

# ***AMERICA FROM THE GROUND UP:* INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLARSHIP, FILM, AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

*America from the Ground Up*: Estudio interdisciplinar, rodaje e interacción social

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**ABSTRACT** The fields of public history and public archaeology both deal with questions related to interactions between academics and the wider public. Over the last four decades, debate among researchers and practitioners has focused on just what is meant by “public history” and “public archaeology” The authors present a case for active engagement with the public by scholars and argue that film, and important mass communication media, can be effectively leveraged by academics to speak directly to a general audience. Moreover, using the example of their public television series *America from the Ground Up*, which over three seasons presents a comparative analysis of colonialism in America, we argue that film is a tool for public engagement that is also appropriate for the presentation of scholarly research, and that the use of one approach does not preclude the use of the other.

**Keywords:** American History, Colonialism, Cultural policy, Entertainment industry, Popular history, Public archaeology, Public television.

**RESUMEN** Los campos de la historia y la arqueología pública tratan cuestiones relacionadas con la interacción entre academia y público. Durante las pasadas cuatro décadas, el debate entre investigadores y profesionales se ha centrado en el significado de los términos. Los autores presentan un caso para la intervención activa a través del cine, siendo los medios de comunicación una herramienta potencialmente útil para el trato directo con el público. Más allá, usando el ejemplo de su programa de televisión *America from the Ground Up*, que a lo largo de sus tres temporadas presentará un análisis del colonialismo en América, plantean que el uso de medios audiovisuales es una herramienta potente de interacción pública y además no excluyente con otras.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de América, Colonialismo, Políticas Culturales, Industria del Entretenimiento, Historia Popular, Arqueología Pública, Televisión Pública.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article explores the creation, development, and production of the documentary series *America from the Ground Up* (henceforth *AFTGU*), a US-based television programme created by the authors of this article, and produced by WCMU Public Media at Central Michigan University (fig. 1). Planned for three seasons, and currently in production on Season 2, *AFTGU* examines the effects upon early United States history of its three major colonising powers: France (Season 1), Spain (Season 2), and Great Britain (Season 3).

It does this by blending together historical and archaeological approaches to early American history with a focus on the lived experiences of the peoples moving throughout the frontier borderlands of colonial America. In doing so, this series decentres the canonical American story away from places like Boston and Philadelphia, to explore regional and local histories in national and transnational contexts.

Using *AFTGU* as a case in point, this article argues that historians and archaeologists can use television and film media to create popular historical works

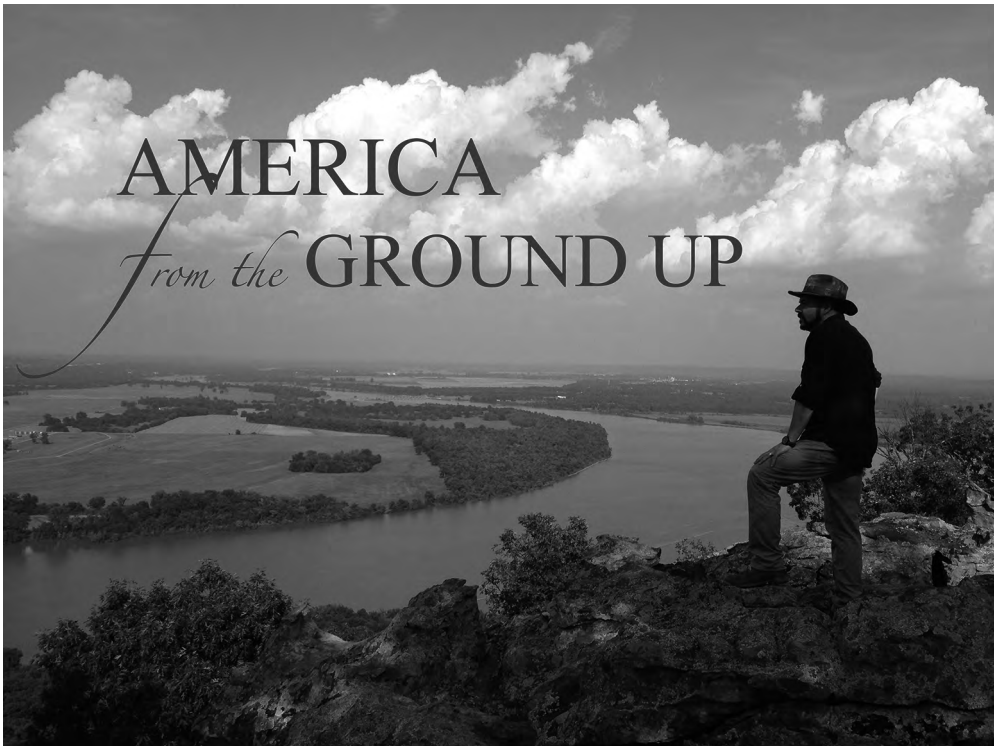


Fig. 1.—*America from the Ground Up* Series Promotional Image (Copyright Stratigraphic Productions LLC).

in the best public archaeology and public history traditions, while also holding to scholarly standards in presentation and analysis. It also argues that historians and archaeologists need to engage the public on more popular grounds using other media like television and film if they wish to remain relevant in public debates about history and heritage.

