats at the top and bottom of the painting.

As Weahkee explains in her artist statement:

> Dziłth'na'o'dithłe is a small community and sacred site just north of Chaco Canyon. Dziłth'na'o'dithłe is mentioned by name in our songs, ceremonies,

[13] For some discussion on how borderlands approaches have worked in reorienting American history, see Hämäläinen and Truett 2011.

[14] Tuck et. al. 2022.

[15] Ibid. This work in turn builds upon Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's land as pedagogy approach, stressing the importance of learning through the land non-extractively, rather than merely learning about or from the land. See Betasamosake Simpson 2014.

[16] For one example of advocacy which focuses on these connections, see: Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, "Land and Body Violence," https://csvanw.org/focus-areas/trainings-and-education/land-body-violence/; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

> and countless traditions. As a small girl, my dad imparted the sacredness of the place, which made me infuriated by the sight of cell phone towers littering the mesa, oil rigs in the distance, and nearly no indication of the preciousness of this beautiful place. Dziłth'na'o'dithłe, as well as our sacred ancestors Changing Woman and White Shell Woman, represent Diné womanhood. Aphrodite, adorned by shells as the Goddess of Sexuality, Love, and Beauty, is loved, respected, revered, and preserved by her home in the hearts of artists, admirers, curators. When creating this piece, I wanted to imagine Aphrodite treated in the same way as ours—loved and dressed carefully by our people, but with little regard or notice from the outside world.[17]

Weahkee's digital painting brings attention to the role of sacredness as embedded in land, still-living ancient sites, and materials therein. In centering Chaco Canyon, a site of colonial dispossession through archeological resource extraction as well as colonial development and the ruinations of lands caused by extractive energy industries such as fracking and uranium mining, Weahkee's work underscores how these forms of ongoing colonialism are linked and continue to degrade the sacred. At the same time, through evoking the Greek goddess Aphrodite, a symbol of objectifying male gazing, Weahkee presents a critical subversion of viewing the sacred as a commodity to be gazed upon or consumed. Through her Indigenized re-imagining of Aphrodite, Weahkee asserts another form of sacredness out of the care and protection that should be extended toward sacred womanhood and the land. Since land and body violence are entangled and gendered, a problem deeply entrenched with the extractive industries that affect the Navajo Nation and Native lands, protecting the sacred requires stewardship and care rather than the destructive forces of objectification and (dis)possession.[18]

While rooted in particular Diné cosmologies, Weahkee's artistic comment engages in a form of Indigenous feminist visiting as reflected on by Tuck et. al. (2022). Weahkee's artwork serves as a unique reflection of Diné cosmologies and relationships to place, yet her painting is not meant to serve as an ethnographic impression upon the land. Rather, her project allows for thinking through the embodied relationships which Diné community members have with those Northern New Mexico lands. Learning through the land, in this case, includes critical reflection upon the embodied violences that are lived experiences for many Diné community members while situating those communities alongside industrial developments that stem from oil, gas, uranium, and other mineral extraction industries. The intrusion of industries, with their challenges to the long-term health of community members, as well as to the health of the land, complicates the nineteenth-century notions of progress central to anthropology's "civilization" models.

Lewis Henry Morgan, kinship, and the AIA

Previous scholarship by classicists has focused on the impact of classics in Morgan's more broad-ranging comparative work, *Ancient Society* (1877), and already draws on the

[17] "Jessie Weahkee, artist statement," *Red Coral Stories* (2023). To highlight her work, I include her bio from the digital exhibition here: "Jessie Weahkee is a Pueblo, Navajo, and Chicana graphic designer and artist based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her artist name, 'Sleepyrock' pays homage to her father's clans and upbringing. Through art, Sleepyrock tries to shed light on Native life, spirituality, trials, and family."

[18] Yazzie 2018.

relationship between classicism and ideas of cultural evolution.[19] *Ancient Society* (1877) is the work in which Morgan most comprehensively lays out his stages of civilization (from savagery and barbarism to civilization with grades in between) and kinship models (which were suffused with terms derived from classical sources such as *gens* and *phratry*). His work was based on inspiration from classical Greek and, especially, Roman authors as well as contemporary classical historians, yet he diverged from the classical tradition where he asserted his own viewpoints as an American, which he believed gave him better and perhaps even corrective insights on kinship in ancient societies and across cultures.[20] In Queer and Indigenous studies scholar Mark Rifkin's reading of Morgan, kinship serves imperial and racialized mappings premised on making normative the nuclear family and private property as conditions of a liberal state. Yet, Rifkin also reads kinship through Indigenous appropriations as useful recognizing alternative political orders outside of nineteenth-century imaginaries and enactments by settler states.[21] These considerations of kinship beyond Morgan's frameworks are useful for re-visiting Morgan's assertions regarding lack of *civitas,* or a state, based on the Indigenous peoples in New Mexico.

Beyond the ideological framings of kinship within Morgan's writings, other scholars have pointed to Morgan's passions for idealized indigeneity as the basis for his deep affinity for his major subject matter, the Iroquois Confederacy or Haudenosaunee people. In other words, Greco-Roman classicism merged with a noble savage fascination with the American Indian in a formative fraternal order membership, known as the Grand Order of the Iroquois, which as Yankton Dakota historian Philip Deloria has detailed, was a form of playing Indian.[22]

Where Deloria reads Morgan's playing Indian as a form of American national claims to Indigenous inheritance, formed out of a romanticism about Native Americans' connections to nature, others have read it in the context of the Victorian nature of fraternal or men's societies, which were themselves homosocial if not homosexually-coded spaces.[23] Fieldwork, literary fantasy, and fellowship converged through Morgan's creation of the Order of the Iroquois, where he also collaborated with a young Towanda Seneca informant, Ely S. Parker. Beyond his early acquaintance with Morgan, Parker would succeed in becoming a key part of US Indian policymaking through working for Ulysses S. Grant and becoming the first Native person appointed as Commissioner of Indian Affairs during Grant's presidency. Following Rifkin's reading of Parker's fleeting presence through popular historical narrativity, Parker should be read as more than a prop in Morgan's story. Through Parker's presence, beyond US nationalist processes that presented silent Natives as temporal aberrations, Parker offers a glimpse of alternative Native histories, sovereignties, and

[19] Varto 2018 and Kennedy 2018. Even more recently, Padilla Peralta 2025 traces Morgan's impact on Marx and subsequent influence on DuBois, an ideological genealogy which created a throughline in excluding America's Native peoples into W.E.B. DuBois' critical work on nineteenth-century race.

