Abstract

What comes after the moment you happen upon an unlocked cabinet of human remains? After you're confronted with the incontrovertible truth of a collection practice always present, but unseen until this moment? This thesis explores the ethical question of collections care and stewardship. I provide a historical understanding of human osteology collections in the United States, an overview of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), and a description of my recent hands-on efforts to reckon with these collections at Mount Holyoke. There are tens of thousands of natural history objects held in Clapp Laboratory, of which nearly 1,500 are classified as human osteological remains. I fundamentally question the presence of these types of collections in institutions of higher education, and argue that Mount Holyoke must work towards intentional restorative practices regarding these human remains. I hope that this thesis acts as a benchmark in a developing process, summarizing the work that has been done, and ushering in a new era of ethical futures for collections at Mount Holyoke College.

Skeletons in Our Basements: The History and Future of Human Remains at Mount Holyoke College

Georgia Swanson

Mount Holyoke College Anthropology Department

Undergraduate Thesis

Mount Holyoke College

South Hadley, Massachusetts

May 2026

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Heather Chenoweth and Willie Perreault. None of the work done throughout these two summers and this thesis would have been possible without their continued support and guidance. I am also grateful to my advisor Matthew Watson for improving my writing skills through each and every draft. Thank you to Michelle Markley for her unending support, laughter, and skillful strategic planning. Additionally I would like to thank Kijua Sanders-McMurtry who has given me the opportunity to work on this project beyond the bounds of this thesis. Thank you to Sarah Reedy and April Biesaw for spending so much time and energy on an unaffiliated student. Thank you to Sarah Adleman who secured funding without which I would not have been able to complete the work over Summer 2025. And thank you to Renae Brodie and the department of Biological Sciences for providing funding for necessary materials. I would like to acknowledge professors Anisha Chadha and Michael Ofori, and thank them for the honor of being readers on this thesis. Thank you to Ellen Alvord and Abby Glogower who have been instrumental in the historical research at the root of this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank my Professor Agnes Kimokoti who always provided the most excellent advice, and has spent much of our session time hearing about bones rather than my homework.

Introduction

"They call it scientific research. They call it educational opportunity. But if it happened to any other people, it would be called grand larceny." Michael S. Haney, United Indian Nations in Oklahoma.[1] In denouncing colonial use of Indigenous peoples' human remains for scientific and educational purposes, Indigenous rights activist Michael Haney illustrates burial rights inequality, which is the core focus of this thesis. Both in the United States and globally, Black and Brown people have faced the disproportionate, unjust, and unlawful desecration of their bodies and graves in the name of science. Several mechanisms of systemic racism have supplied U.S. institutions with human remains which were used as objects of scientific research, as teaching "specimens," and in museum exhibits. While institutions collected human remains through a variety of methods, each of these avenues of human material procurement are products of racism, colonization, and oppression.

Mount Holyoke College, like most institutions in the United States, participated in the sourcing and use of human remains. Mount Holyoke's actions and collections practices are reflections of broader structures such as federal laws and shifting scientific/moral values. The collections at Mount Holyoke were not accumulated in a societal vacuum, a fact that is particularly important as our materials have no accompanying metadata, or provenance. As I develop in Chapter Three, there is no known associated documentation with any of the human bones in Mount Holyoke's holdings. Furthermore, even if *the* document or card catalogue that identifies each and every person held was unearthed, it would be unfeasible to reconnect the human remains with this information. While many of the animal bones in the college's collection received uniform catalog numbers, Mount Holyoke faculty members failed to do this with the human remains. In this informationless collection it is particularly crucial to examine a

[1] Chip Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits* (The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1.

comprehensive history of collections practices.

Examining the many streams that have historically fed U.S. institutions human biological material is integral in understanding the broader context of Mount Holyoke's assemblage of human bone (osteological) material. The millions of skeletons sold from northern India to institutions in the United States and Europe is one piece in this story.[2] The India Bone Trade was established by the horrifically violent British colonial regime in the sub-continent. Britain's brutality and starvation of the Indian population throughout its colonial rule in turn provided more and more bones for extraction.[3] Anti-Black racism in the United States, from slavery through Jim Crow and to the present, substantiated the nonconsensual theft, mutilation, and study of countless African American human remains. This history includes, but is in no way limited to, slave owners selling the bodies of the people they enslaved to physical anthropologists, and the state sanctioned body harvesting of marginalized Black in-migrants fleeing the Jim Crow South during the Great Migration.[4] Furthermore, the bone thieving frenzy of physical anthropologists throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has supplied U.S. institutions with an estimated 300,000 to 2.5 million Native American individuals' remains.[5] A large portion of the work that follows is focused on these Native American skeletons, because there are now federal regulations that govern their treatment.

After decades of activism and advocacy, the Native American Graves Protection and

---

[2] Sabrina Agarwal, "The Disposability and Inclusion of Brown Bodies," *American Journal of Biological Anthropology,* 186(1), e25003. (2025): 9, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.25003

[3] Agarwal, "The Disposability and Inclusion of Brown Bodies," 5.

[4] Carlina de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection: A Promised Land Lost" in *Bioarchaeology of Marginalized People*, ed. Madeleine L. Mant and Alyson Jaagumägi Holland (Academic Press, 2019) 148.
Nathaniel Gray Sommers, Repatriating the Dead: The Necessity of an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act to Break One of the Surviving Chains of Slavery, 75 Case W. Rsrv. L. Rev. 697 (2024): 700. Available at: https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev/vol75/iss2/8

[5] Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 14.

Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was signed into federal law on November 16th, 1990. This legislation mandates that federally funded U.S. institutions repatriate Indigenous human remains and sacred belongings to the affiliated Native Nation or Hawaiian Organization. This thesis analyzes the law in order to argue that its scope needs to be broadened, that its tenets should be applied to non-Native human remains. How can U.S. institutions, such as Mount Holyoke, apply the principles of NAGPRA to the entirety of the human remains they hold? How can Mount Holyoke go beyond the minimum that is dictated by federal law in order to restore equality of rights (for both the human remains and the affected descendant community) to all of the human remains this institution holds?

This body of work is not a theoretical investigation of my beliefs on the afterlife, nor is it a debate about what does and does not possess personhood. Rather, it centrally argues for the ethical treatment of the dead who reside in Mount Holyoke's basements due to systemic oppression and violence. It is specifically an intervention into the neglect of these collections at Mount Holyoke, with the end goal of altering the college's currently unsustainable stewardship practices. This thesis is a plea that calls everyone connected to Mount Holyoke to learn about, engage with, and respond to these histories of injustice, and to find ethical ways forward.

