Tales of the ex-Apes

By Jonathan Marks
UNC-Charlotte

The GAD Distinguished Lecture, given November 20, 2015, is based on a book of the same title, recently published by the University of California Press.

This will be an exploration of meaning in human evolution without paleoanthropology. I’m not talking about the foot of Australopithecus sediba or the supraorbital torus of Homo erectus; I want to talk about who we are and where we came from. I am talking about origin myths; I am talking about kinship. I am not talking about human evolution; I’m talking about how we talk about human evolution.

Human evolution as bio-politics

Let me start off, then, with a sort of epigraph by Carleton Coon. Coon is not remembered fondly today, because in the early 1960s, as President of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, he was secretly colluding with the segregationists, giving them preprints of his book which purported to demonstrate that the reason that Africans were economically and politically subjugated by Europeans is that they hadn’t been members of our species for very long, because whites had evolved into Homo sapiens 200,000 years before blacks did. And I’m happy to say that most of his contemporaries smoked him down, and in particular he got into a heated exchange with the great fruit fly geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, who, I might add, was a member of the American Anthro-

(See Mines on page 7)

American Heritage

When the Mines Closed: Heritage Building in Northeastern Pennsylvania

By Paul A. Shackel and V. Camille Westmont
University of Maryland

Introduction

Since 2009, the Anthracite Heritage Project has focused on social issues in Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA). NEPA is a resource-rich, economically poor area located in the northernmost reaches of the Appalachian Region. While anthracite coal was discovered in this region in the late eighteenth century, large scale extraction of this carbon fossil fuel did not occur until the middle of the nineteenth century with the development of railroads and canal systems. It is the fuel that helped propel American industry to become an international leader in manufacturing. Our goal in this project is to study the rise and fall of the anthracite coal industry, and to address inequities in the community, past and present, related to work, labor, gender, race, and immigration.

The NEPA communities, including the city of Hazleton, the focus of our study, developed in the mid-nineteenth century with a massive influx of newly arrived foreign immigrants who were necessary for the extraction of coal. This migration also created a ready workforce with more available workers than jobs. Surplus labor allowed the coal operators to keep wages relatively low with the threat that there were always willing workers available. The earliest immigrants to the coal fields came primarily

In This Issue

Marks on Tales of the Ex-Apes....Page 1
Shackel and Westmont on American Heritage in Appalachia.............Page 1
Recent Finds in Paleoanthropology......................Page 10
Ethnographic Reviews..................Page 14
Film and Video....................Page 15

(See Mines on page 7)
The human universe is a moral universe

Perhaps you’ve noticed that I haven’t mentioned a single bone, tool, or DNA sequence. I’m interested in the bigger frame.

And one of the most important elements in the authoritative story of our nature and origins is the relative balance we ascribe to descent and modification in the construction of that narrative. We are neither apes nor angels, but people, with apes for ancestors and perhaps aspirations to be angels. And this is not the domain of zoology, and a lifetime of zoological training cannot prepare you for the responsibilities incurred in curating, in a responsible and scholarly fashion, the authoritative scientific story of who we are and where we come from.

And it is kind of ironic that this is a lesson for working on human evolution, because it is also a reasonable lesson to be taken from the text of Genesis. So let me finish with a little sermon: Adam and Eve are in a Garden world without Good and Evil; that is to say, in a babylike or animal-like state. Eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is what makes them different from other life, in the creation and occupation of a moral universe in addition to the physical universe, beginning with the recognition that it’s wrong to be naked in public. Once they enter that moral universe there is no turning back; it is the world of adulthood, of right and wrong, of good and evil – the things that you have to know in order for us to allow you to remain with us. Immorality is no longer an option, perhaps sometimes excusable in children, animals, or strangers or mythic ancestors. Immorality, like killing your brother and lying about it, the very next story, is not an option either. What’s left is the moral life, the human life, and the lesson is far broader and deeper than the concerns of contemporary creationists, namely: You have to learn right from wrong and do what’s right, or else you are not welcome here. And that is as applicable to modern age scientists as it is to Bronze Age shepherds.

References

Coon, C. S.

Coyne, J.

Diamond, J.

Gee, H.

Haeckel, E.

Huxley, T.

Huxley, T., and J. S. Huxley

Jones, S.

Landau, M.