[20] Varto 2018 has already given a more in-depth discussion of Morgan's classical lens via *Ancient Society.* I use this study as a taking off point, to consider where his later travels and data brought him into the American Southwest as a further place-based intervention.

[21] Rifkin 2024.

[22] Deloria 1998. I use "American Indian" as the term here, where it refers to the particular construction of American stereotyping, whether idealization or denigration, of Native American peoples. The term "Indian" is especially relevant toward the particular national identity formation which Americans have romanticized or sought to appropriate, as in situations of "playing Indian."

[23] Herdt 2003.

futures.[24] There also exists in Morgan's relationship to Parker and his culture what Tuck and Yang identify as "settler nativism" and "fantasizing adoption" among what they refer to as a "series of settler moves to innocence" in their influential work on decolonization.[25] These are ultimately moves toward reconciling settler futurity as well as assuaging guilt. Such moves underlie the function of kinship, genealogy and, ultimately, inheritance—key elements in the settler project.

The very concept of classicism as tradition likewise bears the burden of genealogical inheritance, though classicist Marcella Ward has cautioned against the past century's tendencies to affiliate classics with biological science. Ward's intervention is to resist those eugenicist and ableist impulses, based in the same notions of progressive cultural evolution and fitness which plague Morgan's models. She instead posits queer kinship, or crip ancestorship, as a counter. "Kinship with the Greeks and Romans, under these models of disobedient relationality, is not an accident of inheritance or biology but a networked solidarity actively sought," writes Ward.[26] This is an intriguing potential intervention, though kinship as chosen does not fully unsettle colonial dispossession, given that Morgan and his contemporaries, even prior to a twentieth century biological determinism, closely tied nineteenth-century romantic kinship with Greeks, Romans, and America's Indians alike.

And while inheritance is a construct, its construction through Western or Classical traditions carries its own genealogy. Morgan's own notions of inheritance and kinship sit at the juncture of a classicism more visibly bearing on anthropology, as the latter sought to establish itself as a science for future settler progress and as a way of systematically (dis)possessing ancient pasts. I bring into consideration Morgan's later travels and writings which, while relatively uninfluential in Southwest anthropology, were present at a seminal point in the development of a regional center for anthropological and archeological interests on the North American continent. Travel writings in the American Southwest territories evoke a longer tradition of romanticized American views of the Western continent's lands.[27] Modern Greek historian Olga Katsiardi-Hering has traced how eighteenth-century archeology fomented modern Greek nationalism's constructions of Hellenism as underpinned by antiquity. The same archeological discoveries served as the basis of European identifications through Grand Tour neoclassicism and romanticism, each of which sought to elevate Hellenic and Roman antiquity as "classical."[28] The tourism of Morgan and others in the later nineteenth century likewise sought to discover an American ancient past, and if not elevate it, create knowledges for the sake of making Americans both alike and distinct from Europeans in their national roots.

Key to settler colonial claims to antiquity, in both the epistemological and material senses, was the nineteenth-century formation of nationalist identities. Morgan's studies across Latin America and the New Mexico territory provide a multi-layered fashioning of colonial narratives which supplant Indigenous meaning and presence in mapping a linear

[24] Rifkin 2017.

[25] Tuck and Yang 2012.

[26] Ward 2023, 268.

[27] Some of this American romance exists in the imagination of Western landscapes (Huhndorf 2024), while some scholars have explicitly tied combined romanticism and nationalism that, in the process of positioning American nationalism in connection with "Old World" ancient connections, built myths of civilized past races out of Mounds sites rendered into ruins for supplanting American Indian ownership (Timmerman 2020).

[28] Katsiardi-Hering 2020.

progression toward later nations' inheritance. Classicist Marcella Ward provides a critique of classical studies' naturalization of linear time through reading Muslim studies interventions against chrononormativity. Such naturalization privileges a line of inheritance from the classical, while omitting history which is not included as part of the "West."[29] My similar critique of such strategies of naturalization, including Morgan's, comes from Indigenous studies interventions, such as Mark Rifkin's study of Native presence beyond settler orders of time. Rifkin argues for understanding multiple temporalities, such as Indigenous experience "in relation to collective experiences of people-hood, to particular territories…to the ongoing histories of their inhabitance in those spaces, and to histories of displacement from them."[30] In Morgan's 1878 "Journal of a Trip to Southwestern Colorado and New Mexico" and preceding "Seven Cities of Cibola" (1869), he asserts that New Mexico's San Juan River Valley and the greater Chaco area were the origin site for corn and particular forms of building, and thus ancient American civilization. He thereby privileges *Aztlán* and the mythological cities of Cibola, associated with with Spanish and Mexican presence, over the presence of the Apache, Diné, and Pueblo Indians of the region.

Today, *Aztlán* in the United States evokes the Chicano Movement's postcolonial resistance to racism and exclusion in the US through *indigenismo*, which simultaneously glosses and collapses Mexican indigeneity through *mestizaje* or mixture. This embrace of *indigenismo* presupposes inheritance of a monolithic and static past and boosts a narrative of an ancestral homeland north of the Mexican border, *Aztlán*, at once instilling legitimacy and also constructing an idealized "Indian" past for those without Zapotec, Maya, or other specific Indigenous identities to claim. This mythic past, however, is based on Mexican nationalist claims and relies on settler statuses.[31] At the same time, this narrative about civilization origins does not necessarily promote Mexican, US, or any specific other nation's colonial claims, but can be read as a more universalizing framework that treats any ancient origin as belonging to the "discovering" nation's empirical gaze, a framework that inserts such etiologies into a broader civilizational history.[32] In other words, it positions an ancient origin for a successive nation to claim. Archeological nationalisms stemming from the nineteenth century relied on linear narratives providing genealogical origins for nation states from ancient predecessors which entailed dispossessive claims on the part of settler-colonial nations.[33]

I will omit close readings only to point to the 1869 and 1878 writings, focused on New Mexico collectively, which both constituted portions of his Southwest trip data in the first annual AIA report. The first annual AIA report featured Morgan's essay on Indigenous societies in the Americas, contemporary and ancient, alongside essays by other scholars who

[29] Ward 2024; this study centers Muslim studies interventions against chrononormativity toward a-historicity that destabilizes this normativity. Bhalerao 2024 in the same volume exemplifies a similar intervention in a case study that asserts Islamic co-presence rather than alternative history at sites which privilege classical associations.

