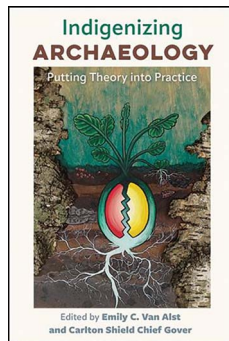




Book Review

EMILY C. VAN ALST & CARLTON SHIELD CHIEF GOVER (ed.). 2024. *Indigenizing archaeology: putting theory into practice*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6986-9 hardback \$90 ebook OpenAccess <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00092058/00001/pdf>



The social sciences have come under increased scrutiny by many Indigenous scholars and practitioners who question the western-dominated way of ‘knowing’ associated with a positivist view of reality. Although this portrayal of western thinking and academia is certainly more nuanced, there is a need to find out more about the workings of the world from different perspectives. It is fair to say that the closely related discipline of anthropology still carries the legacy of what has been described as an antiquated colonial past leaving little room for Indigenous voices and experiences. Interpreting archaeology through the lenses of Indigenous communities is a relatively new endeavour, reflecting the under-representation of

Indigenous archaeologists in both academia and cultural resource management. *Indigenizing Archaeology* looks into Indigenous knowledge and practice through the understanding of Native American and Canadian First Nations archaeologists.

The book features work by early career researchers, whose contributions stem from their master’s thesis or doctoral work. Their training in archaeological method and theory is put to the test when interacting with custodians of tribal knowledge. However, this does not necessarily result in the rejection of non-Indigenous approaches or the need to exclude non-Native archaeologists. Thus, Indigenous archaeology is defined as a “theory with an activist approach” (p.xx). Despite these acknowledgements, some readers might be perturbed by the editors’ statement that “archaeology has been used as a tool of settler colonialism to *actively destroy* [emphasis added] the cultural heritage of Indigenous people” (p.xxi), which is a sweeping argument that essentially discredits all previous attempts at understanding the Indigenous archaeological past.

Eleven chapters divided into three themes—‘Reconstructing archives of knowledge’, ‘Reclaiming cultural heritage’ and ‘Retelling Indigenous stories’—reflect on case studies where some of the contributors display deep emotions as they connect with their tribal roots and offer a unique glimpse into the interpretation or reinterpretation of the past. This connection or sense of place with which Indigenous archaeologists investigate aspects of tribal culture avoids the pitfalls of lumping all Indigenous knowledge together, demonstrating that different groups have devised their own ways of doing archaeology based on their cultural practices.

In the first theme, contributors highlight colonial institutions such as museums, archives and libraries that have kept and controlled various Indigenous cultural expressions. Zoë Eddy

argues that museums can be both venues of trauma and healing for Native people. Margaret Spivey-Faulkner demonstrates that by Indigenising the classification process, a better understanding of Indigenous language and culture can be achieved. Lydia Curliss reminds archivists and librarians of the need to engage more actively with Indigenous archaeologists by centring Indigenous voices.

The second theme examines community-based practices and relationship building to better preserve cultural heritage. Patrick Cruz emphasises the crucial role of archaeologists in dealing with multiple stakeholders to improve working relationships with local communities. Nicholas Laluk calls for incorporating Indigenous ontologies. Other contributors stress the need for collaboration rather than just consultation with communities at all stages of the research process.

The third theme explores the importance of weaving together Indigenous stories with western archaeological and anthropological methods. Examples include centring Indigenous voices to interpret cultural landscapes. Emily Van Alst's study of rock art opens the window to Indigenous knowledge, not simply the expression of 'art' in the western sense. The more technically minded reader will find Carlton Shield Chief Gover's study of Pawnee and Arikara oral traditions appealing as he connects these traditions with multivariate statistical analyses of radiocarbon dates to provide a more holistic interpretation of ethnogenesis and population dynamics.

The book should appeal to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous archaeologists and cultural heritage practitioners globally.

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