Here, I would like to note my own complicity and perpetration of systemic violence while doing this work. Like hundreds of Mount Holyoke students before me, I learned using these human remains, even if our intentions differ. I acquired experience in human anatomy, collections skills, and osteological techniques, while attempting to improve their condition. I can put these work experiences on my résumé, speak about the collection at conferences, and write this senior thesis because of these bones. Furthermore, I have chosen to take classes at other institutions that use similar legacy human remains collections. In order to develop expertise

necessary to intervene into Mount Holyoke's holdings, I studied osteological methods using skeletons held unethically at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. The continued violence imparted on the human remains must not be ignored even as we endeavor to leave a positive impact.

I would also like to note my deliberate effort to use respectful language in this thesis. Here I refer to the human bone and teeth held at Mount Holyoke in a variety of ways. I choose to call them: human remains, skeletons, osteological material, elements, individuals, and people. I choose to use the words "individuals" and "people" as terms of respect. Restoring personhood to these human remains is one path forward to a more ethical future.[6] The continued implicit refutation of the personhood of human remains by Western sciences, and U.S. institutions that embody them, has led us into these immoral, unsustainable collections practices in the first place. Additionally, I would like to note my use of language surrounding the words used to describe the Indigenous peoples from the region that is now called the United States of America. While I use the terms "Native," "Native American," "Indigenous," I would like to recognize the issues with these terms. The title "Native America" is often criticized for its upholding of biological race in the United States, as the entirety of Indigenous people from North America do not fit into any single coherent grouping.[7] Yet, I have decided to use this term, in conjunction with other descriptive synonyms, as they are the available labels at present. Furthermore, NAGPRA uses "Native American" and "Native Hawaiian" as distinctly defined categories and, for ease of understanding, I use these terms when referencing the legislation.

The conceptual framework underpinning this work is rooted in the ethical debates that led to the passage of NAGPRA. These debates focused on the historic inequality of burial rights and

[6] Agarwal, "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies," 10.
[7] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 273.

therefore of Native American human rights. This thesis seeks to illustrate that the avenues through which U.S. museums, universities, and federal agencies have acquired human remains were based in racism, colonialism, and systemic oppression. I argue that these historical collections of human bodies would not exist without these mechanisms of violence and that *all* human remains, in these historical collections, are therefore unethical to possess and use.

NAGPRA is a piece of human rights legislation that seeks to address the historic violation of Native Americans' civil rights and to prevent these violations in the future.[8] Even before NAGPRA's passing, repatriation requests of both human remains and sacred belongings, often spoke to ethical and humanitarian pleas.[9] The law addresses the inalienable right of Native Americans to worship and practice their beliefs as they see fit.[10] Practices of collecting Native human remains in the United States is wholly tied to the state's constitutive colonialism and genocide. It is no surprise that "during some of the first moments of North America's colonization, Native American graves were looted. In the autumn of 1620, not far from Plymouth Rock, the Pilgrims despoiled the grave of a man and a child out of curiosity."[11] The ethics that guide this work understands that NAGPRA is a human rights law that seeks to rightfully establish protection and repatriation for Indigenous communities in the United States.

Furthermore, it is naive to propose that the larger U.S. population does not care about the respect and protection of the dead. In other words, desecration only becomes science when the bodies are Black and Brown. Chip Colwell, former Curator of Anthropology at the Denver

---

[8] Trope, Jack F., and Echo-Hawk, Walter R. "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History" in *Repatriation Reader,* ed. Devon Mihesuah (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 139.
[9] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 35.
[10] Sangita Chari and Jaime M.N. Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA : Perspectives on the Intent, Impact, and Future of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (Oregon State University Press, 2013), 84.
[11] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 5.

Museum of Nature & Science, illustrates this, stating that the act of returning bones "is not foreign to Western values."[12] He invokes the lessons from the *Iliad* and *Antigone*, cites the 1789 New York Anatomy Acts which "prevent[ed] the odious practice of digging up and removing bodies… for the purpose of dissection," and the U.S. government's costly continued effort "every year to find the human remains of the 83,000 missing soldiers from past wars."[13] Colwell further illuminates that human remains are allotted respect in death unequally.

NAGPRA intends "to address and provide some redress for centuries of exploitation, displacement, and dispossession."[14] Expanding this scope is one route to restore respect and equality to the human remains of other marginalized individuals.[15] Calls for an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act reflect this severe gap in legal protections. In this work, I conceptualize NAGPRA as one step of the journey toward ethical collections stewardship. NAGPRA forces institutions, like Mount Holyoke, to examine their holdings, but does not govern all of the individuals held at those institutions. Throughout this thesis I show that this work cannot end at the boundaries of NAGPRA, that this legislation is a starting point for the development of more critical and ethical practices, specifically at Mount Holyoke.

Mount Holyoke's Collections

Mount Holyoke College holds tens of thousands of neglected natural history objects. There are hundreds of taxidermied mammals and birds, thousands of insects, about 10,000 fossils, animal bones, corals, and more. These objects currently have no formal home or use.

---

[12] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 237.
[13] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 237.
[14] Kevin P. Ray, NAGPRA and Its Limitations: Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Heritage, 15 J. MARSHALL REV. INTELL. PROP. L. 472 (2016), 473.
[15] Nathaniel Gray Sommers, Repatriating the Dead: The Necessity of an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act to Break One of the Surviving Chains of Slavery, 75 Case W. Rsrv. L. Rev. 697 (2024): 718. Available at: https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev/vol75/iss2/8

They have floated around Mount Holyoke's 100-year-old science building, Clapp Laboratory, without much notice or care, and have fallen into disrepair. However, in the past few years, efforts to tend to these collections have yielded fruitful results for both the objects and for the students who work with them. Like many other students interested in museum collections and the sciences, I began working in Mount Holyoke's collection with a Lynk funded summer internship. In Summer 2024 Geology professor Michelle Markley agreed to supervise my project focused on the origins and ethical concerns of Mount Holyoke's paleontology collection. My primary research focus was to address how parachute science and the colonization of the Western United States were reflected in our fossil collection.[16] This type of research was only feasible because our paleontology collection retains much of its original metadata, or provenance. I conducted extensive archival research into the history of the fossil collection and decided to track the prevalence of countries outside the United States represented in the collection. One product of this research was the creation of collection "heat maps" which visually communicate the prevalence of fossils from certain regions, and I ultimately found a scientific colonial relationship between the United States and the Caribbean, specifically Puerto Rico. This is an example of research that can be accomplished with these historic collections when provenance is retained.