Overall, the article will focus on three main areas. First, it will examine the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the *AFTGU* project, including a discussion on the interdisciplinary and the comparative/transnational structure the project has adopted and why, as well as an exploration of the role public archaeology and public history play in a project such as this. Second, the article will delve into the overall project outline, including descriptions of the thematic content of each season. Finally, the authors will argue that film projects such as this are suitable forums for both public engagement and scholarly research.

## THEORY AND METHODOLOGIES

This project is first and foremost a programme about American history and archaeology, made for a largely American television audience. That is not to say it has no relevance to a wider audience; indeed it is broadcast on the UK Community Channel to a national UK audience. Be that as it may, the authors are all American academics who created *AFTGU* to address a particular gap in the American television market: the relative dearth on American television of factually accurate, engaging programming about American history and archaeology (fig. 2).

*AFTGU* presents an overview of the archaeology of America from the end of the last Ice Age to the 1950s. The project straddles the gaps between pre-contact culture, post-contact colonialism, historical archaeology, and just about any other archaeological paradigm one might bring to the discussion. The authors' aim is to present, as completely as practicable, an overview of the interactions of various social actors in America be they Native, European, African, Asian, or Hispanic.

This project seeks to interpret human interaction across a spatial and temporal landscape encompassing a continent and tens of thousands of years. In some cases, *AFTGU* takes an unapologetic historical archaeological approach to understanding the actions of human interaction and its complexities (Deetz, 1988; 1991). This is particularly helpful when discussing Native or indigenous peoples and their often complex interactions with all the social actors active on the North American stage (Rubertone, 2000).

Additionally, the project also deals with colonialism and the key question: what was the impact of colonisation on America? Any answer to this would be a complex, multivocal, multivalent argument rather than a simple assertion of facts (Lyons & Papadopoulos, 2002; Nicholas & Hollowell, 2007). In this context, the *AFTGU* project is an attempt to present archaeological histories that replace discussions of monolithic cultures with, as Silliman (2005) suggests, "individual agents negotiating cultural practices and discourses in [a] multiethnic setting" (68). As such, the authors have



Fig. 2.—Archaeologist Douglas D. Scott interviewed at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield about the American Civil War and battlefield archaeology (Copyright WCMU Public Media, Stratigraphic Productions LLC).

adopted a postmodern, interdisciplinary approach that views theoretical paradigms as simply another tool in the kit—right beside the shovel, trowel, notebook, and pen.

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH**

The questions of authority, ownership and representation are common to both public archaeology and public history. While cultural groups may be authority figures with their own histories, are they authorities and knowledge keepers of public history? All of these questions and juxtapositions remain problematic for those engaged in projects such as this. Without interaction and mutual input, a project dangerously approaches a narrow, confusing, celebratory, or even hegemonic dialogue of history and culture. Yet, if the process of mutual input and interaction among community, museum staff, filmmakers, and scholars runs too broadly, the narrative spins out of control. The task was to develop a well-rounded balance of expertise and authority (Karp & Lavine, 1991).

*AFTGU* pursues an interdisciplinary approach to the American story, which combines elements of public archaeology and history. The authors accept the premise that surviving documents, for the most part, record the actions of the “big men” who shaped the overarching national story of discovery, war, and growth, in the form of documents such as the notes of explorers, actions of commanders, and orders of presidents.

However, archaeology potentially preserves records of anyone living in a given landscape including common people and can provide more information about those who lived and worked in the landscape but whose lives were not recorded in documents. In all phases of the research, writing, filming, editing and final production of the series, the authors have consulted university based research academics, museum professionals, public historians and archaeologists, tribal representatives, and community groups to produce a project that is academically and editorially sound, and as inclusive as possible within the confines of the chosen format.

This project explores both the limitations and the potential utility of television as an appropriate venue for both public history/ archaeology and serious academic pursuit (fig. 3). In terms of limitations, it is often the time restrictions of format conventions in the television and film world that impose the key restrictions on a project such as this. This is why, for instance, *AFTGU* uses the format of a six-episode series of 30-minute programmes, which follows the American public television convention of a 30, 60, or 90-minute programme length (PBS, 2016).



Fig. 3.—Geophysical results analysis at Angel Mounds State Park (Copyright Stratigraphic Productions LLC).

Beyond structure and format, the time limits imposed by television and film dictate decisions about which stories to include and exclude. However, this need not prohibit scholarly discourse through the medium of film. Indeed, most historians and archaeologists, as well as most other academic fields, select the data to present in their research by subjective means. That is to say, project design and research goals represent selective criteria, and therefore any resultant conclusions are, at least in part, driven by the initial choice and can be said to be subjective (Tilly, 1991; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998; Dobson, 2006).