[30] Rifkin 2017, 3.

[31] Lourdes 2016.

[32] Díaz-Andreu García 2007 elaborates on both dimensions of Latin American nationalisms building archeological narratives, but also looks at the broader operations of nineteenth-century archaeology in support of European imperialism and colonialism globally, as both of these are forms of hegemony. Critical Ancient World Studies, notably, disparages universalism as colonial (inasmuch as it is made synonymous with Eurocentrism or the "West" in their aims (Umachandran and Ward 2024).

[33] Sommer 2017.

focused on ancient Roman and Greek studies.[34] Morgan's AIA presentation would then comprise the subject of his final book publication on *Houses and House-Life of the American Aborigines* (1881). With the aim of furthering the AIA's expanding interests in American antiquities, Lewis Henry Morgan contributed to the AIA's first annual report, "A Study of the Houses of the American Aborigines: With Suggestions for the Exploration of the Ruins in New Mexico, Arizona, the Valley of the San Juan, and in Yucatan and Central America, Under the Auspices of the Archeological Institute." From the title alone, these regions are delineated as spaces rich with remnants or relics, left for Americans to explore for assembling knowledge.

In the first AIA report, Morgan's comparative contribution added New Mexico "ruins" to a range of ethnographic evidence and classical knowledge that he collected earlier in life. This paper was the culmination of other pieces of writing that came from his late excursions into Central America and New Mexico territory. The information from these trips were supplemented by his correspondence as he mentored Adolph Bandelier, who would go on the AIA's sponsored New Mexico expeditions in the 1880s. Unlike Morgan, Bandelier would extensively travel the region beyond Morgan's brief tours. Yet it was Morgan who influenced Bandelier's path toward ethnographic exploration. A site within the Jemez mountains, also known as the Pajarito Plateau, is now more prominently known as Bandelier National Monument, making the explorer figure in some ways larger than the many Pueblo peoples who lived there over centuries.[35] A disruption of the relations between people and place occurs in both the labeling of the buildings there as abandoned ruins and the renaming of the place after the settler who later "rediscovered" them.[36] Yet, in addition to foregrounding the presence of many such "ruins" scattering the region, early anthropological interest imbued the northernmost parts of the Southwestern territory with origin stories and mythmaking about the North American continent's ancient past.

While Morgan does not further these assertions to the same extent in his AIA presentation, this publication gives a glimpse of what interest he may have excited in Bandelier and others affiliated with the organization as they proceeded to make the region a priority for expeditions. Such insistence about America's ancient origins is a significant feature of settler-colonial knowledge-making that went into Morgan's study. Classicism, notably through Morgan's conception of *civitas*, meaning State and also condition for civilization, functions as a metaphor that operates between discursive and material dispossession. The second section of his essay, where he treats the built structures enumerated in his study's title directly, is particularly illuminating of these dispossessive epistemological processes. Not entirely focused on "ruins," his study is both ethnographic and archeological in its breadth, yet categorizes examples of dwellings from each region according to objectifying classifications. For his AIA study, bringing each of these areas together, Morgan refers to various groups as "the Sedentary Village Indians of New Mexico, Arizona, Mexico, and Central America," flattening multiple peoples across space and time according to his perception of similarities.[37]

[34] *First Annual Report* 1880.

[35] For a more recent archeological perspective on this expansive premodern history, see Stuart 2010.

[36] However, this is not to say visibly restoring Indigenous placenames is always the solution, as some peoples prefer to keep these intimate knowledges about places to themselves. This includes where coloniality relies on both historical and legal processes to construct evidence against Indigenous safeguarding (Kolowratnik 2022).

[37] Morgan in 1880b, 43.

Morgan's AIA report stresses the static state of the tribes of the Southwest US territory. To Morgan, the Southwest tribes seem as if untouched by contact, which he stresses is not the case with Eastern tribes. He finds the Southwest Natives important, but still inferior to societies in the Yucatan and Central America, who were "middle barbarous" per his stages of civilization. Those societies were not upper barbarous as he deemed the Ancient Greeks, Romans, and Germanic tribes, which he evidenced by the Central American ruins—and the "middle barbarous status existed before Spanish violences replaced those extant societies with lesser ones, according to Morgan.[38] As for *civitas* as an element of civilization, Morgan asserts:

> A palace implies a king, or a potentate of some kind, with power to enforce the labor of the people to build palaces for his exclusive use; a city implies numbers, a highly organized society, and stable subsistence, and civilization implies a high degree of culture and advancement. When America was discovered there were found two Pueblos of large size—that of Mexico and that of Cuzco in Peru—and a large number of small Pueblos, such as that at Palenque and at Uxmal; but there was no city, no palace, no civilization, and no State (*civitas*), as these terms are properly understood. The elements of civilization are gained only by immense labor, and outside of the Aryan and Semitic families it can scarcely be said at that time to have existed.[39]

Morgan's denial of particular terms related to ancient cities from Mexico to Peru undergirds his cultural evolutionary staging. According to Morgan's arguments against others studying those ruins, while these societies may have left impressive forms of architecture, they were not at the level of civilizations. For Morgan, civilizational advancement was equated with political power, including labor exploitation, forming what he recognized as a *civitas* state. This relationship to labor and power brings in a materialist or property-based dimension to what *civitas* meant to Morgan, where he viewed it as more appropriate to treat ruins in Central America as resembling New Mexican Pueblos in structure. Morgan insisted on societies without *civitas* as based on communal relations. Accordingly, he viewed these ancient palaces and temples as more likely communal houses built of communal labor, in line with his observations from living Pueblo villages or perhaps Iroquois societies within his North American studies. A level of advancement involving a state could not be recognized out of documented ruins in Morgan's rigid cultural evolutionary scheme.

My analysis is not meant to dwell long on the use of *civitas* through deeper analysis of its classical referents. I do see the use of this term as at least inspired by his studies of ancient writing, with sustained attachments to classicism through his comparative study, though his usage of such terms do not constitute consistent or sustained engagement with Cicero or any other ancient Roman or Greek author.[40] The Ciceronian *civitas,* based in governing laws, is referenced where Morgan aligns the meaning with a State.[41] At the same time, this brief

[38] These stages of civilization, as well as earlier conceptualization around *civitas*, are more famously premised in his book, *Ancient Society* (1877).

[39] Morgan 1880b, 74-75.