Through the 2024 summer experience with the fossil collection, I became more familiar and involved with the other types of collections: taxidermy, osteological remains, the fluid–preserved specimens. I worked closely with Science Center Staff, Heather Chenoweth and Willie Perreault, who supervise students working in these collections. During this summer experience with the fossil collection, I regularly encountered human remains held in the Clapp

[16] Raja, N.B., Dunne, E.M., Matiwane, A. *et al.* Colonial history and global economics distort our understanding of deep-time biodiversity. *Nat Ecol Evol* **6**, 145–154 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01608-8

basement. Chenoweth and Perreault knew that I had anatomical experience gained through human evolution courses at UMass Amherst, so I became a resource for osteological questions. Is this a real bone or is it plastic? Why is this bone bending like that? Are these human vertebrae? What are those ridges on the inside of this skullcap? At this time, between my sophomore and junior years, I felt completely underqualified to be answering these questions. My practical knowledge of osteology was limited, and I had moral concerns handling the remains without a clear course of action to improve their condition. Throughout my junior year, I continued working with the paleontology collection and developed a plan to change the human remains' situation on campus, a situation in which they were on display, neglected to the point of decay, and not spoken about at Mount Holyoke College.

In my junior year, I studied abroad at the Turkana Basin Institute in Kenya, where I developed expertise in ecology, geology, vertebrate paleontology, human evolution, and archaeology. This non-critical, field-work focused institute solidified my passion for ethical collections stewardship and repatriation. The institute's majority U.S.-born professors seemed unable to critically analyze the work we were conducting with respect to the regional sociopolitical context and the history of physical anthropology. None of the professors answered ethical questions regarding colonial relationships between the United States and England with Kenya. They brushed aside any student apprehension about the history of the institute and the human remains it has collected. Disappointed by my own naivety in assuming these ethical concerns would be at the forefront of the field school, and with new osteological training in both vertebrate and human anatomy, I came back to Mount Holyoke with the ability to intervene into the state of the human remains on campus.

During Summer 2025, I again worked in the basement of Clapp Laboratory in our

collections. The following section briefly outlines what, and who comprise this collection–and what material is left out of Mount Holyoke's Human Osteology Collection. From my perspective it is critical to understand that what follows in the chapters of this thesis is rooted in tangible, physical entities which take up space on a shelf, and become dilapidated when neglected. These human remains are not just the subject of theoretical, philosophical, or legal inquiries. They are physically held in a room, and require physical resources for their maintenance and repatriation. During Summer 2025 I transported, identified, and documented nearly 1,500 human bones and teeth. While bone and teeth are all that comprise the human osteological collection, they are not the only human remains at Mount Holyoke. There are fluid preserved human remains, including various organs such as the brain, and a relatively large collection of human fetuses. These remains are beyond the scope of my knowledge base and this project, however these ethical concerns and collections histories are connected.

The ~1,500 human bones and teeth make up an estimated 28 separate individuals, with no known accompanying provenance, or information. Typically, the adult human skeleton contains two hundred and six bones, meaning that many of the individuals in the assemblage are severely incomplete. My work, which will be detailed extensively in the Reckoning with the Collection chapter, sought to centralize all of the skeletal remains in one secure, climate-controlled location. I also created a Google spreadsheet cataloging each separate skeletal element, recording which bone it is, if I believe the bone is connected to any other bone in the collection, if there are any abnormalities or traumatic injuries to the bone etc. I had always envisioned this work as the first step to gain basic information about how many bones the college held, how many people there are, and where these bones are, which would then be used by a professional osteologist to make biological profiles of each individual. I knew that this work would be directly helpful in creating

a greater understanding of the holdings for senior leadership, and could therefore lead to next steps taken by the college. The practical work I did with the remains always stemmed from the hope that doing this would lead to broader attention to the ethical and legal concerns with the collection.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 discusses the historical background of the specific collecting practices that built these human remains collections in U.S. institutions. While we do not know the specific origins of the skeletal remains at Mount Holyoke, the histories outlined in this chapter are vital to understanding Mount Holyoke's collection. The first section of the chapter examines the "known" body, or remains held at institutions that were stolen for scientific use because of some attributable feature the person possessed in life that they also now hold in death. This identifying feature could be the individual's race, ethnicity, burial location, time period of life, etc. The information influenced the collector to harvest this specific person's body to be placed in an institutional collection, whether that be a museum or teaching institution. I discuss the ubiquitousness of grave robbing and the theft of body parts as war souvenirs during the United States genocide of Indigenous people. I then shift to the human remains that retain no information in death, those that are used primarily in teaching institutions as tools of anatomical study. These peoples' remains were bought and sold, often as a result of the oppression this individual experienced in life. Understanding the human remains sold by biological supply companies leads us to a brief history of the English colonization of India, including the imposition of Western medical practices. I will also briefly discuss one mechanism of anti-Black racism in the United States that supplied bodies to medical and teaching institutions.

Chapter 2 discusses the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). First I outline some of the activism, advocacy, and previous laws that led to this piece of legislation, followed by a section on what the law actually states and mandates. This examination of the law sets up a discussion of some of the shortcomings of NAGPRA, who the law omits, why it is currently a forceless piece of legislation, etc. With this basic understanding of why NAGPRA was passed, what it dictates, and how it could improve, I then examine other institutions' responses to NAGPRA. When consulting with other professionals, I worked most closely with representatives from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and Vassar College. Given distinct institutional structures and contexts, UMass and Vassar have had different results when reckoning with the ethics of their osteology collections. Finally, I briefly describe the previous NAGPRA work conducted at Mount Holyoke.

Chapter 3 delves into my process of working physically with the human bones during Summer 2025 and academic year 2025-26. I first discuss the gathering and preliminary organization of the human skeletal assemblage found in various corners of Clapp Laboratory. I then relay the process of transporting the remains from room to room followed by the process of identifying and documenting the bones. Finally I address the issues of and temporary solutions for respectful restorage of the remains, which was one of my key goals at this project's start.

The Conclusion develops possibilities and suggestions for the future. I offer both a discussion of the broader changes possible in this field and the specific next steps for Mount Holyoke. I believe that this is a fitting end to this thesis because all of the work I describe has been a first step in a long process of ethical collections stewardship and repatriation. This work's core aim is to open a conversation about what can be done for individuals' remains who are not governed by federal law, as creating ethical futures and atoning for past actions entails broad

campus–wide discussion and education as a community.

Chapter One: Histories of Collections

1.1 Introduction: The Ethics of Biological Collections

The scientific collection of biological "material" is fraught with ethical concerns. Natural history collections started as cabinets of curiosities, which then evolved into the museums and university collections we know today.[17] These cabinets began as private collections, amassed by enthusiasts of natural history in Europe and the United States.[18] Specimens commonly on display included mounted butterflies, "exotic" animal bones, human remains, botany specimens, and material culture from Indigenous peoples around the world.[19] Colonization gave Europeans the opportunity to collect more "rarities" and "exotic" objects and, in turn, these collections fueled colonization. For example, the specimens collected on the Lewis and Clark expedition were used to bolster U.S. nationalism, as well as to categorize and then colonize new Native terrain and organisms.[20] Mount Holyoke's collections are products of this colonial history of collection and science, and holdings should be problematized. Acknowledging that Mount Holyoke's "separate" collections have always been interconnected is integral. The biology collection bleeds into the paleontology collection, both as a result of Mount Holyoke's mismanagement of these specimens, and also because distinctions among fields of scientific study have shifted across time. Here, however, I focus on the history of human remains at the college. Nonhuman animals in our collection certainly deserve due respect and historical research, but the focus of my intervention here centers the conditions of human ancestors in institutional collections.