## COMPARATIVE AND TRANSNATIONAL APPROACHES

As an interdisciplinary work blending history and public archaeology, *AFTGU* relies upon both comparative and transnational analytical approaches to trace the effects of three European colonising powers upon the story of America. In doing so, the project firmly embeds itself within the so-called ‘Transnational Turn’ in US historical scholarship, which over the last 30-plus years has sought to contextualise US history away from an explicit focus on the nation or nation-state (Tyrrell, 2009). This has allowed the project to move beyond a top down, East Coast/Atlantic-centric narrative of US history, to explore more broadly the diverse experiences that make up the history of America from more regional and localised perspectives.

However, taking a transnational approach to a project like *AFTGU* requires further explanation as to what precisely one means by using transnationalism in the study of US history and archaeology. Within US historical scholarship, historians have extensively debated the meaning and implications of transnational history and its connections to other fields and analytic concepts like world, global, or international history; entangled histories; and territoriality (Tyrrell, 1991; McGerr, 1991; Thelen, 1998; Maier, 2000; Cohen & O’Connor, 2004; Bayly *et al.*, 2006; Gould, 2007; Briggs, McCormick & Way, 2008; Tyrrell, 2009; Iriye, 2012). Often, there is little agreement between scholars about its specific forms except to highlight the diversity of approaches, both conceptual and methodological, one can take in crafting transnational histories. And it is this diversity of approaches that allows scholars to tailor a transnational methodology to the kinds of questions they wish to ask in a given project. More than simply a buzzword or catch-all academic jargon, transnationalism becomes another powerfully flexible tool in the academic tool box.

One key facet of the transnational approach that has strongly influenced the development of this project is the idea, articulated by historian Isabel Hofmeyr, that transnational history should be centrally focused on the exploration of the “movements, flows, and circulation” of people and ideas beyond the nation-state context (in Bayly *et al.*, 2006: 1444). This concern with “movements, flows, and people” also implies that the liminal spaces and borderlands these processes take place in become key areas of study for transnational scholarship.

As Hofmeyr notes, “The claim of transnational methods is not simply that historical processes are made in different places but that they are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions” (*ibid.*). This attention to the “space

of the flows” then is one of the core analytical frameworks for this project. While *AFTGU* broadly compares the effects imperial France, Spain, and Great Britain had upon the development of America and its peoples, it does so by focusing on the networks, ideas, peoples, and institutions that connected the imperial zones in the liminal and ever-changing borderlands spaces between them.

## THE PUBLIC IN PUBLIC HISTORY AND PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

In *Presence of the Past* (1998), Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen provide copious evidence to support the fact that Americans in general are concerned with history. In 1994, the authors and their research staff interviewed a sampling of 1,453 individuals; 808 of whom were randomly selected Americans, and 645 African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans (12). The purpose of these oral interviews was to evaluate the importance of history to the general public. Significantly, the oral histories concluded that Americans do feel a strong connection to history (*ibid.*). The survey itself made quite clear the notion that there exists a desire among Americans to understand and connect to the past. An understanding of the past can allow an individual or group better understand the present and help shape the future (66-8).

However, the survey also made clear that not all sources of historical information were considered trustworthy. When asked about sources of historical information, an overwhelming 79.9 percent of those individuals interviewed stated that museums were the most accurate or authentic source of historical information (21). Academics and scholars ranked fourth on the scale of trustworthy sources. Not surprising, movies and television ranked last on the list of credible sources. The survey did indicate, however, that audiences believed that some forms of television were more accurate than others. Publicly funded sources—such as PBS, the US publicly funded national broadcast network—are seen as far more credible, and less biased than commercial sources (100). Indeed, for 14 years running, PBS has ranked in surveys as the most trusted nationally known institution in America (PBS 2017).

TABLE 1  
TRUSTWORTHINESS OF SOURCES (ROSENZWEIG & THELEN, 1998:21)

<i>Sources</i>	<i>Trustworthiness (%)</i>
Museums	79.9
Personal accounts from grandparents or other relatives	68.9
Conversation with someone who was there (witness)	64.4
College history professors	54.3
High school teachers	35.5
Nonfiction books	32.1
Movies and television programmes	11

Similarly, there exists a lack of trust when evaluating academic sources. Respondents noted that college professors and academics possess “freedom of choice” (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998: 102). College professors have the ability to not only select their topics of inquiry, but also their sources of documentation. In addition several people interviewed noted that personal agendas come into play when academic history is concerned (103-4). Numerous Native and Mexican American participants viewed popular culture versions of history, specifically the history of the American West, as distorted or even “a gringo story” (99).

As a result, the majority of the participants interviewed choose to receive their history from institutions such as museums. Often, Americans desire to attend museums through which they can see themselves and their own personal histories. American museumgoers are able and willing to draw distinctions between museums. As the survey indicated, the American public is less concerned with national or patriotic narrative, and much more interested in individual or group histories (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998: 116-124). They want museums to help them see themselves in the larger story. Overwhelmingly, participants felt that they could connect to the past through such institutions.

