

Community Organizing in Public Archaeology: Coalitions for the Preservation of a Hidden History in Florida

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Looking for Angola, an interdisciplinary research project seeking material remains of an early nineteenth-century maroon community, has faced the challenges of locating archaeological remains in an urban environment. Public outreach and community involvement in Bradenton, Florida since 2004 has intersected with public archaeology as applied anthropology, service learning, and civic engagement. The role of the archaeologist in these types of endeavors deserves continuing attention, and community organizing as inspired by Saul Alinsky is offered as a possibility in light of one of the survey areas facing development that threatened the homes of its residents, historic structures, and the archaeological record. Community organizing is relevant for the continuing concerns in public archaeology for conservation, preservation, and collaborative commemoration of the past.

Introduction: Archaeology in a Neighborhood

Moving beyond preservation for a generalized and vague future, recent arguments on the interests behind public archaeology (Baram 2011) suggest the need for new avenues of engagement with local communities and further consideration of the politics of representations for the archaeological past. Discussions of public archaeology as civic engagements (Little and Shackel, 2007) are moving the socio-politics of archaeology into the local politics for complex, multivocal, and complicated social places. Based on experiences in an urban neighborhood searching for elusive material remains of a potentially significant history, this article offers community organizing -- building alliances among groups for conservation and commemoration of the past -- as an additional facet for discussions in public archaeology. This article contains an overview of public archaeology, the use of community organizing within collaborative approaches, and a case study situated at the intersection of a partially bulldozed neighborhood with the search for a hidden history.

Saul Alinsky was Never an Archaeologist

Archaeology is burgeoning with examples of excavations in the sunshine (Milanich, 1991), public outreach, efforts with descendant communities (McDavid, 2002; Mullins, 2003), community service learning endeavors (Nassaney and Levine, 2009), and participatory action research (McGhee, 2000); some are exploring the roles of archaeology in heritage (e.g., Rowan and Baram, 2004) and commemoration (e.g., Shackel, 2003) and of archaeologists as members of communities (e.g., Gibb, 1997; Moser *et al.*,

2002; www.archaeologyincommunity.com). These have provided fruitful discussions for public archaeology, with one of the key issues being relationships between archaeologists and communities. Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008:9) explain the collaborative continuum as "an act and a practice" that "requires scholars to work in partnership with people who would normally constitute the 'subject' of research." But not all subjects are organized for collaboration with archaeologists or archaeology; as Nicholas *et al.* (2008:291) mention in the conclusion to *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice*: "any catalog of collaboration would be littered with the mouldering remains of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of archaeology-Indigenous partnership initiatives that never found their legs" and the numbers would be higher when other descendant and local partnerships are considered.

The successful collaborations are enlightening but the disappointments are also worth consideration. To meet the challenges of protecting the past where historic preservation institutions are weak or nonexistent, organizing groups might be considered part of the archaeological collaborative process. Organizing is not merely the act of bringing people together or expanding the rolls of professional organizations. Community organizing has been conceptualized, probably most famously and most influentially, by Saul Alinsky, whose insights are worth considering for organizing public archaeology.

Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) was committed to improving the living conditions of the poor through his grassroots organizing for social justice (Horwitt, 1992). His *Rules for Radicals* and other writings are inspiration for community organizing and activist politics in the USA. If you google his name (mostly recently January 6, 2011), you might find his career started with archaeology at the University

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Fig. 1: Tampa Bay, Florida from Google Earth.

of Chicago. The story goes that the lack of archaeology jobs during the Great Depression led to a shift toward criminology and then to community organizing. Claiming Alinsky as an archaeologist could make him an ancestor for the new dynamics in public anthropology and offer a rich entry point to solving challenges as archaeologists wrestle with their roles in communities and in the commemoration of the past. But in a recent biography, Sanford Horwitt (1992) lays out Alinsky's undergraduate career in sociology with no archaeology component. Horwitt (1992:283) explains that the organizer was willing to let interesting stories flourish to make himself seem more dramatic, including it seems the inclusion of archaeology as a potential career path. So I need to start with the simple statement for the potential of organizing in archaeology that Saul Alinsky was never an archaeologist.