This chapter outlines two main distinctions between human remains in institutional

---

[17] Bruce Robertson, "Curiosity Cabinets, Museums, and Universities," In *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation*, edited by Colleen J. Sheeny, (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 11.
[18] Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "Curiosities and Cabinets: Natural History Museums and Education on the Antebellum Campus, " (*Isis* 79, no. 3 (1988): 405–26.), 409.
[19] Kohlstedt, "Curiosities and Cabinets," 409.
[20] Kohlstedt, "Curiosities and Cabinets," 410.

collections. The first is the history of what I have termed "the known body", the collected body that wastes away in the academic institution due to a scientific interest in some aspect of the person's identity in life. Bodies have been disinterred for a variety of reasons. These "known bodies" were used as subjects of scientific racism and archaeological analysis. They were measured and abused to uphold white supremacist ideas of the presence of innate biological differences between races.[21] Other known bodies are deemed archaeological "specimens," that are representative of a particular time or place. Archaeologists harvested these people's remains and their funerary belongings from the ground to then interpret, display, and hold in perpetuity. It is ironic that scientists work to attain these peoples' life histories through the study of their skeletons, while in the same motion stripping them of their personhood, through dehumanizing scientific language, storage, and study. Scientists then justify the biological study of these known human remains on the basis of a perceived intriguing element of the person's identity.

On the other hand, a second group of human skeletons came to the institution as completely anonymous material. Some were exhumed from the ground similarly to the archaeological "materials," while others were collected before receiving any burial rights. These individuals were exhumed, defiled, stripped of their flesh, and sold by biological supply companies to institutions throughout the West. Sabrina Agarwal explains that these anonymous bodies were used as "elements for the study of human skeletal anatomy or landmarks, essentially to be used as bodily maps of bony structure and variation."[22] Legacy anatomical collections in institutions are mainly composed of these anonymous deceased individuals, because they were used in the classroom for anatomy and morphology lessons along with cat, horse, and bird skeletons. Legacy skeletal collections have been used for decades in institutions across the

[21] Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology," 9.
[22] Agarwal, "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies," 3.

United States, with little understanding of where these human remains were sourced or the legality of purchasing them. At Mount Holyoke these people's remains were passed around the classroom as study tools. This process has taken a physical toll on the remains, as the oils from hundreds of peoples' hands over decades give the bones a shiny patina. The histories of these two types of human osteological remains in institutions, the anonymous and the known, are produced by similar forces of colonization and racism, but have different historical contexts, and therefore different futures.

In this chapter I argue that particular historical events led to the construction of two different types of human remains that we find in institutions. First is the history of those exhumed and stolen from graves. These are human skeletons that are generally older, and were excavated for archaeological or research purposes. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to prove biological race through "scientific" study of human bones, mainly the skull.

I then describe the anonymous bodies that are prevalent especially in teaching institutions, like Mount Holyoke College, where we find human remains used for anatomical or biological study. While the archaeological/anatomical lines that characterize the human remains held in U.S. institutions are not absolute, it is important to investigate their differences. Many human remains used in biology classes were acquired through biological supply companies which each have unique histories of where they procured human material. Understanding the biological supply company is integral for determining the next best course of action for the human remains that likely fall under that category. I then briefly discuss the biological supply companies that are represented in Mount Holyoke's holdings, followed by a section covering what is known and unknown about the collections history at Mount Holyoke.

1.2 The Harvest of "Known Bodies"

This subsection covers the "known bodies" used in U.S. institutions. The people that fall under this category are those that died and their bodies, or body parts, were collected due to some known part of their story or identity. These aspects could include, their race, ethnicity, geographic location, the time period in which they lived, etc. I have split this section into two subsections, the history of racism in physical anthropology, and a section specifically on the collection of Native American human remains. I believe that this distinction is important because the skeletons of Native people in the United States were stolen in ways that differ from the collection of other minority groups' skeletal remains.

1.2.1 Racism and the Collection of Human Remains

U.S. physical anthropology and the collection of human remains were created to justify racism and white supremacy. The harvesting of these "known bodies" is completely inextricable from this history. Aleš Hrdlička is a key figure who desecrated and harvested thousands of bodies from around the world. Hrdlička (1869-1943) was the first curator of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian and was the founder of the American Journal of Physical Anthropology.[23] He believed that race was biologically "real" and that physical differences between races explained group characteristics.[24] Hrdlička's early nineteenth-century predecessor, Samuel Morton, justified slavery and racial inequality through "craniometric" comparison and "polygenic" arguments that races comprise distinct human species.[25] After the United States Civil War, debates over biological race remained, but shifted from justifying slavery to

[23] Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology," 10.
[24] Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology," 10.
[25] Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology," 9.

rationalizing the oppression faced by free people in an unequal wage labor system.[26] According to a Washington Post analysis, Hrdlička stole around 19,000 human body parts, or 62% of the Smithsonian's current holdings, to accumulate comparative data for his racist, genocidal ends.[27] These stolen corpses were collected from communities around the world, mainly from people of color.

Hrdlička seemingly never thought twice about the actions carried out by him and his network of colleagues. He harvested the severed heads of Indigenous people in Mexico after a brutal massacre carried out by the Mexican government.[28] He and his lackeys collected countless individuals from hospitals, morgues, and graveyards.[29] Hrdlička even "publicly urged policymakers to adopt laws allowing anthropologists to take unclaimed bodies — those that had not been identified by relatives or came from families who could not afford to bury them — from hospitals and graveyards."[30] In a letter to anthropologist Adalbert Schück, who was sent to Africa to collect human remains and the measurements of children, Hrdlička stated, "the natives must not, of course, be taken into confidence, in fact, they should know nothing about such collecting. If you will need help get some good white man."[31] During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was common practice for anthropologists to trade human skeletons in an attempt to "diversify"

---

[26] Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology," 10.
[27] Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.
Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology," 13.
[28] Toensing, Gale Courey. "107 Years Later." ICT, November 28, 2025. https://ictnews.org/archive/107-years-later/.
[29] Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.
[30] Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.
[31] Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.

their respective collections.[32] Hrdlička also harvested 255 human brains for his "racial brain collection," at least 57 of which were stolen from deceased Black Americans.[33]

This history continues to plague the affected communities whose ancestors were violated for the justification of racism and eugenics, many of whom still have not been allowed to rebury their kin. The collection of human remains was a self perpetuating cycle of colonialism and racism. In other words, the desecration and removal of human remains was an instrument of U.S. colonialism. Systemic pillaging of expeditions yielded human remains that were then used by anthropologists to justify racism through "science". Native American remains were among the most prolifically stolen for U.S. collections. The following section will trace the unique violence that Native American ancestors, burial sites, and cultural objects endured in the name of physical anthropology.