The process of viewing history gives society an experience, and in many instances these experiences fulfil a need or desire for recreation and enjoyment, and the need or desire for knowledge of self. However, the representation of history is a selective process. A museum board of directors or an exhibition designer might choose the final product of an exhibition. Similarly, a film company decides the ultimate outcome of a Hollywood production. This can be problematic as there exists a common tendency among humans to combine historical fact with historical fiction, and for the public there often lies a tendency to confuse entertainment for authenticity. Society is filled with examples ranging from scholarship and museums to films and video games related to American history. The problem is that oftentimes these representations are skewed. There exists a push to depict the fanciful and even wild nature within these historical reproductions.

Be that as it may, the production or reproduction of history serves some need, be it political, economic, or social. Martha Norkunas (1993) states that, “the creation of the past legitimises contemporary personal, social and political circumstances” (6). Through their chosen sources, most individuals, when obtaining historical knowledge, receive a simulacra. Jean Baudrillard (1998) defines this phenomena as hyperreality, or the conscious inability to discern between fact and fiction. As a result, the *infotainment* or *edutainment* product is often accepted as an example of historical fact. Herein lies the problem.

Indeed, the proliferation of pseudo-historical/ archaeological content in the public sphere is a compelling argument in favour of academic engagement with the general public. For example, in the run up to 2012, there was a marked increase in the production of “history/ archaeology” programmes proclaiming the demise of the universe based on an erroneous interpretation of Mayan archaeology, the calculation of dating, and a mishmash of pseudoscience and New Age religious teaching (Normark, 2015).



Elsewhere on commercial networks, the proliferation of shows such as *Ancient Aliens*, which posits that extraterrestrial beings contributed to the development of human culture, continue unabated. Other programmes such as the infamous National Geographic Channel International series *Nazi War Diggers*—which aired on UK Channel 5 as *Battlefield Recovery*—and the American show *Diggers* promote the commercialisation, and the destruction of the archaeological record at best (Altschul *et al.*, 2014). On most commercial networks, both academically sound programming and pseudo-historic/ scientific exist in the same broadcast space (Holly, 2016). This can be confusing for the audience, stripping barriers between fact and fiction, and reinforcing Baudrillard’s forces of hyperreality. Therefore, how the general public acquires knowledge of the past is now a pressing concern for academics.

Beyond the generalised “it’s a good idea to communicate with the public,” why do interdisciplinary projects such as *AFTGU* matter? First, the presentation to the public of knowledge of the past is not merely a desired outcome of academic endeavour, but an imperative (Apaydin, 2016) (fig. 4). According to the Unesco 1972 convention:

“...member states should undertake educational campaigns to arouse widespread public interest in, and respect for the cultural and natural heritage. Continuing efforts should be made to inform the public about what is being and can be done to protect the cultural or natural heritage and to inculcate appreciation and respect for the values it enshrines. For this purpose all media of information should be employed as required” (Unesco, 1972).



Fig. 4.—Dobson participating at a public question and answer forum over season one at the Missouri History Museum, St Louis (Photo Credit: Tamara Heitz-Peek; Copyright Stratigraphic Productions LLC).

Within the field of public history, the questions of authenticity, authority and ownership have been prominent for at least the last five decades. As Philip Burnham notes, the rise of new history, or social history, in the 1960s forced historians and museums alike to reevaluate their presented stories. The goal of new history was to include those groups, primarily minorities, previously excluded from the historical record (Burnham, 1995: xi).

Throughout his *How the Other Half Lived* (1995), Burnham analyses the historical representation of minorities, such as women, Blacks, Native Americans, and Asians, throughout various historical sites, such as plantations, missions, the home, and battlefields. He notes throughout that many of America's historic sites fail to accurately depict the histories of the nation's many ethnic groups. Museums and historic sites served a collective desire to purge the landscape and its stories of controversial or unpopular portions of history, depending on who controls the storytelling.

Oftentimes their group histories are silenced, and those sites that do include such histories often skew their presentations. For example, as Burnham (1995) explains, two-thirds of the nation's road markers discussing Native Americans deal with the topic of violence (199). In addition, many museums and historic sites fail to address potentially controversial topics. For example, he notes that many of America's railroad museums remain silent about such topics as violence, prostitution, mobs and militias, African American scab labour, or the hatred of the railroad by many farmers (181).

Beginning with Charles McGimsey's call to action in *Public Archaeology* (1972),

“Archaeologists, amateur and professional, cannot expect others to preserve the nation's heritage if we, who are by interest or training are best qualified in the field, do not assume the role of positive leadership and public education” (4).

Archaeologists have been debating what exactly should constitute “public archaeology.” Answers to this range from public education, cultural resource management, publicly funded projects, advocacy, to avocational archaeology among others (SAA; McGimsey 1972; Schadla Hall 1999, 2016; Richardson & Almansa, 2015 ). Despite the production of archaeological themed television from the 1950s, scholarly discussion of public archaeology and filmmaking is relatively rare (Dobson 2012; Schablitsky & Hetherington 2012; Morgan 2015). Coleen Morgan (2015) presents a very good overview of the history of archaeological film. For the purposes of this project the authors adopt the following definition after the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN):

“Public Archaeology focuses on increasing public awareness and education about archaeology. Through the medium of video, *America from the Ground Up* aims to promote understanding of the American story and the preservation of the fragile sites of our prehistoric and historic past.”