While Alinsky was never an archaeologist, it might be useful to note some aspects of his life's work as it relates to contemporary discussions of public archaeology. Community organizing is typically defined as a process through which people are brought together into an organization that acts in their shared self-interest; community organizers generally assume that social change involves conflict and social struggle in order to generate collective power for the powerless. Alinsky did not invent community organizing but he sharpened its tactics, such as focusing on giving people a sense of their own power and building up organizations that can sustain social change (Bobo *et al.*, 2001). Alinsky saw the organizer as an outsider (Horwitt, 1992:174), but to the various groups within a coalition

rather than to the problems being confronted. That positioning seems to answer several concerns for the role of the organizer in sustaining social change, including the role of an archaeologist involved with the commemoration of the past in a localized context.

The central assertion in this article is that community organizing can be a larger part of the conversation as archaeologists consider the potential of the field for contributing to social justice and community (Little, 2009a), even to cosmopolitanism (Meskell, 2009), as well as providing frameworks and criteria of accountability on how to sustain the goals of preservation, conservation, and commemoration of the past in meaningful ways.

Looking for Angola as Public Archaeology

Community organizing grabbed my attention in light of involvement with Looking for Angola, an interdisciplinary, community-based, public anthropology research project seeking material remains of a maroon community in southern Tampa Bay (Baram, 2008) on Florida's Gulf Coast (see Figure 1). The research design took into account the fact that the descendant community, as will be explained below, was not in Florida, that there were multiple local communities for public outreach, and that the knowledge of the Florida maroons was limited to a handful of scholars. Public outreach and collaboration were at the center of the project but immediate threats raised the concern for organizing in order to protect the potential sites of Angola on the Manatee River.

Angola was a haven of freedom for self-emancipated Africans during the First Seminole War. Recovered from the silences of history through the archival research of the historian Canter Brown (1990), the name comes from a failed land claim by Cuban fishermen for 640 acres on the Manatee River. The immediate historical background for Angola is the First Seminole War (1816-1818), which consisted of increasingly deeper American military invasions into Spanish La Florida to attack Seminole and maroon communities – first at the Apalachicola River (1816) and then the Suwannee River (1818), leading survivors toward a last rallying spot in southern Tampa Bay. At the Manatee River, hundreds of Black Seminoles and self-emancipated slaves farmed and hunted, traded with Cuban fishermen, and trained with British filibusters. Brown (2005) suggests up to seven hundred people lived at Angola during the early nineteenth century, until a devastating military raid in 1821, just as Spain turned over the territory to the United States, destroyed the community and forced hundreds northward into slavery. The survivors fled to the interior or southward to Cape Florida; those who crossed the Florida Straits ultimately reached Andros Island where their descendants are known as the Black Seminoles of the Bahamas (Howard 2002).

From its launching, Looking for Angola has been inspired by the current attempts at public archaeology as applied anthropology, collaborative research, and civic engagement. The research began with a public outreach program that asked members of local communities for their input into the research agenda (Baram, 2009). At every stage of the research process, which included public lectures, screening a video, and creating teaching materials, members of local communities were invited to provide input and communications sustained with the descendant community on Andros Island. Thus far, excavations have only been suggestive for narrowing down the target area, but the search for Angola has had much success in public outreach, bringing attention to a previously unknown haven of freedom in a part of Florida where the contemporary landscape overwhelms the past.

Searching the Manatee River

The archaeology has faced the challenges of locating material markers of a group of people who sought to be hidden – the typical challenges of maroon archaeology (e.g., Orser, 1998). Archival sources point to the Manatee River as the general location for the early nineteenth-century maroon community but the exact location of the settlement is uncertain from the documents. Unlike other examples of public archaeology, Looking for Angola could not point the public to a specific place or a set of ongoing intensive excavations, only periodic small-scale surveys and generalized locations. The research team targeted several areas as potentially productive for archaeological investigations and organized public presentations of the approach and the research at community events to generate interest and gather information; at one presentation, a small historic preservation organization named Reflections of Manatee, Inc., offered their property for archaeological testing.

