



American Anthropological Association
Advancing Knowledge, Solving Human Problems

Executive Board Summary

Issues in Cultural Heritage

Based on the
AAA Task Force Cultural Heritage Report

September 2016

Background and Purpose of the Task Force Cultural Heritage¹

Cultural heritage issues will be a permanent and increasingly important element of the cultural landscape, and hence the intellectual and political landscape for anthropology globally. The AAA had been concerned about improving on a piecemeal, primarily reactive, approach to threats to cultural heritage, drawing on the expertise of current Executive Board members. An institutionalized structure is required for the Association to proactively deal with the complex issues of cultural heritage from an anthropological perspective.

The AAA Task Force on Cultural Heritage was formed in 2013 and charged with producing recommendations to build a stronger, durable, and multifaceted approach to issues of cultural heritage in the Association. The goal has been to increase appreciation of cultural heritage issues in anthropological discourse and to assist the Executive Board in developing effective positions and practices on cultural heritage issues in the US and internationally.

The Task Force was specifically charged to:

- 1) Examine what “cultural heritage” means to different constituencies and how it relates to different areas of anthropological inquiry in order to guide the implementation of AAA positions and practices.
- 2) Investigate how other professional associations are dealing with cultural heritage nationally and internationally and incorporate their best practices in recommendations for new structures or formations that will allow the AAA to become and remain actively engaged in cultural heritage issues.
- 3) Identify potential proactive initiatives aimed at protecting cultural heritage in the United States and internationally in collaboration with international colleagues and organizations
- 4) Recommend ways to increase training in cultural heritage issues in undergraduate and graduate anthropology curricula and continuing education in other venues
- 5) Identify sustainable means for coordinated collaboration among relevant AAA committees and sections, other professional organizations, trade associations, and other organizations involved in cultural heritage protection.
- 6) Recommend ways for the AAA to become a leading association for national and international dialogue and change regarding cultural heritage, identifying the special or unique contributions the AAA can make in this regard.
- 7) Help draft advocacy letters or statements until more permanent entities can carry out that task, and devise guidelines and protocols for such letters and statements.

¹ Task Force Co-Chairs: Susan D. Gillespie (U Florida) and Teresita Majewski (Statistical Research, Inc.). Task Force Members: Sarah Cowie (U Nevada-Reno); Michael Di Giovine (West Chester U); T. J. Ferguson (U Arizona); Antoinette Jackson (U South Florida); Rosemary A. Joyce (U California, Berkeley); Morag Kersel (DePaul U); Richard Meyers (South Dakota State U); Stephen Nash (Denver Museum of Nature and Science); Mark Turin (U British Columbia). Sandra Lopez Varela (UNAM, TFCH Member and Executive Board Liaison); Elizabeth Chilton (U Mass-Amherst, Executive Board Liaison).

The Task Force Cultural Heritage report was prepared by Teresita Majewski and Susan D. Gillespie. In what follows are excerpts from the TFCH report and new information indicated by a “Note.”

Charge 1: What are the meanings of “cultural heritage” and its relationships with different areas of anthropological inquiry?

Heritage has been defined in many ways in international conventions and charters as well as explicitly in many nations’ laws. All definitions share certain similarities that embrace the importance of both tangible and intangible resources of value to people at local, national, and global scales, and there is a strong emphasis on the dynamics of time, geography, and scale. Differences in specifics relate to a particular community of interest. For the Task Force’s work, we did not recognize the need to endorse any particular definition of cultural heritage but instead acknowledged various unifying notions about heritage: it is a nonrenewable resource under significant threat worldwide, integral to group identity, has tangible and intangible aspects, and is a universal human right.

The Task Force has prepared a white paper based on a study by Task Force members Michael Di Giovine and Sarah Cowie, “[Defining Heritage: Operational Definitions of Patrimony](#).”

Charge 2: How are other professional associations dealing with cultural heritage nationally and internationally? How can AAA incorporate their best practices in recommendations for new structures or formations that will allow the AAA to become and remain actively engaged in cultural heritage issues?

As a result of the establishment of the Task Force, collaboration began between the Association of Brazilian Anthropologists and a number of other major professional anthropological associations. Antonio Arantes (of the Association of Brazilian Anthropologists [ABA]) initiated this collaboration. Dr. Arantes (former president of ABA, former professor at the University of Campinas, Brazil, and on the UNESCO commission on cultural heritage) organized an inter-American and Caribbean forum in August 2015, and Teresita Majewski participated as AAA representative. The forum met, and a working group was established, which wrote the founding statement and launched the project.