1.2.2 The Collection of Native American Human Remains

Native American bodies, particularly skulls, were stolen for the mission of both scientific racism and salvage anthropology. A product of colonialism and genocide, salvage anthropology created an intense focus on the "preservation" of objects and human remains in museums before Indigeneous cultures "died out forever."[34] This product of Westward expansion resulted in the theft of millions of Native American cultural objects and ancestral remains to be stored and displayed in museums across the country. The United States launched this attack on Indigenous groups through both war practices and racist legislation. Some Native American remains were

[32] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 136.
[33] Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.
[34] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 120.

disinterred from the ground, while other avenues of body theft promoted the violation of ancestors before they were ever given a proper burial.[35]

These collections were only able to be amassed at institutions because of the attempted genocide of Indigenous people perpetrated by the United States. As colonizers moved throughout the West of the continent, soldiers were not only encouraged to murder, torture, and rape living Native people, they also mutilated the bodies of those they had slaughtered. Chip Colwell's *Plundered Skulls and Broken Spirits* details the 1864 mutilation and theft of the bodies of Cheyenne and Arapaho people at Sand Creek in terms that merit quotation at length:

> The majority of the men, women, and children–upward of 200 counted in the end were scalped. "In many instances," First Lieutenant James D. Cannon later testified, "their bodies were mutilated in the most horrible manner." Cannon saw soldiers taking the genitals of women. One labia was pierced with a stick and placed upright on exhibit. Some were stretched over saddles. Others decorated hats. "They were followed up and pursued and killed and butchered," Samuel G. Colley, a soldier there testified. "They were cut to pieces in almost every manner and form." One pregnant woman was murdered; her stomach slashed open; the unborn child pulled out. John S. Smith, an interpreter and Indian agent, reported seeing much the same thing: bodies cut to pieces, mutilated with knives, scalped, brains knocked out, children only a few months old lay dead. Some of the Native leaders were singled out for special punishment. It was said that the ears of White Antelope, one of the tribe's biggest proponents for peace, were cut off. His genitals were cut off and later made into a tobacco bag. Fingers and ears were amputated, in some cases for grisly souvenirs, in other cases to remove rings and

[35] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 97.

> earrings as loot. Much of this work proceeded not amid the heat of war, but the next morning, on November 30, after it was clear the army had secured the slaughter. The stiff bodies of dead women were taken out in the open and posed in indecent positions.[36]

This passage details the violence that created museum collections in America. The scalps of these massacred Cheyenne and Arapaho people were then exhibited throughout the state of Colorado, with dozens of scalps landing in museum collections across the country.[37] By 1868, Army Surgeon General Joseph Barnes had stolen 4,500 Native American crania, which were then transferred to the Smithsonian in the 1890s.[38] Furthermore, the U.S. Army Medical Museum formed a cranial collection beginning in 1867 with 143 Native skulls. Military personnel were ordered to "aid in the progress of the anthropological science by obtaining skulls of aboriginal races of Native America."[39] Samuel Morton gave incentives to soldiers, settlers, and government agents if they dug up Native burials to be used for race science.[40] The collection of human remains for race science was so ubiquitous that now a majority of repatriations are of lone skulls, not full individuals, the result severing Indigenous people's heads from their bodies for the process of racial categorization and display.[41] The government encouraged the collections aspect of genocide through military force, and also through the law.

In 1906, the United States passed the Antiquities Act, a law which denied Native Americans their civil rights of burial protection.[42] After this act, Native American graves and remains on federal lands were labeled archaeological resources which could then be harvested,

---

[36] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 96-97.
[37] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 100.
[38] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 13.
[39] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 85.
[40] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 12.
[41] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 84.
[42] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 212.

rather than graves that deserved protection.[43] If the U.S. had enforced common law regarding human burial equally, these Native graves would have been respected, however this racist legislation was enacted as a piece of the colonial agenda to strip Indigenous people of their human rights.[44] By the mid-nineteenth century, laws established the hierarchy of rights in regards to the care of corpses for most of the U.S. population. First it is the individual's decision if they would like their corpse to be donated to science, buried, cremated, etc. If the will of the deceased is unknown, the decision then falls to their next of kin. If no next of kin can be identified the state decides what is done with the corpse.[45] Colwell argues that the same extinction mindset that created salvage anthropology, empowered U.S. anthropologists and law–makers to dig up Native remains. If there is no next of kin, because the genocide of Indigenous people is successful, in their understanding, then there is no one to care that their family members are being exhumed.[46]

The practices outlined in this section resulted in an estimated three hundred thousand to two and a half million Native American remains being stolen and held in U.S. museums.[47] Most of these collections were amassed between the 1870s and the 1970s, aligning with the onslaught of salvage anthropology and ending with the advocacy around repatriation from the American Indian Movement which will be discussed in the following chapter.[48] This history is the foundational understanding for the implementation of NAGPRA. NAGPRA specifically covers Native American human remains and cultural objects because of the magnitude at which these

---

[43] Trope, Jack F., and Echo-Hawk, Walter R. "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History" in *Repatriation Reader,* ed. Devon Mihesuah (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 127.
[44] Trope, Jack F., and Echo-Hawk, Walter R. "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History" in *Repatriation Reader,* ed. Devon Mihesuah (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 130.
[45] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 212.
[46] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 212.
[47] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 14.
[48] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 118.

items were stolen. The distinct violence that collections practices enacted and still enact on Indigenous communities has led to the implementation of a federal repatriation law that aims to address these human rights violations. The following section examines the history of bodies harvested to be placed on the market, often for the purpose of biological study. These remains are often stripped of any identifying factor that contributed to their personhood in life, i.e. "warrior massacred at Sand Creek" or "skull taken from Peru."[49] There is currently no legislative requirement for the repatriation, or respectful treatment, of these unknown human remains. As the next section elucidates, the same racist, violent mechanisms that stole Native bodies also brought these "unknown" remains to museums in the United States.