Be that as it may, increasing numbers of archaeologists are calling on their colleagues to engage the public in meaningful ways, if only for archaeology's continued survival; for example, Tim Schadla-Hall (2016) has argued that for archaeology to have continued relevance in the 21st century, it must, as a discipline, attempt to engage the wider public.

Meanwhile, others point to the increased opportunity for engagement afforded by advances in technology and communications. Troels Myrup Kristensen (2007) notes that new media and, by extension, technology, have afforded archaeologists increased opportunity to engage the public (Kristensen 2007). Overall, these forces have led to a broader conversation and more meaningful interaction between researchers and the wider public (Marshall, 2002; Cressey, Reeder, & Bryson, 2003; Smith & Waterton, 2009). Over the last two decades, both technological and philosophical changes have led to more open dialogue between scholars and the public in the field of archaeology (Scheper-Hughes, 2009). Elsewhere, Lemont Dobson (2012) notes that advances in digital filmmaking have made the technology both more affordable and easier to use. Within the discipline of archaeology, the postmodernist call for a democratisation of science is perhaps its greatest contribution to the field (Schadla-Hall, 2016).

In this very brief overview, it is important to acknowledge that there is no consensus about just what public archaeology is, beyond public engagement. As Robin Skeates, John Carman, and Carol McDavid (2012) point out, “‘public archaeology’ as a term, concept, and practice, requires critical evaluation” (4). What has emerged as public archaeology is a broad area of interaction between practitioners and the public that overlaps the spaces of museum, cultural resource management, public archaeology, community archaeology and education, among others (SAA, 2016). What consensus there is centres on the questions of dissemination of knowledge, consultation and involvement of the public, to some degree, in project planning and execution.

## ***AFTGU PROJECT OUTLINE***

Throughout its history, the experiences of diverse peoples on the move have fuelled the growth of the US, from the first European colonists arriving in New Mexico Province in the Southwest, to the shores of the Chesapeake, to the early explorers and traders navigating the inland lakes and waterways of the Great Lakes Basin and the Mississippi River Valley, to wagons drawn west by Manifest Destiny, and later, waves of immigrants looking to better their lives.

The reasons for coming and going—colonisation and conquest, the lure of cheap land, the international slave trade—varied widely, as did the experiences of the people involved (Jones 1992; Jacobson 1998; Dinnerstein & Reimers 2009). However, as David A Gerber (2011) notes, the predominant focus of histories of America has been on the integration and assimilation of white Europeans, particularly in the cities of the eastern US, and with the somewhat arbitrary distinction made

between the Old Immigrants of the early-19th century (primarily from Northern and Western Europe) and the New Immigrants who arrived in the late-19th and early-20th centuries (mainly from Southern and Eastern Europe). To many Americans, this is what American history was: European, Eastern, white. The conventional history of America seen on television follows this model all too often, despite the work of many academics, which for decades has explored the American story from other perspectives.

Indeed, for several decades in academic literature, the voices of indigenous peoples, African Americans, and immigrant groups have become more prominent (Van Nuys, 2002; Reimers, 2005; Blackhawk, 2008; Hämäläinen, 2008; Gerber, 2011). In addition, researchers have begun to reconsider the American story that emphasised the British model of colonisation at places like Boston, Philadelphia, and Jamestown to explore the substantial contributions of colonisers such as the Spanish, French, and Russian, to the development of the American story. For Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (2004), the influence of Spanish institutions and ideas about the colonial enterprise—ranging from models of colonisation (especially conversion; economic development, e.g., slavery, and resource extraction; and ideologies of possession), as well as cultural, and scientific advances—are not limited by geography, but are writ large on the American story. By shifting the primary focus away from the East, and using both text and artefacts as source material, *AFTGU* opens up new vistas that reveal a broader, more diverse American experience (fig. 5).

In the following project outline of *AFTGU*, individual episodes are numbered sequentially, e.g., s.102 for episode two of Season 1. Also, of the three seasons, only Season 1 has been finished and broadcast. As of this writing, principal photography and filming for Season 2 is complete and the series is in post-production, while Season 3 is in preproduction. As such, the summaries for Seasons 2 and 3 are contingent and open to revision during production and post-production.

## Season 1: New France

Season 1 explores the relationship between people and the landscape in the area of New France. Geographically, Season 1 focuses on human activity along and around the inland water highways including: the St Lawrence River; the Great Lakes; and the Mississippi River. Beginning with the Mississippian civilisation and ending with the War of 1812, or roughly a span of 1,000 years, Season 1 explores questions of trade and the effect of Native American geopolitics on transatlantic trade and relationships.

### *s.101: America's Lost Civilisation*

“America’s Lost Civilisation” explores the archaeology of Mississippian civilisation sites and their relationship to the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Within the episode, a major consideration is the construction of social power and social complexity in complex chiefdoms. Towards that, the role of ritual, and control



Fig. 5.—Rickey Hayes, Mountain Ute Tribal Historic Park Senior Guide (Copyright Stratigraphic Productions LLC).

of access to resources (trade) and land are presented as possible paths to political power. The episode points to the role archaeology can play in helping us understand the social complexity and diversity among the continent’s indigenous peoples.