Osborn, H. F.

Simpson, G. G.

Simpson, G. G.
1964 Organisms and Molecules in Evolution, Science, 146: 1535-1538.

Zuckerkandl, E.

(Mines Continued from page 1)

from England, Wales, and Ireland. By the end of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth century, most of the newcomers were from Eastern and Southern Europe (Blatz 2003:27). The anthracite coal industry thrived from the 1850s through the early twentieth century. While the coal industry peaked during WWI, employing 180,000 people, it soon began a gradual decline, coinciding with the increasing use of other fuels, like oil and natural gas. Although there was a slight uptick in anthracite extraction during WWII, the coal industry in Northeastern Pennsylvania collapsed in the 1950s (Dublin and Licht 2005). Today, only a few hundred people work in this industry.

With the downfall of the coal industry, there was a significant outmigration of the area’s younger generations who found employment in New York, Philadelphia, and New Jersey. Although NEPA attracted new businesses, the unemployment rate soared in the 1950s to about 18 percent (Dublin 1998:10). Many women found employment in the area’s garment factories. Some started working while their husbands were still working in the mines, while others began when their spouses lost their jobs. In many cases women became the main economic backbone of the households (Dublin 1998:29).

Hazleton’s population, which peaked at 38,000 in 1940, declined to around 23,000 residents in 2000. Only five percent of Hazleton’s population identified as Hispanic in 2000, but five years later, approximately 30 percent of the city’s population of 31,000 identified as Hispanic. Anti-immigration fervor hit the community in the early 2000s and the city council quickly developed anti-immigration legislation. Many Latinos objected to the xenophobic sentiment of the established community and moved elsewhere. By 2010, the city’s population had declined to about 25,000. Despite this ethnic flight, the percentage of Hispanics has continued to increase steadily and is now over 40 percent of the population (Bahadur 2006; Englund 2007:887). In much the same way that the community’s European ancestors fled poverty and oppression, many of the new Latino immigrants are escaping similar circumstances. They are coming to Hazleton and other communities in the region for a new beginning, only to be faced with overwhelming xenophobia.

The Implications of Heritage Building in Northern Appalachia

While it is important to understand how
heritage is created and the political purposes it serves, it also is imperative to think about how we can mobilize our heritage work and address social justice issues (Shackel 2013; Little and Shackel 2014). The goal of our heritage work in Northeastern Pennsylvania is not only to understand the past, but also to consider how people use heritage today. We hope that our scholarship on heritage can be used to address some of the region’s current issues related to labor and race.

Heritage is a force that simultaneously binds and divides. Heritage and the mutually accepted historical narrative it promotes underlie and enforce social bonds that range from community cohesion to national identities. Yet while heritage can bring people together to find a common purpose and a deeper sense of belonging, those on the outside of that heritage also face similar degrees of exclusion (Hafstein 2012). Using heritage as a cultural touchstone that grants an individual access to a community or a national identity also runs the risk of alienating individuals and populations who lack those specific cultural references. The underlying definitions of who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ are politically motivated. In Hazleton, this political alienation has escalated into a two-tiered system based primarily on race.

Community Heritage: Past and the Present

With a history firmly cemented in industrial exploitation of newly arrived immigrant groups, beginning with the Welsh in the early 19th century and continuing with Latino (primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican) populations today, Northeastern Pennsylvania broadly and the Greater Hazleton area specifically offer a textbook example of a region’s actors using heritage as a justification to cleave itself in two. Oral histories conducted as part of the Anthracite Heritage Project have revealed reverence for a past that, at best, is a collective, wistful memory and, at worst, never existed to begin with. The city’s primary English-speaking newspaper, the Standard-Speaker, runs a regular series of seemingly contradictory headlines, such as “With nostalgia in its DNA, Hazleton needs to move on” (McElwee 2014a) and “In Hazleton, nostalgia needs to give way to hope” (McElwee 2014b), followed promptly by articles with titles such as “Back to the Future in Hazleton,” parts one and two (Apichella 2015), in which the author recounts personal stories from the 1940s and 50s, and invites locals to write to him with their own recollections. Research by the Anthracite Heritage Project has found similar nostalgic sentiments throughout the community.