1.3.1 The "Anonymous Body"

It is a reasonable assumption that the majority of the human remains at Mount Holyoke College, like other teaching institutions, were purchased through biological supply companies. Some bones are labeled with the names of these companies, while others lack such traces back to these companies. Many of the human remains in Mount Holyoke's collection have characteristics indicating they were professionally cleaned and bleached, as opposed to bones that are left to decompose in the ground which absorb color and material from the soil.[50] However, a number of the bones in Clapp are tan in color, and some even retain dirt, and traces of blood; these remains were taken from a burial. Another telltale sign that someone was left to decompose in the ground is the presence of adipocere, also called death/grave wax.[51] Adipocere is left on bones when the

[49] Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.
[50] Danielle C. McCallister, Tara L. Moore, and James T. Pokines, "The Effects of Taphonomic Color Alteration Upon Skeletal Recovery Rates During Surface Searches." *Journal of Forensic Sciences* Volume 71, Issue 1 (2026): 525-32. https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.70201
[51] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.

body fat that surrounds the bone breaks down into a waxy, soaplike substance.[52] While some skeletal material in the collection shows these signs of decomposition in the ground, a majority of the human osteology collection can be reasonably attributed to biological supply companies.

Below, I argue that human remains that were likely purchased from various biological supply sources still deserve respect, proper care, and critical investigations. It is nonsensical to conclude that our possession of these peoples' remains is righteous because we bought them. Displays of systemic violence, colonialism, and dehumanization enabled biological supply companies to harvest and sell human bone. To maintain an uncritical attitude toward these peoples' remains, and their histories would be a grave misstep. Understanding how biological supply companies obtained skeletons begins with a history of the British Empire's forceful implementation of Western medicine in India.

A vast majority of anatomical skeletons used in medical and teaching institutions in the United States and Europe were unethically or illegally acquired from India. Millions of bodies were harvested from South Asia and sold to Western teaching institutions to satiate our need for human material to "progress" medicine and science .[53] Agarwal outlines the history of colonialism and oppression that created this trade in her paper, "The Disposability and Inclusion of Brown Bodies." British Imperial implementation of the Western medical education system set the stage for India to become the biggest supplier of human bodies for anatomical and anthropological study. But why did British colonialism in the subcontinent include this kind of human material extraction? The history of doctors in England graverobbing and even killing for fresh corpses to further their medical prowess is well documented. England passed the Anatomy Act in 1832 to discourage the ubiquitous practice of graverobbing, as English society was

[52] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.
[53] Agarwal, "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies," 4.

viewing the practice as unacceptable.[54] As a result, British medical schools then looked to its colonies for bodies.

The first medical school in India was founded in Kolkata, capital of the state of West Bengal, in 1833. This institution would become a site for the imposition of Western medicine on India, as well as a body factory that processed and exported millions of skeletons to countries in the West.[55] It was a lucrative business for those involved, except for the deceased or their families. Colonial violence and oppression fueled this ever-growing bone trade. British policies that prioritized Indian resource exports to England starved millions of people in the Bengal Famine of 1943. Western science profited from this violent act of colonialism. An issue of *Life Magazine* from 1943 documents that a United States based anatomical supply company, Clay Adams, imported skeletons from people that perished in this famine.[56] In the basement of Mount Holyoke's Clapp Hall, there is a skull of an infant that died at just six months old. This baby has "Clay Adams Company" written in ink across the left side of their head. An estimated 2.4 million people's bodies were taken from India and exported to medical schools and other institutions across Europe and America.[57] Could the baby held at Mount Holyoke be one of the 2.4 million? Collections created with bodies from the India Bone Trade are so ubiquitous that, "until recently the trade was so extensive that just about every classroom skeleton in America must have come from India."[58] The export of human remains from India to foreign countries was made illegal in 1985. Medical schools in the United States and Europe responded to these new regulations by begging the Indian government to reverse this decision.[59] Understanding the

[54] Agarwal, "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies," 4.
[55] Agarwal, "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies," 5.
[56] Agarwal, "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies," 5.
[57] Agarwal, "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies," 6.
[58] Scott Carney, *The Red Market: On the Trail of the World's Organ Brokers, Bone Thieves, Blood Farmers, and Child Traffickers* (William Morrow 2011), XII.
[59] Carney, *The Red Market,* 52.

global processes that fueled this trade is important, but it is also integral to grasp the individual experiences of those affected in the bone trade.

Scott Carney outlines the gory details of this trade, and more, in his book *The Red Market*. While I hesitate to describe every gruesome detail, understanding the physicality of the work that turns corpses into specimens is one step in their rehumanization.[60] While it may be uncomfortable for some, we must put flesh back onto these bones so we can understand the violence it took to strip these people of it. Carney explains how deceased individuals were processed before traveling across oceans and continents through the India Bone Trade to the basements of institutions like Mount Holyoke. Countless corpses were dug from their graveyards, or snatched from funeral pyres, just after the mourning family departed.[61] The rich were able to fortify their deceased loved ones' graves by hiring soldiers, constructing towering walls, and digging very deep graves. On the other hand, the poor and those of lower castes were unable to protect against the theft and desecration of their families' bodies. After carcasses were taken from their intended place of rest, whether that be in the ground or as cremated remains, the processing began. Bodies were wrapped in netting and anchored in rivers for several days to allow bacteria, fish, and the water's current to clean the bones of a majority of tissue. Then crews of men scrubbed the skeleton of any remaining flesh, and boiled them in water and sodium hydroxide. This process leaves each bone with a yellow tint, not quite anatomical grade white. The hue is then corrected by bleaching the bones out in the sun for a few weeks, followed by soaking them in hydrochloric acid. After this tedious process, what is left of the recently deceased are finally ready for the medical supply market. The 1985 ban decreased the prevalence of this manufacturing of human anatomical 'specimens' but it has not completely halted.

---

[60] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 152.
[61] Carney, *The Red Market,* 42.

The India Bone Trade was so pervasive that directly following the 1985 ban it became increasingly difficult to obtain new skeletal remains for use in universities. Human teaching skeletons can cost thousands of dollars and take months or years to source. It is so difficult to consistently acquire human remains that many biological supply companies now mainly sell polymer replicas of skeletons. Older, well-established universities often hold legacy collections of human remains that are available for multiple students to study. Historically, each student, specifically medical students, would require their own skeleton for anatomical study.[62] Mount Holyoke's position is that of a well-established institution whose curriculum does not require a steady stream of incoming carcasses or skeletons. While the India Bone Trade supplied many of the human remains used in universities across the world, the unethical collection of human remains within the United States also contributed to these university collections.