#### *s.102: The Fur Trade*

This episode explores the relationship between New France and the Anishinaabeg, their primary Native ally whose homeland was in the Great Lakes. Beginning with the initial settlements along the St Lawrence, the episode follows French expansion into the interior of the continent. Combining the archaeological evidence for French and Native interaction at Fur Trade era forts in the Great Lakes, and contemporary French records, social relationships were outlined. For example, the documents record marriage between Frenchmen and Native women, and the archaeology at forts in the Great Lakes demonstrate that Voyageur lifeways reflect both influences. Indeed, the French cultivated the relationship with the Anishinaabeg people and the Anishinaabeg used that relationship to gain a technological advantage (guns) that allowed them to keep pace with their traditional rivals, the Iroquois, who were allied with the British. The episode contrasts British and French colonial strategy, and highlights the cooperative nature of Anishinaabeg alliance with the French.

#### *s.103: World War America*

“World War America” places the French and Indian War of the mid-18th century in the transnational context of European dynastic competition and Native American geopolitics, highlighting the French military dependence on the Anishinaabeg. The

episode contrasts the archaeology of French and British forts along the shores of the St Lawrence River; Richelieu River; Lake Champlain; Hudson River; and Ohio Rivers with French forts in the Great Lakes region. The episode features discussion of how landscape archaeology and underwater archaeology can help us better understand how people used the waterways in the colonial era. The episode concludes with a presentation of Anishinaabeg perspective on the British victory, and how Pontiac's War was a continuation of that conflict in the Old Northwest Territory.

*s.104: Revolution*

“Revolution” explores the archaeology and history of the American war for independence along the lakes and rivers of what is now the border with Canada. Opening with the siege of Quebec, the episode explores how underwater archaeology is helping us better understand the early stages of the war in Quebec and on Lake Champlain. Part of the discussion of the war in the western theatre includes the Anishinaabeg perspective on the war. The episode uses archaeological and historical evidence to illustrate that European American and Native American motivations and alliances were more diverse than traditional accounts of the war would allow.

*s.105: The Science of Archaeology*

“The Science of Archaeology” is a discussion of the process of finding, sampling, and excavating archaeological sites, and explores how archaeologists process, preserve and interpret artefacts. The episode uses longer segments from selected interviews and discussions from the other episodes to show how archaeologists discover, process, and interpret information about the past.

*s.106: War of 1812*

The final episode of Season 1 explores the archaeology and history of the second war between Britain and its former colony. The episode presents the Anishinaabeg perspective through exploring the pan-Indian alliance founded by Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (‘The Prophet’). This episode combines underwater archaeological research on Lake Champlain, historical accounts, and archaeological excavation to present the war in a transnational context. While often viewed as ancillary to the American Revolution in the US, the episode discusses its role as one of the fundamental events in a developing Canadian national identity (fig. 6).

## **Season 2: New Spain**

Season 2 explores the history and archaeology of immigration into America through the lens of Spanish colonisation and explores archaeology of migration/human mobility from the last Ice Age to the close of the 19th century. First, instead of focusing on immigration and migration into and throughout the eastern US, it explores the stories and experiences of immigrants throughout the trans-Mississippi American West, an area with particularly mobile frontier borders. Second, it emphasises the



Fig. 6.—Still from season one opening title sequence depicting a mix of historical and archaeological sites (Copyright Stratigraphic Productions LLC).

stories and experiences of non-European and non-white peoples in the population of the American West, as well as connections and interactions with Native peoples already on the land. Third, it explores Spanish influences on the institutions and ideological underpinnings of New World colonisation with particular emphasis on the processes and results of enslavement in the context of the Spanish origins of the plantation economy.

*s.201: The Ancestors*

This episode takes a look at the first people who migrated to North America during the last Ice Age to the age of European contact. As successive waves of people moved across North America, archaeological evidence clearly shows that conflicts resulted from the competition for land and resources. Humanities content in this episode includes discussion of how North America’s indigenous peoples first populated the continent, competition for resources in the face of environmental change, and how expanding populations led to conflict and warfare among pre-contact Pueblo peoples in the Southwest.

*s.202: Worlds Collide*

“Worlds Collide” explores Spanish colonial activity in the viceroyalty of New Spain’s province of New Mexico. From the earliest expeditions of discovery to the establishment of missions in Texas as a buffer between Spain and its French rivals in North America, this episode discusses how Spanish models of colonisation

(including conversion, economic development, and ideologies of possession), as well as cultural and scientific contributions, influenced other European colonisers. Spanish influence includes colonial economic structures, immigration and migration of peoples, the mission system in New Mexico province. The episode also explores the intersection of historical sources and archaeological evidence in the fields of history and archaeology.