[40] One clue that we have for a Ciceronian *civitas* is a translation of Cicero's *De inventione* among his papers, which does make some allusion to *civitas,* for the sake of establishing rhetoric practice. See Kabelac and Trautmann 1994.

[41] Cicero describes *civitates* as *concilia coetusque hominum iure sociati*, "assemblies and gatherings of men associated through justice" (*Rep*. 6.13). Cicero thus used the term *civitas* more in line with political sovereign citizenship.

passage in the AIA report shows Morgan treating social structure formulations of labor—rendered through political power as property—as a significant factor in his discerning *civitas* from any earlier stage. Whether or not his observations were accurate, surveys of building structures were key to Morgan's arguments about social structures, compounding a materialist dimension to his concepts about cultural stages. This is not to say that anthropologists still explicitly embrace him as correct in these categorizations, especially not where these stages avoided recognizing states or empires based on labor exploitation within the Americas. What is significant nonetheless was that Morgan saw in these ancient peoples an significant earlier impression of a society that was at once stateless, but also instructive.

Morgan sees the potential in learning how a nation (that is, the US) can *inherit* or possess the knowledge to progress and advance while justifying the dispossession of that knowledge from those without recognized states. This collecting of knowledge for a comparative housing study is not neutral where epistemological dispossession overlaps with material forms of colonial dispossession. Any useful knowledge is appropriated for the state in power, while intimate relationships with materials embedded in local knowledges are obscured or erased through such data collection.[42] Where living peoples are treated as relics of past ways of life, Morgan points to Natives in New Mexico as exemplary. He states, "The Village Indians of New Mexico, alone among the Indian tribes of America, are now, as I have said, in possession of the houses occupied by their ancestors in 1540. What has survived of the ancient manner of life is now exhibited by them."[43] Peoples still in proximity to their ancestral and ongoing ways of life are rendered into vestiges of an ancient past and treated as a display or window into that past.

Also central to his consignment of these peoples to a static past is the information cited by Morgan that he derived from accounts of military expeditions as early as the Spanish conquistador Coronado's. Morgan attributes Coronado's first perception of Pueblo homes and lifeways to the customs of people whose descendants were still-living. Yet he also uses Coronado's expedition as a possible etiological piece—claiming that the "remarkable ruins" of Chaco Canyon, as documented by Lieutenant James H. Simpson's expedition, could be the mythic Seven Cities of Cibola which the Spanish party sought.[44] In addition to sourcing Spanish colonial accounts, Morgan is heavily reliant on the early US expedition surveys of Lieutenant Simpson and William Henry Jackson. Those surveys extended across the neighboring and overlapping populations of Navajo and Pueblo peoples in Northern New Mexico. Both expeditions represent military-involved expeditions to gain knowledge of the lands for the United States. Morgan, who was invested in the idea that the Pueblo peoples were sedentary only, avoided referring to Navajos, who, while they had settlements in the region, were considered at least semi-nomadic by anthropologists. Meanwhile, the collapsing of many peoples into a single "sedentary" entity across time and space oversimplifies and, in many ways, erases Indigenous people's long-term presence in these regions.

Morgan's reliance on military expedition mapping also informs his reductive approach to Indigenous peoples and their lands. In a 2011 essay, anthropologist Berenika Byszewski

[42] Hence the ongoing efforts to restore relationships and knowledges through practices of Indigenous data sovereignty (Ellenwood and Foxworth 2024).

[43] Morgan 1880b, 46.

[44] Morgan 1880b, 43-46.

notes the specific difficulty in mapping Navajoland where the "semi-nomadic" peoples there "shifted and morphed" across the spaces of maps. Lt. Simpson's Navajo expedition set out to fix this following the Mexican-American War as the US formally claimed this territory, and as Byszewski points out, this was a map of not just the ruins of Chaco, but also settler-colonial resources.[45] That the military expedition maps these ruins alongside other points of extractable resources, including the control of the land itself, was thus not a passing side interest. Simpson was enamored with the ruins, referenced as "abandoned" by its earlier inhabitants even within Byszewski's analysis, but what existed for its many Euro-American discoverers was a *terra nullius* for surveyors to inscribe with their idea of ancient pasts as well as settler futures.[46] Settler futures were mapped as places to set aside Native peoples or to otherwise set in railroads and other plans for use or disuse. In other words, these maps served to gain domination through complete knowledge of the land on the part of US interests, with military, administrative, and commercial interests in close alignment.[47] Morgan draws from and cites these maps in his AIA report; they can be seen as a continuation of the settler-colonial project. Following the military mapping of ruins as knowledge extraction for colonial resourcing, Morgan then advocated for furthering this systematic knowledge extraction beyond cartography. With the not yet delineated study of ethnography and archeology, as the AIA furthered their interests in exploring the New Mexico ruins, such studies also involved documenting people residing nearby in order to further understand the ruins. Through such documentation, the still-living people were rendered relics of the past to be discovered and documented in turn.

Morgan himself would occupy the place of vestige in the greater history of Southwest American archeology, largely through his indirect attachment to Bandelier, who was significantly more influential. A different set of AIA members, both classically influenced and also setting themselves apart as more strictly Americanist, followed in further establishing the American Southwest as an influential region for studying anthropology.[48] At the same time, such documentation was a concern for others instrumental to founding or developing American anthropology as a field, even beyond Morgan's early presence in it. Boas was not central to the Southwest developments, though he was central to the formation of American anthropology's sub-fields at this time of its early institutionalization. This close handling of archeological and ethnographical material collecting did not change overnight. Boas' ethnographic work was notably distinct from Morgan's or Lt. Simpson's romance with ruins; yet his similar mapping of geographical features as surveyor turned to a passion for mapping people, their languages and cultures. In a 2018 essay, "Why White People Love Franz Boas," Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson reflects on the so-called father of anthropology, Franz Boas,

[45] Byszewski 2012.

[46] See Brugge 1980 for an early attempt through National Park Service records to account for Navajo perspectives and centuries-long presence and stewardship in the area surrounding Chaco Canyon. While this shift still requires much more centering of Navajo residents' histories and perspectives, it's one point against dispossessive language that settles on treating the ancient materials there as merely relics from Indigenous peoples' abandonment. The counternarrative supports ongoing persistence of peoples and relationships to the space, despite displacements and ongoing challenges for Indigenous residents. For the issue of *terra nullius*, while relevant in different forms across global coloniality, Moreton-Robinson 2015 provides a useful discussion of how white British possession against Australian aboriginal claims depends on invisibilizing and nullifying Native title.