As discussed in section 1.2.1, Native American people were not the only marginalized group in the United States whose bodies were taken without personal or next of kin consent to be used for scientific gains. Enslaved Black Americans were sold in death by slave owners and through grave robbing to museums and universities.[63] The former occurred before the abolition of slavery in America, while the grave robbing of enslaved individuals continued far beyond the United States Civil War. This section from "Repatriating the Dead: The Necessity of an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act to Break One of the Surviving Chains of Slavery" by Nathaniel Gray Sommers is particularly telling:

> One of the most notable historical examples of grave-robbery-for-dissection was the Doctor's Mob of 1788, which began with students at Columbia

[62] Carney, *The Red Market,* 46.
[63] Nathaniel Gray Sommers, Repatriating the Dead: The Necessity of an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act to Break One of the Surviving Chains of Slavery, 75 Case W. Rsrv. L. Rev. 697 (2024): 702. Available at: https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev/vol75/iss2/8

> University—at the time King's College—stealing bodies from the "Negroes Burying Ground, a segregated portion of potter's field" in 1787. When news broke about this practice, free Black citizens petitioned the city's Common Council to ban the practice. Their petition went unanswered. The Common Council's failure to act emboldened the Columbia students, who became notably more audacious, moving from robbing burial grounds of peoples of color and those on the fringes of eighteenth-century colonial society to robbing white peoples' graves. It was only after a report that the students stole the body of a white woman from a church's graveyard in 1788 that the practice was forcefully ended by a mob of 5,000 people.[64]

This historic lack of protections for Black American graves has led to proposals and advocacy for an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act (EPGRA) which would be based on NAGPRA, with some key differences. Slavery itself supplied U.S. institutions with Black bodies to be desecrated and studied, and also systemic racism, after slavery, continued to unequally harvest Black Americans' corpses. One example of this unequal harvest is the collection of human skeletal remains at Washington University School of Medicine, built by Robert Terry. This collection was built between 1910 and 1941 by Terry, followed by Midred Trotter, a Mount Holyoke alum, class of 1920, who expanded the series until 1967, when it was ultimately transferred to the Smithsonian Institution. The collection holds 1,728 individuals born between 1822 and 1943, and is a direct reflection of the processes of the legalized anatomization of the unclaimed poor, specifically those victimized by the Great Migration. During the first eight

[64] Nathaniel Gray Sommers, Repatriating the Dead: The Necessity of an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act to Break One of the Surviving Chains of Slavery, 75 Case W. Rsrv. L. Rev. 697 (2024): 704. Available at: https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev/vol75/iss2/8

months of 1923, around thirty thousand Black in-migrants settled in St. Louis, like thousands of Black Americans who moved from the South to Midwest Cities during the Great Migration. This influx of Black Americans fleeing the Jim Crow South resulted in race riots, housing crises, overcrowding, and job competition.[65] The systemic marginality and oppression faced by Black American in-migrants attempting to escape Jim Crow made them vulnerable targets whose bodies would then be gathered for anatomization.[66] The law states that individuals who die in taxpayer–funded institutions, such as a church or hospital, have only a 36 hour window to be claimed by the next of kin before the body is sent to the state anatomical board and is then distributed to medical institutions for study.[67] This resulted in Black Americans who had recently moved far away from their families, and were systemically pushed to the margins of St. Louis society, being collected for scientific study disproportionally. In 1930, African Americans constituted just 8.78% of St. Louis' populations, however, 54.3% of the 1,728 individuals in the Terry collection are African American.[68] The Terry Collection is a prime example of how these anatomical collections are created through structural violence, enabled by laws which nonconsensually collect the corpses of, and therefore denies burial to, the destitute and the marginalized.[69] Understanding this type of postmortem, state–enacted violence is central when contextualizing Mount Holyoke's unethical collection.

[65] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 149.
[66] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 149.
[67] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 138.
[68] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 139.
[69] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 138.

1.3.2 Mount Holyoke and Biological Supply Companies

There are five separate biological supply companies that have direct ties to Mount Holyoke's Human Osteology Collection. The college has purchased human remains from: Carolina Biological Supply Company; Clay Adams Company; Wards Scientific; General Biological Supply House; and Deyrolle Company.[70] This is known largely from labels either written directly on the bones, or labelling attached to the boxes in which the human remains are held. Each of these companies has its own specific context, depending on their geographic location, but they are all products of the aforementioned human remain collections histories. These companies are based around the United States, in states such as Illinois, North Carolina, New York and even a French biological supply company is represented in our collection. Many of these companies still exist today, but in a different form. They largely have shifted to selling high quality skeletal replicas, rather than real human tissue. The following section describes the incomplete known history of natural history collections at Mount Holyoke College.

1.4.1 The History of Collecting at Mount Holyoke College

The collections history at Mount Holyoke College is a nonlinear, partial story. Mount Holyoke Female Seminary was founded in 1837 by Mary Lyon, a trailblazer in women's education.[71] There is little available information about the college's natural history holdings during the earliest stages of the school's development. However, the importance of collections at Mount Holyoke was transformed, when the four story Lyman Williston Hall was constructed in 1876 to display and hold these growing collections. Williston held lecture halls, scientific laboratories, and all of the college's natural history collections. It was also the site of the first

[70] "Our History." Deyrolle. Accessed April 26, 2026. https://deyrolle.com/en/pages/notre-histoire.
[71] Mount Holyoke College | History, women's education, Seven Sisters, & Facts | Britannica. Accessed April 27, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mount-Holyoke-College.

iteration of the Mount Holyoke Art Museum. There is no known inventory of the objects that were held and displayed in the building, but historic photos and information, found in the Mount Holyoke Archives and Special Collections, reveal vast natural history holdings. The college once held "geological, geological and mineralogical cabinets…[a] set of casts of the entire collection of Professor Ward of Rochester, and a skeleton of the extinct New Zealand bird, *Palapteryz elephantopus*"[72] Massive casts of the *Megatherium*, accompanied by giant armadillo shells, mammoth skulls and more were all purchased from supply company Wards Scientific. The origins of the minerals, taxidermy, rocks, and articulated animal skeletons on display are not known. However, the specimens seen in these historic photos are not the same organisms that are neglected in the Clapp Laboratory today.