Founded in 1997, Reflections of Manatee, Inc. has a mission to “protect historically significant structures, sites, and items of historical interest, and also protection of environmentally sensitive and archaeologically important properties.” The not-for-profit organization owns three acres, including a small urban park that contains Manatee Mineral Spring. The spring is a source of local legends about Native American tragic love affairs, and until the beginning of the twentieth century there were large mounds by the spring, which are now gone (Warner, 1986). After the Spanish conquest, the spring continued to be significant; eighteenth-century Cuban fishermen living on the coastal islands used it as a landmark (e.g., Matthews, 1983:129; Warner, 1986:75). Most notably, starting in the 1840s, it was the location of the Village of Manatee, a pioneering Anglo-American settlement, now part of the city of Bradenton. While Reflections of Manatee focuses on the pioneer settlement, the organization encompasses all of the histories of the area and welcomed the search for Angola on its property. The archaeologist reciprocated by offering excavation training, equipment for preservation of historical artifacts, and public outreach. Because Reflections of Manatee has sustained efforts with the people around the mineral spring, the archaeological search became entwined with a neighborhood known as Old Manatee in east Bradenton.

East Bradenton as a Neighborhood in Florida

Neighborhoods are places where, presumably, people are connected at least by location. The historian and philosopher of science Lewis Mumford (1954:258) allowed for a universal and happenstance approach to neighborhoods; groupings that form without any theoretical preoccupation or political direction. Mumford basically defines a neighborhood as a geographic unit within a city.

The City of Bradenton Community Redevelopment Agency calls East Bradenton to the south of Manatee Mineral Spring: “predominantly residential with a mix of private homes, private sector apartments, and public housing projects. There are two parks in the area. An ethnically diverse population resides in East Bradenton. There are few commercial establishments” (http://www.bradentonccra.com/project_areas.html accessed January 6, 2011). To bring out the social dimensions of archaeology at Manatee Mineral Spring, the larger neighborhood of East Bradenton might best be understood through the words of a community activist. Cynthia Newell, in a 2000 “Next door - Meet Your Neighbor” piece in the *Bradenton Herald* (December 14, 2000) describes the community: “Neighbors look out for each other, they talk to one another in passing, and know who should or should not be parked outside another neighbor’s house.” She explains that “There was a time when all of east Bradenton resembled a real community, but the neighborhood has been divided by industry” and, in recent years, the area has faced more transformations.

In the newspaper story, Newell calls for investment in social capital, a library, and other facilities to enrich the neighborhood. The neighborhood has not received a li-

brary but others saw the potential for a traditional Florida type of richness in the neighborhood: real estate development. In 2003, city planners approved a development called Old Manatee Village for the East Bradenton riverside. Newspaper accounts illustrate the public nature of the debates over the transformation of the neighborhood.

The choice of Old Manatee Village as the name for the development reflects a transformation of history into consumable heritage, one that would erase the potential of the archaeological record (e.g., Fawcett and Lewelling, 2000) to bring forward the maroon history, creating a sanitized and inauthentic version of the past for the sake of a popularized theme. The *Tampa Bay Business Journal* (July 14, 2003) headlined the story as the “Feel of Key West coming to Bradenton development,” without recognizing the irony of bringing Key West to represent Old Manatee (that several of the early inhabitants of Manatee came from Key West probably is a coincidence). That project never got off the ground (according to the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* February 26, 2005), but another development scheme quickly followed. The newspaper reports that several homeowners received above-market prices for their houses which are described as “eyesores, with dirt yards and molded sideboard.” In that newspaper article, Trudy Williams of Reflections of Manatee provided the opposing image: “Every house is different.” Another resident noted that “This is mainly a single-family neighborhood. I’d like it to stay that way.” It has not; as part of the real estate development, the purchased houses were bulldozed quickly.

In 2006, another plan to “rejuvenate the blighted Old Manatee neighborhood” (according to the *Bradenton Herald* on August 16, 2006) focused on a development called Riviera SouthShore with four high-rise condominium towers.

During this process, the city of Bradenton, which had deeded the park with the Manatee Mineral Spring to Reflections of Manatee in 1998, requested the return of the park. The city in May 2007 claimed that the original sale was a mistake. A *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* columnist, Tom Lyons, wrote a piece titled “Why does the city want its park back?” (July 20, 2006) arguing that the city should let (his term) “good-doers” continue to care for the park.