[47] Simpson and McNitt 1964, for a sense of the historiography on how this expedition is treated as significant to the development of the American West.

[48] Lewis and Hagan 2007.

in an edited volume revisiting his legacy. Simpson notes Boas as a central figure of Indigenous dispossession, arguing, "Such dispossession makes possible not only the conditions for their [i.e., settler] science, but also for *settler states*, that is, states predicated upon the active and ongoing dispossession of Indian people from land and life."[49] A grammar of (dis)possession emerges in Simpson's evaluation of Boas' elision of state formation: while work is preoccupied with the salvage of cultural loss, his anthropological imaginary does not acknowledge this loss as a loss of land (the reality of Indigenous dispossession). Morgan was an older scholar, characterized by his romanticism and nods to classicism, but his contribution sat at the juncture of studies increasingly embedded in scientific survey. Yet, at the same time, science and romance—even its classical underpinnings—were always closely interwoven within anthropology, even as it redefined itself in the twentieth century.

The Southwest was a crucial region for the development of American archeology as a field, set against European archeology schools.[50] At the time of the AIA's first annual report, founding a school in Athens to rival the French and German schools already there comprised the AIA's goal.[51] However, the AIA's establishment of the classical schools in Athens and Rome preceded their founding of archeological schools in Palestine at the turn of the century, followed by the establishment of its school in New Mexico. The global scope of such institutions for archeological research, founded under American national control, reveals the deep entanglement of these forms of dispossession as forms of colonial resource extraction. These sites in Palestine and New Mexico remain embedded in extremely violent colonial contexts to this day.[52] The US is a settler colony, but also heavily engaged in related forms of imperial domination and resource extraction overseas, which provides an important context for understanding the valorization and discursive frameworks of antiquity that surrounded the founding of these American centers for archeological research between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The early twentieth century yielded further international and imperialist dimensions, when the AIA founded its Jerusalem and Santa Fe schools in close succession. However, those American claims on antiquity have roots in nineteenth-century expeditions and exploration, notably in Northern New Mexico with extensions further South into Latin American countries.[53]

The material loss of land is reflected in ongoing resource extraction, which exists alongside settler claims of national heritage (Chaco Canyon specifically would become a national historical park in 1907).[54] Morgan's brief comparative work as it appeared in the first AIA report served as an early bridge between early archeological surveys and the fieldwork

[49] Simpson 2018, 168.

[50] For example: Fowler 2000, Snead 2001, Parezo et. al. 1993.

[51] The first annual report states, "it is greatly to be desired, for the sake of American scholarship, that a similar American school may before long enter into honorable rivalry with those already established" (25).

[52] Yazzie 2015 highlights intersecting violences, but also international solidarity, albeit reflecting situations from a decade ago.

[53] I explore these twentieth-century AIA developments in greater depth elsewhere in my project. See Irving 2024 for further consideration of how, in the parallel circumstances of Palestinian indigeneity, twentieth-century displacements and erasures following this late pre-Mandate era, and reading from imperial documentation including travelogues and archeology. Masalha 2015 traces post-1948 cartographic and toponymic forms of dispossession in Palestine, which are entangled in the establishment of biblical archeology earlier in the century. For a discussion on critical cartography which implicates both classical imagining and related violent erasures toward Palestine, see Umachandran 2024.

[54] Notably, the same year as the founding of the AIA's Santa Fe school and done following the efforts of Edgar L. Hewett and others involved in the founding of the Santa Fe school. See Chauvenet 1983.

that would be more recognizably part of the anthropological discipline, reflecting dispossessive roots through such study. Where Morgan's entry depicted ancient America in relation to ruins and civilization, his particular notion of settler-colonial kinship reframed New Mexico's sites within civilizational value. For nineteenth-century (white) Europeans and European Americans alike, there existed through travel and exploration—visitations—a constructed affinity or kinship with Greeks and Romans of an envisioned ancient past.[55] As white Americans continued to map their newly claimed or "discovered" lands, successive stages of civilization drew new lines for those settler citizens to choose to inherit as their own.

Chosen settler identifications with heritage were constructed out of comprehensive material and knowledge collecting that served in naturalizing visitors' romance of the land and its features. Ward's 2023 essay provides a welcome disruption of white supremacist claims to the ancient past, but the stakes are not yet clear regarding what might be a transformative rupture that is reciprocal to Indigenous futurity. I instead point to relationality as defined within Indigenous studies, which also provides an expansive view of disability that not only resists biological determinism (which Ward also critiques), but also operates through complex *experiential* kinship often situated in *specific* embodied knowledges and forms of collectivity and caretaking.[56] Indigenous ancestorship involves reclamation and community-based care, perhaps out of view of more universalized experiences, beyond individual interests or identifications. When it comes to de-naturalizing the classical tradition as a white or "Western" inheritance, it may be easy to continue to construct fictive kinships with idealized pasts over relationships with present-day peoples that would center Indigenous future well-being. Indigenous feminist visitation envisions accountability by and for Indigenous subjects, but still imparts counter-visioning against viewing lands and lives for the sake of an extractive tour. American national heritage, written at first in an early AIA report that presented American materials for study alongside Greek and Roman culture, served to re-envision and remap Indigenous lands and continuous presence into one of dispossessive kinship. Settler interests in Indigenous lands often still privileges protection through constructed national heritage and recreational visitation, while those whose lives are intimately entangled with their continued relationships to the land, beyond tourism, are given less regard.

Countermapping: Piñons to Pinyon Plains, or (Re)mapping ancestral kinship beyond ruins

A recent opinion piece by Diné columnist Cheyenne Antonio in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* speaks to the more than a century of oil and gas extraction in the San Juan Basin and advocates for cleanup as a way to protect lifeways. As Antonio writes, "Thousands of wells, many abandoned or orphaned, dot the landscape, leaking harmful emissions into the air, soil, and water. For families gathering piñons, these wells are not just unsightly relics—they are silent threats."[57] This statement echoes in many ways the sentiments of Weahkee's digital painting, while framing the imposing structures of extractive development as relics. Antonio's piece starts with the tradition of piñon, or pine nut, gathering among Diné families in Northwest New Mexico, and also points to the well-being of not just the land, but the

[55] Considering again Ward 2023's discussion of heritability and classics.

[56] Yellowhorse 2023.

