



E49 Forensic Archaeology, Ritual Crime, and Ethics: Assisting Law Enforcement While Maintaining Confidentiality as an Anthropologist

*Sharon K. Moses, PhD**, Northern Arizona University, Dept of Anthropology, PO Box 15200, Flagstaff, AZ 86011-5200

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand of circumstances that contribute to an ethical dilemma when a crime scene suggests involvement of individuals from a descendant community in which the archaeologist also conducts research and relies on informants. How does one navigate around issues of confidentiality while assisting law enforcement without betraying professional trust on either side?

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the fine line of service and consultation an anthropologist provides to law enforcement that enables them to do their own analyses and create strategies to protect the interests of the public without jeopardizing the confidentiality of research informants.

Many forensic archaeologists are also engaged in archaeological excavation or research as academics. This presentation is an exploration of a case in which an anthropologist was called in as a forensic archaeologist and consultant to law enforcement who were investigating cemetery disturbances where recently interred graves were partially disinterred during nighttime clandestine activities. Undeniably, the evidence indicated ritual activity with supernatural overtones characteristic of some African religious practices, otherwise known as *hoodoo* and an expression of Vodun (voodoo) beliefs. Many rituals and religions from the African Congo and Gold Coast (West Africa) arrived with the enslaved Africans in the Southern states during colonization and the transatlantic slave trade of the late 17th and 18th centuries. Native Americans also comprised a percentage of the enslaved population in the Deep South for a time and Christian Baptist and Methodist ministers also left ideological impressions on enslaved peoples. The result was a co-evolution of new ethnic and magico-religious ideas unique to descendant populations today.

Contemporary incidences of cemetery disturbances and rituals are not as rare as one might think, although reporting of it is, as cemeteries are resistant to the information becoming public for fear of the harm it will do to their businesses. In the course of the investigation, the forensic archaeologist was confronted with the likelihood of a connection existing between the anthropologist's research populations, descendants of enslaved Africans from a historical plantation that was being excavated. Signature construction of "spell jars" and other paraphernalia were found at the crime scene that hinted at these origins.

Informants can reveal information in the course of ethno-historical interviews that, if shared, would be a breach of trust and ethics for an anthropologist/archaeologist and lead to serious ramifications within the community. Oftentimes magico-religious practices are taught or apprenticed generationally within families. The anthropologist, while providing forensic services and consultation to law enforcement, had to be cautious not to reveal informants' personal information.

Forensic Archaeology, Ethics, Voodoo