*s.203: American Empires*

“American Empires” explores the competition between France, Russia, Britain and a fledgling US to acquire pieces of a waning Spanish empire in North America. The episode examines Russian economic models of colonisation and its relationships with indigenous peoples at settlements in California. Themes investigated in this episode include: European colonisation of the New World; the impact on and reaction to colonisation by North America’s indigenous peoples; colonial economics; and the effects of European immigration into North America.

*s.204: Paradise Lost*

Too often, television documentary accounts of slavery in the US focus on the Deep South and the plantation system there with little discussion of the institution’s origins. This episode begins with a discussion of the origins of the American plantation system that can be traced to the Iberian peninsula in the early modern period. Slavery at Spanish missions in what is now the American Southwest formed a major economic component of the empire in the region. A central feature of those missions was the forced labour of Native peoples. Later, after the Mexican government had outlawed slavery, Americans immigrating into Texas from The Deep South brought the institution of slavery in its Americanised form into the region, in order to exploit the agricultural potential of the black earth zone that extended from Georgia into what is now eastern Texas. The Levi Jordan sugar plantation in Texas and the Whitney sugar plantation in Louisiana are two sites where recent excavations have uncovered details about the daily lives of the enslaved populations there.

*s.205: An Un-Civil War*

“An Un-Civil War” decentres the American Civil War and focuses on the war in the Trans-Mississippi West. With the migration of white American settlers—both free-soiler and pro-slavery—into Missouri and Kansas, slavery and the question of balance in the Senate took centre stage. While there may have been fewer massive battles than in the East, out in the West in Missouri and Kansas the pitched battles and dogged warfare were as brutal and divisive as anything in the East. The episode also explores experiences of the first African American troops to see battle in the Civil War in a national and regional context, as is the impact of war on the daily lives of the American people; a discussion of how immigration and migration of settlers moving west of the Mississippi River was one cause of the war; and the displacement of Native peoples.



*s.206: Go West*

From intrepid explorers, conquistadores to the Governor of Alta California, to the Buffalo Soldiers who fought to enforce America's reservation policy on the Indians of the West, the African American story is the history of the American West. This episode explores the American expansion westward from multiple perspectives. Beginning with Spanish colonisation of what is now the American Southwest, the episode explores the stories of often marginalised peoples including: African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans.

### **Season 3: British America**

Season three of *AFTGU* will explore the effects of British colonialism on American history. Whereas the traditional historical narrative of American history begins with the British at Jamestown and Roanoke, *AFTGU* concludes with that story. This allows the authors to compare and contrast British influence in America with the impact of France and Spain.

*s.301: A Crowded House*

From the Vikings at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, the French in Quebec, the Dutch at New Amsterdam, and New Sweden and the Spanish in Florida, European colonisation of the Eastern coast of North America had a long history. Contrary to popular conception, it was not simply the British who colonised the Eastern United States, and this episode explores the archaeology and history of European settlement in North America.

*s.302: Colonial Economies*

"Colonial Economies" will explore the archaeology and history of America's colonial economy. Topics will include labour, manufacturing, and extractive industry in the context of a colonial economic structure.

*s.303: Indian Wars*

This episode will showcase the British model of empire that features exporting colonists to the 'New World' and the removal of indigenous peoples to take the land for settlement. From the collapse of the earliest treaty with the Wampanoag people of the North East, to the Northwest Indian War, the Treaty of Greenville, through the Trail of Tears, and on to the Great Plains, first British, and later American views of Native Americans were seen as obstacles to settlement. "Indian Wars" includes a discussion of the role of infamous Indian schools in the attempted destruction of Native American culture.

*s.304: Building a Nation*

"Building a Nation" will explore the infrastructure projects that built America, from the early British colonial postal and wagon roads, to canals, and the railroads of

the 19th century. The episode will explore issues such as the impact of immigration on the American labour force. Archaeological sites like Duffy's Cut in Pennsylvania will provide details about the worker's daily lives.

*s.305: The Golden Age*

"The Golden Age" will explore how immigration and the industrial revolutions transformed America from the Jeffersonian ideal of yeoman farmers, to the growth of massive cities and the new urban America.

*s.306: All the World's a Stage*

Progressive era policies of US president Theodore Roosevelt and the country's participation in WWI pulled America from the inward focus of isolationism in the 18th and 19th centuries to a major world power. This episode explores the archaeological record that tells the story of the beginning of the "American Century".

## CHALLENGES

In a project of this nature, there are multiple challenges including, but not limited to, funding, industry trends, access to sites, academic mistrust, and a reluctance of Native American tribal governments to participate.

The project was initially proposed—or pitched in industry terminology—to several television production companies. Because the project was so intensively focused on academic archaeology and history, none of the companies approached were willing to commit time and resources to it without significant changes. Some suggestions included: a focus on more sensational stories; casting a celebrity host; and Bigfoot/Yeti archaeology. Reaction to the project from these production companies was likely driven by industry demands for entertainment focused content, even among networks ostensibly focused on the genre of history, e.g., History, Discovery Network, and the National Geographic Channel. So, in 2012, Dobson and Andrew Devenney founded their own film production company Stratigraphic Productions LLC and began working on the series.