Hazleton promotes a dangerous standard of equating tradition, nostalgia, and heritage with whiteness. Oral histories collected in and around Hazleton since 2009 have revealed a fascinating pattern of associating the not-so-distant past with images of peace, togetherness, and harmony in a town composed primarily of Eastern and Southern European immigrants. The present, by contrast, is imagined as a lawless world marked by the arrival of Latino immigrants. Primary and secondary accounts of its actual history confirm, however, rough times in Hazleton prior to the arrival of Latino immigrants. The town’s history includes periods of labor unrest, high unemployment, and de facto mob rule (Wolensky and Hastie 2013). Still, despite an extensive history of domestic violence (Stepenoff 1999), low wages, and dangerous working conditions (Shackel and Roller 2013), among other social and societal ills, individuals’ memories of this period are resoundingly positive.

In individual accounts, the pain of deindustrialization, population decline, and the death of many “traditional” ways of life between 1940 and 1990 either don’t register or are mentioned with a wistful pride about how people were able to overcome through hard work and sacrifice. Accounts mention the strength and resiliency of the church in supporting workers through labor unrest; the stands of solidarity labor advocates made, going so far as to suggest the creation of a monument reminiscent of the iconic Iwo Jima American flag statue in honor of Hazleton’s ancestral coal miners. Others remember their childhoods as a time before material pursuits when everyone focused instead on family, religion, and simply being happy. While these tableaus of the past are heartwarming, they also are fictitious. Documentary and archaeological research demonstrates that Hazleton always has had an ethnically divided landscape forged and maintained through violence against and manipulation of the working classes. Additionally, while much of what people now believe about their collective past may be false, it is the comparison of this idyllic mirage to outsiders’ politically-driven renderings of society today that pose the greatest threat to Hazleton’s future.

While it is not uncommon for people to paint the past in a light that is rosier than reality, the true issue lies in the full-fledged culture war being waged against Hazleton’s Latino community based on this nostalgia. Throughout our research, oral histories have inevitably returned to the topic of immigration and attributed the decresit state of Hazleton today due to recently arrived immigrants. As the birthplace of the 2005 Illegal Immigration Relief Act that went on to inspire Arizona’s own SB1070, it follows that the attitudes of the local citizens would reiterate this sentiment. As a deeply conservative town, much of the rhetoric on immigration we have heard follows the types of examples set forth by Chavez’ Latino Threat Narrative (2008). Political actors have successfully linked supposedly increased economic and social risks to Latino immigration, despite statistics proving that crime per capita has decreased and that the city’s budget has increased since the Latino population arrived (Bahadur 2006).

Interviews with white Hazleton residents were full of anecdotes grounded in an ‘us vs. them’ dialectic. Common themes included stories about Latino families purchasing lobster and T-bone steaks with food stamps; how Latinos brought gangs connected to Mexican cartels; and how recent immigrants expect the government to provide everything for them; and how Americans have lost their morality during the last thirty years. One individual suggested that we read works by Ayn Rand to understand why the Latino immigrants were a problem. These same images, repeated nearly verbatim across economic, age, and gender lines, reveal the desperate adherence to a single cause to explain the complex and multifaceted social and economic decline of the area.

William Logan (2012) notes that, when developing cultural heritage for a place, the community should also consider cultural diversity and human rights. He cautions us that official heritage in-
terventions, which may be done to achieve political goals, can undermine rather than strengthen community identity, cultural diversity, and human rights. Following Logan’s lead, one of our goals for the Anthracite Heritage Project is to develop universal meanings—heritage that will allow us to connect the narrative of immigration and racialization to the contemporary population. Our goal is to build bridges between the disparate communities by developing a common heritage in this racially tense and poverty-stricken region (Little and Shackel 2014). Developing universal meanings of the place’s heritage allows us to link the past and the present and facilitate an exploration of both historic and contemporary concerns related to social justice.

A major goal in Hazleton is to promote a civil discourse between established and new immigrant communities. While the city and county governments have made it extremely difficult for the new immigrants to feel welcomed, community groups have developed to provide social services the city refuses. It is reminiscent of the Progressive Era, when local and national community organizations developed to help the urban poor and new immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gates 2002:25).