What to Do? Organize

Bradenton is part of the Sarasota-Manatee region, where many pre-Columbian sites were destroyed in the beginning of the twentieth century and, over the last decade the region has lost well-known historical places even after high-profile campaigns for their conservation. With the lack of effective support for historic preservation, it seemed like the target area for Angola was being lost, along with the historic mid-to-late nineteenth-century landscape, even as development and the city employed heritage to create an entirely new urban landscape. The local politics were not focused on archaeology but on the neighborhood of houses, many historic, intermixed with emptied lots, with the future of its archaeological record at stake. The case required moving beyond an institutional view of partnerships to a holistic consideration of the local

community and the role of this archaeologist in the coalition for historic preservation in that neighborhood.

While the literature on public archaeology has explored partnerships with heritage groups, the relationship with Reflections of Manatee was not at issue: the archaeological project and the historical preservation organization shared a common goal. The case focuses on the possibilities for the archaeologist to help with preservation. Prominently among archaeologists, Leone (1995:251) has set out the rationale for an engaged politics for archaeology, noting professionals cannot “continue to live with our current political innocence and political ineffectiveness.” But as McGuire (2005:21) has noted, archaeology is a “weak weapon for political action.” In evaluations of their vigorous public archaeology programs, Chidester and Gadsby (2009) and Leone (1995) express disappointment in their critical endeavors as public archaeologists; recently Leone (2005) points to his collaborative partnership as an answer to the question of audience for critical archaeological insights, but in the Bradenton case study the collaborations were in place and positive; the concern was an immediate threat to the potential of a property to reveal a hidden history. More publicity and more outreach are appropriate answers for public archaeology but are unlikely to be successful in a place like Bradenton where the descendants and the history are far removed from the current local community.

Considering community organizing in public archaeology requires rethinking the role of the archaeologist in the preservation and commemoration of the past. In a 1995 essay, Neil Silberman noted that throughout much of the discipline’s history the archaeologist is the hero of narratives: the archaeologist discovers or reveals the past. With the rise of calls for public outreach and civic engagement that motif seems to be continuing; the heroic act has expanded from discovery to helping contemporary communities. Barbara Little (2009a:118) formulates the linkages between archaeology and social justice in more direct terms: “it’s not about promoting one’s own career or even one’s own discipline” but working with alliances for social justice. This article suggests that the archaeologist as informed citizen can contribute to organizing support for preservation of the archaeological record by encouraging a diverse, localized coalition through community organizing, which decenters the archaeologist in the process in favor of a community organization.

The Story Unfolds along the Collaborative Continuum

When Reflections of Manatee faced the loss of the park containing Manatee Mineral Spring, archaeological excavations were part of the solution. Luckily, the local media is entranced by archaeological excavations; the attention paid to a radar tomography survey at Manatee Mineral Spring in 2007, high tech research that captured the attention of the local media, raised the profile of the park for revealing history and may have contributed to the city’s withdrawing its challenge to the ownership of the small park. That type of research might be considered the

typical role for archaeology, with the archaeologist providing expertise in analysis and interpretation.

But the next challenge for the area could not be addressed by archaeological research. The 2008 Great Recession shook Sarasota and Manatee counties particularly hard: the housing market collapsed and the Manatee River development went into foreclosure. The bulldozed homes in much of the area around Manatee Mineral Spring were left as vacant lots and the future of the neighborhood was in doubt. Into this landscape, Reflections of Manatee led a coalition of interested parties who saw an opportunity to conserve a large area for archaeology and the environment, and to build social capital based on heritage for the neighborhood. With the assumption that the real estate market would improve at some point and encourage continuation of the development schemes, Reflections of Manatee applied, successfully, for the federal Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (<http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/>) in 2010. The National Park Service program facilitated discussions over how to transform the now vacant land and foreclosed properties into a greenway using a toolkit (http://www.nps.gov/nero/rtcatoolbox/index_comtoolbox.htm) that is surprisingly similar to the model that grows out of community organizing. The focus is on networking, bringing together stakeholders in, and concerned with, the neighborhood, and involving government and non-governmental organizations in planning the conservation of the region. Manatee Heritage Park, a preserve focused on the material history of the area, is the promising proposal for the networking of stakeholders. Historical research, the results of archaeological testing, and archaeology's promise of material evidence for an important chapter in the region's history are elements of the park discussion but only a component.