[57] Antonio 2025.

people who face ill health effects due to toxic leakage. Antonio asserts this is an issue of environmental justice as well as preservation of lifeways, both cultural and economic. Antonio's advocacy also provides a useful counternarrative to what has long been characterized as a difficult entanglement with economic dependency on extractive industries for the Navajo Nation,[58] instead seeing the hope of maintaining continuous—though still threatened—threads of self-sufficiency. I point to Antonio's call to action to highlight that, despite controversies and complications in Native self-determination and protecting land, people, and lifeways in the San Juan Basin and beyond, many Native-led coalitions still work toward re-asserting what has long been held as sacred outside of the resource-mapping that anthropologists contributed to and relied upon in the nineteenth century.

In sharing her piece, Weahkee and I discussed the recent efforts by Navajo activists to stop uranium mining in the Pinyon Plains mine and the operation of a transportation route through the Western side of the Navajo Nation. Haul no!, an Indigenous-led organization has been at the forefront of these efforts, bringing together Diné, Havasupai, and Hopi activists to protect their communities and sacred sites, including the Grand Canyon, from this harmful threat.[59] The mine is in Havasupai homelands, but the route crosses through Hopi and Diné lands, bringing together peoples from each of these nations. Although this hazardous uranium route concerns the opposite side of the Navajo Nation from the San Juan Basin, it is not the only area affected by uranium mining and other harmful resource extraction. The Pinyon Plains contestation shows the extent of extractive industries across the land and also points to the breadth of the struggle against continuously destructive resource extraction, which goes beyond addressing abandoned mines and wells.[60] Ongoing struggles to prevent further contamination of lands and lifeways persist. On the Eastern side, such as within the San Juan Basin which Cheyenne Antonio writes about, protecting the sacred is also invoked by the Frack Off Greater Chaco Coalition, representing Diné, Pueblo, and allied groups. Imagery for the coalition often includes ancient petroglyphs, since the protection of ancestral pasts is deeply tied to safeguarding Indigenous futures.[61] The coalition's platform states: "The Greater Chaco Landscape expands far beyond Chaco Culture National Historic Park and immediate vicinity and holds spiritual and cultural significance to all Indigenous peoples who are rooted in Chaco culture, not limited to the Navajo Nation."[62] This statement undermines the limited mapping that treats part of Chaco Culture as safeguarded through National Park stewardship, while also allowing for the possibility of inter-tribal connectivity across space despite present-day maps which limit the ancient sites to the bounds of the Navajo Nation. Such efforts are at once geared toward self-determined futures for several Native nations regarding their sacred lands, while also challenging the static forms of colonial mapping. Colonial mapping and its divisions have often placed Native

[58] See White 1983.

[59] https://haulno.com/about/; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

[60] A few publications that elaborate on this entrenched issue of mines toward the treatment of the region as toxified sacrifice zone, in addition to Voyles 2015, include Eichstaedt 1994, Brugge, et. al. 2006, Pasternak 2010, and Gomez 2022. Importantly, Gomez's recent contribution brings in the effects of nuclear colonialism on Nuevo Mexicano, or detribalized/mixed, Indigenous New Mexican communities and focuses on the Pajarito Plateau (mentioned previously in this chapter as linked to Bandelier's exploration).

[61] https://www.frackoffchaco.org/; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

[62] https://www.frackoffchaco.org/our-coaltion; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

nations at odds over stewarding places, but intertribal coalitions respond in recognizing that places have long had stewardship shared by various Indigenous peoples.

What do these present-day efforts mean for approaching the ancient past of the Southwest? As emphasized in the introduction of this article, highlighting these issues affecting living peoples is not incongruous with the disruption of Western canons and understanding more global premodern worlds, as discussed by Ward and Umachandran (2024) in their Critical Ancient World Studies manifesto. Adding the Greater Chaco Culture, however, still often comes with the baggage of outdated civilization models that treat it as an ancient ruin. Adding Chaco to a compendium of ancient civilizations, including the classical ones, works toward universalizing (dispossessing) its sites from the active continuous Indigenous lifeways in the area. Public history and archeology have developed more recent approaches through resources built from partnerships committed to the traditional preservation and conservation of National Parks, while also recognizing and supporting future stewardship models that support long-term sovereign and intertribal protection and continuity through Native-led archeology and ethnology.[63] These approaches present potential models for epistemological repair, if not yet material returns.

Ruination existed both in the nineteenth-century dispossessive frameworks and the ongoing effects of fossil fuel and other resource extractive industries on the Navajo Nation, but collaborative work reveals how Diné in their territorial care resist these frameworks as "life beyond ruins."[64] Recognizing Indigenous relationality also has present and future stakes beyond the impacts of preserving ancient sites for settler enjoyment. Not only are such strides toward Indigenous futurity based on sustaining intertribal sovereign partnerships, but they also recognize ancient kinship between peoples and allow for healing and repair. Kinship is not just a set of categories for anthropological mapping, but it also defines embodied relationships within and across Native peoples. (Re)mapping also precludes making visible or consumable sacred or intimate knowledge, even as it promotes Native stewardship, as Weahkee's Venus-as-Changing Woman suggests. This is not to argue for censorship, but for privileging knowledge sharing through relationship building and care, for accountable kinship in place of extractive tourism in both the practical and epistemological senses.

Conclusion

This article aims to communicate about practices that draw from ancient materials into Indigenous futurity, not to make a spectacle of the ongoing violence of colonialism on Native lands and bodies. Taking its orientation from the artwork by Jessie Weahkee, this critical focus reiterates the question, "What is sacred?" when it comes to lands. Lands may be claimed within various forms of material extraction, including the collection of knowledges connected to ancient pasts, within colonial schemes of ownership and (dis)possession. Ownership of such knowledge persists alongside the deep and obstinate influence of nineteenth-century intellectual interests, implicating the legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan and the fields of both early anthropology and classical studies. The concept of *civitas* derives in part from both. These two co-influenced fields shaped prevalent understandings of ancient

[63] Note, the Frack off Chaco coalition mentions Native-led ethnography as a way of repair. Regarding some steps exemplified through National Parks collaboration see also Hill et. al. 2024; but consider also calls such as Treuer 2021, or more recently, Whittle 2025.

[64] Powell 2024.

pasts in the western hemisphere in developing "American antiquity" as a field and pursuit. Yet, this article serves as a starting-point for (re)mapping Indigenous lands as distinctly ancestral to Indigenous people and still actively inhabited as ancestral sites. Shifting this understanding of places and people serves to upend casual associations of Indigenous ancestral sites as "ruins" or "abandoned" prior to European or Euro-American discovery.