One such group is the Hazleton Integration Program (HIP), a nonprofit community organization with a mission to bring together the many different ethnic groups in and around Hazleton (Hazleton Integration Project 2015). Because the city government maintains decidedly anti-immigrant policies, which have already forced many newcomers to leave for other communities, this non-profit organization has filled a social void. We are developing programs with HIP to have youth participate in our heritage-of-immigration program. Our focus on developing a program on immigration has allowed us to recruit area high school students, many of whom identify as Latino, to work on our project. The high school students quickly learn to excavate, take notes, and curate artifacts. The partnering of college students with high school students has led to discussions beyond the issue of immigration, including the value of and access to higher education. These dialogues provide a freer exchange of information than those between students and a high school guidance counselor. Providing this mentorship is important because Hazleton area schools are ranked relatively low in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

We have established websites, created blogs with themes related to the history of immigration, and made efforts to increase awareness of our project through the established media. With every newspaper and television interview, we connect our historical work to contemporary immigrants. For instance, Westmont states in one newspaper that, “the Irish immigrant miners living at Eckley with a dozen other people in a double-home half don’t much different from Latins earning low wages and sharing an apartment to save money today. ‘The social scorn, the legal isolation that existed 150 years ago is exactly what people today are going through’” (Jackson 2015). In our efforts to increase visibility, we also have turned to non-traditional methods of communication. A recent article in the local Spanish language newspapers that serve the Hazleton region had quotes from our project explaining our work on the history of immigrant life (Poder 2015).

Engaging descendants and other stakeholder communities can lead to a more inclusive narrative and provide a broader understanding of the past, while also illuminating contemporary social and economic inequities. As described in the work of the Tenement Museum (Russell-Ciardi 2008: 42), one of the most powerful tools of engagement is to use the past to illuminate the important social, political, and economic issues that we face today. Heritage sites can serve as important places where we learn about communities and ourselves. The Anthracite Heritage Project will continue to connect with the new Latino community by making immigration heritage a focus of the project, connecting the past to the present, and bringing attention to the inequalities that are embedded in the community.

Conclusion

Many decades after the immigrant generation of Slavs and Italians, the traditions of class and ethnic solidarity remain strong in this community of former mining families; however, the new Latino immigrants are challenging the established community as they transform the region’s cultural identity. The racism and hardships that historical newcomers have faced are not only part of the community’s history—they continue to exist in many of NEPA’s communities today as the region faces a new wave of immigration. Some of those interviewed described themselves as self-made men and women who achieved a standard of living because of their hard work and struggle. Many expressed a disdain for the newcomers to the region. They see their traditional lifeways being threatened. They do not see any similarities between their own circumstances struggling to survive and those of the contemporary poor in their neighborhoods. They have become proponents of neo-liberal economics—promoting individualism and making people fend for themselves. We think it is possible to use heritage to bring individuals and communities together and to find a common heritage that helps promote a socially just future.

We cannot change individual minds about the mistakes of the past century that have led to the current social and economic situations in Northeastern Pennsylvania; however, we can work to change the overall cultural narrative on the past. We can use the past to show that segregation and discrimination today are as painful and as futile as they were 150 years ago. But even more than removing a source for hate, we can use heritage and the meaning of place to redefine Northeastern Pennsylvania’s industrial heritage as a touchstone for all cultures and peoples who have endured exploitative labor practices, social and legal exclusion, and public scrutiny. Our work seeks to change who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ through public archaeology and community outreach.

References Cited

Apichella, Michael

Bahadur, Gaiuntra

Blatz, Perry
2003 Eckley Miners’ Village: Pennsylvania Trail and History Guide. Me-
Chanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.

Chavez, Leo

Dublin, Thomas

Dublin, Thomas and Walter Licht

Englund, Jason

Gates, Christopher T.

Hafstein, V.

Jacketti, Maria
2015 Planting a Victory Garden is the Sensible Thing to do. Hazleton Standard-Speaker, August 10.

Jackson, Kent

Little, Barbara, J. and Paul A. Shackel
2014 Archaeology, Heritage and Civic Engagement: Working Toward the Public Good. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Logan, William

McElwee


Poder
2015 La Universidad de Maryland Completó Una Excavación Arqueológica de Eckley Pueblo de Mineros. August 1.

Russell-Ciardi, Maggie

Shackel, Paul A.

Shackel, Paul A. and Michael P. Roller

Stepenoff, Bonnie

Hazleton Integration Project

Wolensky, Robert and William Hastie Sr.