Community organizing moves the role of the archaeologist beyond archaeology but might also address concerns arising out of the evolving discussions in public archaeology. While archaeologists and archaeological organizations have been involved in protecting archaeological sites for future generations, for this case study the engagement focuses on benefits to a neighborhood. But community organizing also includes self-interest (Bobo *et al.*, 2001:10) so the archaeological concerns for preservation are decentered but not removed. And building up a community-based organization dedicated to preservation addresses the concern of assessing the success of public engagement for archaeology in a neighborhood.

For conservation to succeed in this example, collaborations in terms of building up an organization and creating coalitions dedicated to preservation have been essential; archaeological excavations and interpretations would not have been enough to preserve the area. Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson's (2008) collaboration continuum opens up the dynamics for this approach. For partnerships with government entities or well-established organizations, community organizing may not be a concern, but when partnering with small organizations or connecting groups of citizens, organizing seems to be a necessity. Famously at the African Burial Ground in New

York City, the community formed around the commemoration (see LaRoche and Blakey, 1997), but in East Bradenton the dynamics were neither spontaneous nor driven by excavation results. Building up coalitions and organizations is part of a process that networks groups and propels conservation.

Conclusion

The suggestion in this article to expand the collaborative continuum by building coalitions and to build up organizations grew out of the process of Looking for Angola in Bradenton. The results of the efforts to create a park are not clear as this manuscript goes to publication but starting with organizing would have helped the neighborhood. Yet there are lessons in this discussion that are meant to contribute to the ongoing discussions in public archaeology.

Adding community organizing to the collaboration continuum (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:11) requires addition of new practices for public archaeology. Information on research designs, the archaeological record and its potential, and community interest are part of the process. A clear sense of local politics, and the significance of heritage within the local communities, is important for successful actions and coalitions. And while archaeological excavations are one of the goals for the property, the archaeologist is only one of the interested parties involved. The notion of decentering archaeology does not negate the ethics of stewardship but rather requires additional conscientiousness on the part of the archaeologist. Adding responsibilities seems to be the trajectory in archaeological ethics and community organizing seems a route to fulfill the promise of a socially relevant, empirically rich archaeological endeavor.

With the expanding discussion of civic engagement (e.g., Little and Shackel 2007) and contributing to communities (e.g., McGhee 2000), anthropologists recognize that such work is "not easy, not comfortable, and it is never finished" (Kingsolver 2009:73) but, as ethnographers have found (e.g., Kingsolver 2009), the challenges are balanced by the opportunity to contribute to one's community. For the archaeology in East Bradenton, organizing provides a means to combine the role of scholar concerned with uncovering an important but hidden history with that of an engaged citizen interested in preservation and conservation, balancing the search for an inspiring past with preservation of a neighborhood's future.

If archaeology, as Little (2009b) suggests, can contribute to social justice, it will require shifts in the practices of archaeologists. Archaeological excavations and presentations are contributions to social justice, particularly when stories previously lost to history are recovered and address contemporary heritage concerns. The process, ideally, includes jointly negotiated approaches using archaeo-heritage for building community and social justice. The goals for organizing archaeology include coalition-building among organizations dedicated to heritage and historic preservation. For success in organizing, there needs to be recognition of power relations in a community and in-

formation needs to flow freely within the coalitions. Saul Alinsky is an inspiration for archaeology to contribute to social justice and community, with more consideration possible regarding his efforts and their implications; today's community organizers are attuned to the dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality and for work across organizations (Bobo *et al.*, 2001). In addition, since assessment has been a growing concern in public archaeology, community organizing has tools for assessment of success by evaluating the organization built up, the coalition created and hopefully sustained over time. Organizing – building a coalition for commemoration – could be another strand for weaving together history, the archaeological record, communities, and place into a productive, successful, and socially meaningful public archaeology. This pathway might show that Saul Alinsky is able to contribute to archaeology, and is worth considering for the expanding discussions in public archaeology, even if he was never an archaeologist.

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