Charge 3: Identify potential proactive initiatives aimed at protecting cultural heritage in the United States and internationally in collaboration with international colleagues and organizations

The Task Force has recommended that AAA and its members study and encourage critical analysis of heritage, both nationally and internationally. AAA can take a leadership role by:

- Publishing more extensively and more frequently the results of ongoing anthropological analysis of all aspects of heritage on a global scale
- Encouraging anthropologists (including non-AAA members) to collaborate in examining real-world consequences of heritage legislation, preservation, tourism, and destruction
- Use its publications, conferences, and educational videos to integrate the cultural, archaeological-historical, biological, and linguistic components of heritage

In addition to its leadership activities, the Task Force has recommended that AAA and its members coordinate with others by:

- Encouraging members to take part in existing heritage and preservation coalitions and forums
- Establishing a heritage-oriented interest group for AAA members
- Co-sponsoring meetings or conferences, particularly with unlikely bedfellows, that focus on critical analysis of heritage within anthropological frameworks
- Recognizing the accomplishment of collaborating organizations and colleagues when they do good work, through awards and other forms of recognition

Charge 4: Recommend ways to increase training in cultural heritage issues in undergraduate and graduate anthropology curricula and continuing education in other venues

The Task Force has recommended that AAA can take a leadership role in enhancing training by:

- Producing and disseminating educational materials
- Providing training opportunities (e.g., webinars on heritage issues)
- Collecting and making available syllabi and course modules on cultural heritage
- Offering training opportunities at its Annual Meeting, recruiting subject matter experts to facilitate appropriate workshops
- Identifying training resources offered by other collaborating organizations
- Establishing a partnership with the World Bank to consult on training to support the newly revised environmental and social safeguard policies that are designed to protect tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Charge 5: Identify sustainable means for coordinated collaboration among relevant AAA committees and sections, other professional organizations, trade associations, and other organizations involved in cultural heritage protection.

Note: Although the Task Force commission ended before the Board approved a major reorganization of AAA's governance structure, the new Members Programmatic Advisory and Advocacy Committee (M-PAAC) has been established for exactly this purpose, to create a more effective and sustainable way to coordinate AAA activities in important programmatic areas, including cultural heritage.

Charge 6: Recommend ways for the AAA to become a leading association for national and international dialogue and change regarding cultural heritage, identifying the special or unique contributions the AAA can make in this regard.

Several important issues that were brought to the surface and examined closely by the Task Force will help AAA serve as an important contributor to international alliances and national collaborations. These issues include, but are not limited to:

- The false divide between “tangible” and “intangible” cultural heritage

- Destructive threats that must be taken seriously, and responded to in a coordinated fashion
- Questions of heritage ownership and use rights that require resolution
- Coordinate approaches to increase public awareness of the importance of cultural heritage

The false divide between tangible and intangible cultural heritage

While recognizing certain laws and conventions privilege tangible over intangible heritage, and that different sub-disciplines of anthropology may focus more heavily on one type of heritage, the AAA should consistently encourage the inclusive treatment of heritage, following the recommendations of the ICOMOS charter on intangible heritage.

Tangible and intangible heritage is under real threat of destruction worldwide, particularly in developing countries. Responses must be coordinated.

Five simultaneous threats combine to account for more than 90 percent of the loss and destruction of global heritage sites and intangible cultural heritage worldwide:

- Development pressure
- Unsustainable tourism
- Insufficient management
- Looting
- War and conflict

Who owns cultural heritage?

The Task Force has recommend that AAA acknowledge the “ownership” of cultural heritage is a complex issue, grounded in power relationships, and that the organization support and encourage stakeholder- and community-based input and capacity building to the extent possible.

Charge 7: Help draft position statements and calls for action until such time as more permanent entities can carry out that task, and devise guidelines and protocols for such letters and statements.

The Task Force recommends that AAA remain committed to taking evidence-based positions on cultural heritage protection, and, where appropriate, join in or issue calls for action that take advantage of relevant member expertise. This can be accomplished by:

- Proactively monitoring major legislation or changes in international conventions, charters, and policies impacting cultural heritage*
- Assuring that one seat on the Executive Board always be represented by someone with specialized knowledge in “cultural heritage” issues
- Maintaining working relationships with relevant U.S. Congressional and Executive Branch officials
- Maintaining working relationships with UNESCO and similar heritage organizations (e.g., ICOMOS, the Inter-American and Caribbean Cultural Heritage Forum)
- Maintaining regular communications and working relationships as appropriate with heritage partnerships / coalitions
- Establishing working relationships with major development institutions (e.g., the

- World Bank) that have heritage policies
- Initiating and signing on to appropriate position statements and calls for action, in coordination with sister organizations
 - Establishing a rapid-response team to swiftly take action according to AAA priorities
 - Developing a protocol for prioritizing decisions on taking advocacy actions initiated by others
 - Using social media effectively to disseminate others' actions

EB Summary: Conclusion

The American Anthropological Association is committed to raising critically needed global awareness of the destruction of intangible and tangible heritage, to supporting ethical, sustainable preservation of cultural heritage, and to transforming our reactive, piecemeal approach into a more coherent, forward looking program. The AAA is in a distinctive position to achieve substantial improvements in the processes that lead to effective preservation of cultural heritage. The Association has a “convening power” that brings scholars and practitioners together to exchange information about threats to heritage preservation, and about enhancements in training. This same convening power can contribute to effective collaborations for monitoring legislative and regulatory activities, and for applying the strength of numbers to effective position statements and calls for action in the face of serious threats.

AAA encourages members to contribute to a growing list of resources that building on the useful resources provided by the TFCH.