The imposition of these terms constitutes colonial dispossession, but my reading of a work such as Weahkee's "Dziłth'na'o'dithłe" (2023) provides a counternarrative toward visions of Indigenous futurity based in the continuous presence of Indigenous people. Early anthropologists relegated Indigenous people to static ancient or premodern pasts, and to the status of unknowing or disconnected vestiges whose pasts warranted discovery, in the lead up to the inaugural *AIA* report. Building on scholarship that centers Indigenous feminist practices of (re)mapping and visiting, this article advances a methodology of ethical care as a means of opposing the colonial abandonment of Indigenous peoples to static stages of antiquity.

Centering not just Indigenous knowledge, but kinship and stewardship, of ancestral places directly relates to future sovereign, or self-determined, survival. This may occur at the expense of knowledge systems which value a progressive, successive order of civilizational inheritance. In other words, this requires unsettling colonial claims while disassociating classicism as a standard measure of antiquity (that is, as a Western or universalized tradition). At the same time, by paying attention to the messages in Weahkee's piece, we can envision alternative values of kinship and care with the aim of safeguarding ancient pasts within continuous futures for all. Although evoking classicism, Weahkee's Diné revisioning of Aphrodite asserts instead Indigenous sacred value as embodied by respect and care. This care exists outside of hegemonic models of ancestral kinship tied to classical or colonial traditions that make invisible colonial violence while placing civilizational inheritance on its pedestal.

Kendall Lovely (Diné)
klovely@ucsb.edu

Bibliography

Antonio, Cheyenne. 2025. "Clean up abandoned wells to protect a way of life." *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 18. https://www.santafenewmexican.com/opinion/my_view/clean-up-abandoned-wells-to-protect-a-way-of-life/article_1e1ccb3c-d1dc-11ef-bbdd-1b29fb5051bc.html; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

Archaeological Institute of America, Morgan, L. Henry. 1880. *First Annual Report of the Executive Committee: with Accompanying Papers.* Cambridge, Mass.: J. Wilson.

Bhalerao, Lylaah L. 2024. "Away from 'Civilisational' Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean: Embracing Classical and Islamic Cultural Co-Presences and Simultaneous Histories at the Parthenon and Ayasofya." In *Critical Ancient World Studies*, edited by Marchella Ward and Mathura Umachandran, 1st ed., 156–71. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Betasamosake Simpson, Leanne. 2014. "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3 (3): 1–25.

Brugge, David M. 1980. *A History of the Chaco Navajos*. Albuquerque, N.M.: US Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service.

Brugge, Doug, Timothy Benally, and Esther Yazzie-Lewis, eds. 2006. *The Navajo People and Uranium Mining*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Byszewski, Berenika. 2012."Colonizing Chaco Canyon: Mapping Antiquity in the US Southwest." In *History of Cartography*, edited by Elri Liebenbergand Imre Josef Demhardt, 145–53. Germany: Springer Berlin / Heidelberg.

Chauvenet, Beatrice. 1983. *Hewett and Friends: A Biography of Santa Fe's Vibrant Era*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.

Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women. 2025. "Land and Body Violence." https://csvanw.org/focus-areas/trainings-and-education/land-body-violence/; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

Deloria, Philip J. 1998/2022. "Literary Indians and Ethnographic Objects." In *Playing Indian*, 71–94. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Díaz-Andreu García, Margarita. 2007. *A World History of Nineteenth-Century Archaeology: Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eichstaedt, Peter. 1994. *If You Poison Us: Uranium and Native Americans*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Red Crane Books.

Ellenwood, Cheryl, and Raymond Foxworth. 2024. "Data Back: Indigenous Material Culture, Philanthropy, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty." *The Public Historian* 46, no. 2: 123–43.

Fowler, Don D. 2000. *A Laboratory for Anthropology: Science and Romanticism in the American Southwest, 1846-1930*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Goeman, Mishuana. 2013. *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press.

Goeman-Shulsky, Sedonna. 2022. "Refusal to Record: Intentional Silences as a Method of Archival Justice." *Wicazo Sa Review* 37, no. 1: 53–67.

Gomez, Myrriah. 2022. *Nuclear Nuevo México: Colonialism and the Effects of the Nuclear Industrial Complex on Nuevomexicanos*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Hämäläinen, Pekka, and Samuel Truett. 2011. "On Borderlands." *The Journal of American History (Bloomington, Ind.)* 98, no. 2 (2011): 338–61.

Herdt, Gilbert. 2003. "Lewis Henry Morgan & Victorian Secret Societies," In *Secrecy and Cultural Reality: Utopian Ideologies of the New Guinea Men's House.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Hill, Christina Gish, Matthew J. Hill, and Brooke Neely, eds. 2024. *National Parks, Native Sovereignty: Experiments in Collaboration*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Huhndorf, Shari M. 2024. "Contested Landscapes: Kent Monkman, Zacharias Kunuk, and the Art of Indigenous History." *Native Lands: Culture and Gender in Indigenous Territorial Claims*, 117–46. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Irving, Sarah. 2024. "Land, Indigeneity and Archaeological Ruins in Ottoman Palestine: The People of Beit Jibrin and the Palestine Exploration Fund." *European Review of History Revue Européene d'histoire* 31, no. 6: 861–75.

Kabelac, Karl Sanford and Thomas R. Trautmann. 1994."Register of the Morgan Papers." In *Library of Lewis Henry Morgan and Mary Elizabeth Morgan: Transactions, American Philosophical Society (vols. 84. part 6 and 84, part 7)*, 324–36. Philadelphia, PA: The American Philosophical Society Press.

Katsiardi-Hering, Olga. 2020. "The Role of Archaeology in Forming Greek National Identity and Its Embodiment in European Identity." *European Review (Chichester, England)* 28, no. 3: 448–58.

Kennedy, Rebecca Futo. 2018. "Otis T. Mason and Hippocratic Environmental Theory at the Smithsonian Institution in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." In *Brill's Companion to Classics and Early Anthropology*, edited by Emily Varto, 154–82. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill.

Kolowratnik, Nina. 2022. "Mapping Secrecy: Indigenous Truths in United States Courts." *ARQ (Santiago, Chile)* 110: 62–71.