Production of high-quality television projects is expensive. Securing appropriate levels of funding is one of the major ongoing challenges. This project would have been impossible without the support of the College of Humanities and Social and Behavioral Sciences at Central Michigan University. In 2012, Dobson was invited to serve as the Inaugural Scholar at the School of Public Service and Global Citizenship at Central Michigan University to produce the series. There, the Director of New Media Initiatives, Dan Bracken, joined the project as producer/ director. Additional funding was secured from a combination of private individuals, foundations, and state agencies, such as the Michigan Humanities Council and the Missouri Humanities Council.

During the production of both Seasons 1 and 2 of *AFTGU*, the project developers faced challenges regarding access to locations, and academic and community

involvement. Sites and locations were often closed to filming, or the producers faced obstacles in acquiring permits to film at specific sites. For example, we were unable to film at two state-owned locations in Los Angeles due to the one-size-fits-all policy of the regional film office: the fees were too expensive for the limited budget of a nonprofit project.

Additionally, some academics expressed a mistrust, due to preconceived notions of television projects. It should be noted that this was more an issue for Season 1, when the authors had no real track record of production. Similarly, the authors received limited responses from Native American communities regarding requests for participation in the project due to issues of mistrust. Again, this is likely not unfounded given the numbers of commercial television projects in the US that have often sensationalised, or misrepresented Native American peoples and their histories. Indeed, America has a sordid history where Native American stories have also often been coopted by non-Native peoples for profit and personal gain. As a result, the authors found Native American communities sometimes reluctant to participate with the project. However, this will likely become less a problem as trust is built.

Each of the two seasons has been impacted by all of these challenges and more. During the planning stages, availability of sites, experts and funding all shape the scope and narrative of the project to some degree. For example, budgetary limitations in Season 2 dictated abandoning a planned two-week long film trip to Alaska and Hawaii. This necessitated rewriting two episodes and limiting the planned discussion of the Russian Pacific Empire to one-third of an episode. Other challenges include the completely unpredictable: weather and so-called “acts of God”. For example, the planned interview with a scholar in the field had to be rescheduled to film a month later at their office because of a death in their family.

## ANALYSIS OF IMPACT

The first season of *America from the Ground Up* received positive reviews from academic and industry bodies. The Midwestern History Association awarded the project an Honorable Mention for the 2015 Alice Smith Prize in Public History. Likewise The Michigan Association of Broadcasters awarded Season 1 the Best Independent Public Television Production in 2015.

In terms of project reach, the distribution for Season 1 exceeded our initial expectations. For example, it was initially hoped that 50-60 regional public television stations in the US would broadcast the series. However, the series was broadcast internationally on public television stations in the US and UK. To date it has aired more than 300 times on stations across the US and multiple times in prime time in the UK. *America from the Ground Up* is also available on-demand from the PBS video portal<sup>1</sup>. Viewership data for this is not available at time of press.

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1. See “America from the Ground Up”.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

When completed as envisioned, *AFTGU* will be both a popular, entertaining television series and an 18-chapter critical analysis of colonialism in North America, from Mexico City to Quebec. Using scholarly resources, the series introduces new and current research to fellow scholars, lifelong learners, students, and the general public in the context of an interdisciplinary research methodology.

Indeed, the interdisciplinary focus of the series is one of its major strengths. By bringing together archaeologists and historians who are actively researching complementary topics, *AFTGU* provides a forum for interaction which might otherwise not exist. The resultant conversations and exchange of data leads to new understandings and more importantly, new questions. The camera records these points of interaction and preserves them for public consumption.

It is this public interaction that lies at the heart of the project. From the outset, the producers of *AFTGU* have been committed to the removing as many barriers as possible between the series content and its perspective audiences. That commitment to open source knowledge led to the producers and Central Michigan University to give the project to any public television station in the US that wished to broadcast its content. There is a similar arrangement with the UK public broadcaster The Community Channel.

In an effort to engage students and school children, the producers placed the series on YouTube freely available to all audiences and regions, which has as a primary goal of mitigating the cost barrier for cash-strapped primary and secondary schools. That is not to say the project has been successful in removing all barriers to access. For example, some schools in rural or impoverished areas may not have access to high-speed internet. Language is another barrier. At present, the series is only available in English, and while plans exist to translate and subtitle the series into multiple languages, this phase is dependent on obtaining future grant funding or crowdsourcing the work.

## FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

Film is an acceptable medium for both scholarly archaeology and history if done by academics willing to step out of their comfort zones and embrace new technologies. The fields of archaeology and history both have multiple subfields ranging from osteoarchaeology and zooarchaeology, to gender history and economic history, etc. Technological change has driven much of the innovation in these fields. For example, before the advent of modern computing, the concept of digital history and archaeological computing were neither possible or practicable. With the proliferation of relatively inexpensive video cameras and editing software, it is time to develop more fully, specialised, discipline specific training, and perhaps more importantly, methodologies for the incorporation of film and video in project designs. Indeed, it is the authors' contention that film or video archaeology and or

history should receive the same scholarly consideration as do those other already existing sub fields.

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