Lewis, Nancy Owen and Kay Leigh Hagan. 2007. *A Peculiar Alchemy: A Centennial History of SAR, 1907-2007*. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research.

Lourdes, Alberto. 2016. "Nations, Nationalisms, and *Indígenas*: The 'Indian' in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1: 107–27.

Lovely, Kendall. 2019. "Amazons, Indian Princesses, and the Artistic Matriarchs of the Southwest: On Classicization and the Construction of Native American Femininity in Museums." https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/msst_etds/1; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

Lovely, Kendall. 2025. "Indigenising as Anti-Classical? Locating Indigenous Classicisms in and Beyond Museum Frameworks." In *Ancient Pasts for Modern Audiences: Public Scholarship and the Mediterranean World*, edited by Sabrina C. Higgins and Chelsea A.M Gardner, 74–91. Oxford: Routledge.

Masalha, Nur. 2015. "Settler-Colonialism, Memoricide and Indigenous Toponymic Memory: The Appropriation of Palestinian Place Names by the Israeli State." *The Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 14, no. 1: 3–57.

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. 2015. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Morgan, Lewis H. 1869. "Seven Cities of Cibola." North American Review, Vol. 118: 457–98.

Morgan, Lewis H. 1877. *Ancient Society; Or, Researches In the Lines of Human Progress From Savagery, Through Barbarism to Civilization*. New York: H. Holt and Company.

Morgan, Lewis H. 1880a. "On the Ruins of a Stone Pueblo on the Animas River in New Mexico; with a Ground Plan." *Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, 12th Annual Report*.

Morgan, Lewis H. 1880b. "A Study of the Houses of the American Aborigines; with suggestions for the exploration of the ruins in New Mexico, Arizona, the valley of the San Juan, and in Yucatan and Central America." Archaeological Institute of America, 1st Annual Report of the Executive Committee.

Morgan, Lewis H. 1881. *Houses and House-Life of the American Aborigines*. U. S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region, Contributions to North American Ethnology, Vol. 4. Washington.

Padilla Peralta, Dan-el. 2025. *Classicism and Other Phobias*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Parezo, Nancy, ed. 1993. *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Pasternak, Judy. 2010. *Yellow Dirt: An American Story of a Poisoned Land and a People Betrayed*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Powell, Dana E. 2024. "Life Beyond Ruin: Diné Presence in the Anthropocene." *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 11, no. 1: 71–113.

Rifkin, Mark. 2017. *Beyond Settler Time : Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Durham; Duke University Press.

Rifkin, Mark. 2024. "Kinship's Past, Queer Interventions, and Indigenous Futures." In *The Politics of Kinship*, 43–92. Duke University Press.

Simpson, Audra. 2018."Why White People Love Franz Boas; or, The Grammar of Indigenous Dispossession." In *Indigenous Visions*, edited by Audra Simpson, Isaiah Lorado Wilner, and Ned Blackhawk, 166–82. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Simpson, J. H., and Frank McNitt. 1964. *Navaho Expedition: Journal of a Military Reconnaissance from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Navaho Country Made in 1849*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Sommer, Ulrike. 2017. "Archaeology and Nationalism." In *Key Concepts in Public Archaeology*, edited by Gabriel Moshenska, 166–86. London: UCL Press.

Snead, James E. 2001. *Ruins and Rivals: The Making of Southwest Archaeology*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Stuart, David E. 2010. *Pueblo Peoples on the Pajarito Plateau: Archaeology and Efficiency*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Timmerman, Nicholas A. 2020. "Contested Indigenous Landscapes: Indian Mounds and the Political Creation of the Mythical 'Mound Builder' Race." *Ethnohistory* 67, no. 1: 75–95.

Treuer, David. 2021."Return the National Parks to the Tribes," *The Atlantic.* https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/05/return-the-national-parks-to-the-tribes/618395/; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization is not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1: 1-40.

Tuck, Eve, Haliehana Stepetin, Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing, and Jo Billows. 2022. "Visiting as an Indigenous feminist practice." *Gender and Education*, 35(2): 144–55.

Umachandran, Mathura and Marcella Ward. 2024. "Towards a Manifesto for Critical Ancient World Studies." In *Critical Ancient World Studies: The Case for Forgetting Classics*, edited by Mathura Umachandran and Marchella Ward, 3–34. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Umachandran, Mathura. 2024. "Colonial Cartography and the Classical Imagination." In *Critical Ancient World Studies: The Case for Forgetting Classics*, edited by Mathura Umachandran and Marchella Ward, 131–45. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Varto, Emily. 2018. "The Tinted Lens of *Ancient Society*: Classical History and American Experience in the Ethnology of Lewis Henry Morgan." In *Brill's Companion to Classics and Early Anthropology*, edited by Emily Varto, 63–98. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill.

Voyles, Traci Brynne. 2015. *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ward, Marchella. 2023. "Queering Kinship against Genealogy: Crip Ancestorship, Chosen Families, Alternative Intimacies and Other Ways of Refusing the Classical Tradition." In *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Queer Theory,* edited by Ella Haselswerdt, Sara H. Lindheim, and Kirk Ormand, 257-72. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Ward, Marchella. 2024. "Queer Time, Crip Time, Woman Time, Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Muslim Time ... Remaking Temporality Beyond 'the Classical'." In *Critical Ancient World Studies: The Case for Forgetting Classics*, edited by Mathura Umachandran and Marchella Ward, 172-88. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

White, Leslie A., ed. 1942. "Lewis H. Morgan's Journal of a Trip to Southwestern Colorado and New Mexico, June 21 to August 7, 1878." *American Antiquity* 8, no. 1: 1–26.

White, Richard. 1983. *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Whittle, Joe. 2025. "The Case for Returning US Public Lands to Indigenous People." *Time.*

Yazzie, Melanie K. 2015. "Solidarity with Palestine from Diné Bikéyah." *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2015): 1007–15.

Yazzie, Melanie K. 2018. "Decolonizing Development in Diné Bikeyah: Resource Extraction, Anti-Capitalism, and Relational Futures." *Environment and Society* 9, no. 1 (2018): 25–39.

Yellowhorse, Sandra. 2023. "Indigeneity and Disability: The Teachings of our Ancestors and Being in Relation Towards Harmonious Outcomes." *Disability Visibility Blog*, June 18. https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2023/06/18/indigeneity-and-disability-the-teachings-of-our-ancestors-and-being-in-relation-towards-harmonious-outcomes/; link accessed Jan. 15, 2026.