Virtually everything in the Williston Museum burned in the December 1917 fire that razed the building. The only possessions that were salvaged were twenty six microscopes and chick embryology plates.[73] Luckily the college's original fine art holdings, including the cherished, and problematic, Albert Bierstadt painting *Hetch Hetchy Canyon* were not lost to the fire, as the art museum's holdings were moved to Dwight hall in 1902.[74] This disastrous event affected the campus as a whole, not just the science departments, as this building was beloved by students and the community. Mount Holyoke had lost its science building, all of its teaching specimens, professors' lifelong research and more. Construction of the new science building, Clapp Laboratory, broke ground in the summer of 1922, and Clapp was opened in the Fall

[72] Report of the Building Committee of Lyman Williston Hall to the Trustees of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary November 15, 1876, Page 10, Buildings and Grounds Collection, Box 106, Williston Hall, General 1873-1874, Folder 2, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.
[73] Williston Hall Fire January 21, 1918 by Abby Howe Turner, Page 1, Buildings and Grounds Collection Box 106, General 1873-1874, Folder 2, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.
[74] "Mount Holyoke College Art Museum." Mount Holyoke College, December 15, 2022. https://offices.mtholyoke.edu/hr/handbook/art_museum.

semester of 1924.[75] In the original plan of Clapp, there was a proposed space for a museum. Mignon Talbot, prominent professor in Geology, advocated until her retirement for the reemergence of a strong natural history collection, displayed in a brand new museum.[76]

After the fire, the institution began replenishing a once-exemplary collection. An influx of new objects and specimens were donated by alums, families of alums, community members, and other colleges. One example of this is from a rare occurrence of an archival material referring to the human osteological remains, in which derogatory and racist language is used to describe the Indigenous woman who was repatriated by Mount Holyoke in 2020. A 1948 Mount Holyoke newspaper article states,

> When all of these [previously listed osteological specimens], and hundreds of other specimens were burned in the Williston Hall fire of 1917, a new collection of skeletons was started. First in this new collection was Jenny, who made her most recent appearance in Junior Show. Jenny is an Indian Squaw about 150 years old. She was given to mount Holyoke by a family of doctors in Holyoke who had had her in their family for generations… Jenny's noted present day companion is William Bones, Esquire, the one-legged skeleton used by Dr. Pattie [Groves] in hygiene classes.[77]

This archival document provides evidence of the timeframe of Mount Holyoke's human osteology collection, and was the document that drove the repatriation of this woman's remains

---

[75] Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly - fall 2024 from the archives: 'cornelia and concrete'. Accessed April 27, 2026. https://magazine.mtholyoke.edu/mthaq/fall_2024/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=2026907.

[76] Annual Report 1931/32 written by Mignon Talbot, Geology and Geography Department Files, LD. 7092.6, Folder1, Series B, Reports 1930/31-1933/34, 1935/36-1940/41, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

[77] Mount Holyoke News, November 19, 1948 Page 1, continued on Page 5, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections

which will be discussed further in the next chapter. The people held in Clapp were brought to the college between 1917 and the present, because everything that was held previously was completely destroyed in the Williston fire. With this information we can narrow down the time frame in which we conduct archival research, including timelines and biographical profiles of the professors in departments that could have contributed to the collection (e.g. Anthropology, Physiology, Biology, History). The context and history of Williston Hall is integral for the investigation of the human remains, as eighty years of the college's history can be ruled out as unhelpful for attaining the context of the current collection, meaning a lot less archival material to wade through.

However, the fire's role in the college's history also imparts a distressing realization. The human ancestral remains that were lost to the destruction of the Williston Fire will never be able to be repatriated. An articulated skeleton hangs in one historic photo of a science lab in Williston Hall; now the remains of this individual are forever lost.[78] How can Mount Holyoke acknowledge the remains that will never be repatriated? Understanding this historical context in which our current collection sits is integral in planning future action, and atoning for these histories.

1.4.2 Partial History of the Use of Human Remains at Mount Holyoke

This section outlines an incomplete history of the use of human remains at the college, from current professor and class of 1987 alum, Sarah Bacon. Bacon was hired as a professor in Fall of 1999, and her work focuses on the physiological interaction between mother and fetus in mammalian pregnancy. In an informal conversation, Bacon recalled her undergraduate time spent at Mount Holyoke, particularly in her biology classes in Clapp Lab. She remembers articulated

[78] The Zoological Laboratory Photo, Undated, Buildings and Grounds Collection, Box 108, Folder 3, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections

skeletons “being around” just like any polymer skeleton model today. She does not recall any conversation concerning who the skeleton belonged to. A photo displayed in the Mildred Trotter Display outside of Hooker Auditorium in Clapp depicts Bacon, middle, with her fellow classmates in the homology lab of the ecology/evolution class taught by Stan Rachooton. An articulated skeleton is visible in the background of the photo, and is being used in the same manner as the accompanying chicken skeleton, as a specimen to study comparative anatomy and morphology. She also recalls the fetal skull in our collection being used as a teaching specimen in her time as a Mount Holyoke student.

As a faculty member at the college, Bacon recounted her use of human remains in biology classrooms until an estimated 13 to 15 years ago. She never used the complete articulated skeletons in class, but in her human physiology class she would bring out the vertebral columns in the Wards Box (explained in Chapter 3) to demonstrate how human vertebrae nest together. Bacon decided to halt the utilization of human remains for demonstrative purposes in the classroom, not in response to any department–wide decision, but because she came to understand the issues with the lack of provenance accompanying the remains at Mount Holyoke. Bacon states that she is prepared to tell students everything about the mice dissected in her labs; where they came from, the type of life they led, and how they were killed. Bacon stated that she thinks that she has “no business talking about something” that she knows nothing about, and that it would be wrong of her to display the human remains to students as if they are value neutral, which she argues they are not. Towards the end of this conversation, I asked if she ever missed using human remains in the classroom, or if she felt her students were lacking some facet of biological education. Bacon replied simply, that “it doesn’t come up” and that there are “many ways to explain a concept” that does not include human material. As I was

getting up to leave this very informative conversation, I asked about what she thought of the fluid preserved human fetal collection at Mount Holyoke. She explained that she had never used the fetuses in class when she was a student, and declined to use them in her teaching as a professor. When Bacon first became a professor of biological sciences at the college, Stan Rachooton, her former instructor, showed her the fetal collection, asking her to find a use for them in her teaching. She declined and never brought them into her classroom, however she recalls a human fetus display across from her office when she was department chair in 2011-2013.[79] The fetuses were displayed in a cabinet lined with burlap and illuminated from behind the jars. She recalls kids from the summer camps that rented space in Clapp barrelling down the halls and screaming at the display.[80]

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the broader histories that have led institutions like Mount Holyoke to hold human osteology collections, followed by a brief, and incomplete history of the available information regarding Mount Holyoke collections history specifically. A grasp of these historical events, I argue, is of the utmost importance when thinking about the future of these human remains. None of these bones have come to Mount Holyoke as neutral entities, and likely none of these individuals consented to their bodies being used for these ends. The following chapter discusses the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), as a response to some of these historical grave injustices, those faced by Native Americans.

[79] See Lynn Morgan, *Icons of Life: A Cultural History of Human Embryos*. (University of California Press, 2009).
[80] Sarah Bacon, personal conversation with author, December 16, 2025

Chapter 2: Understanding NAGPRA

2.1 Understanding NAGPRA

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is a complex piece of U.S. legislation that has codified protection of the human right of religious freedom for Native Americans. NAGPRA, in turn, has changed the relationship between Native Nations and U.S. institutions. NAGPRA is not a compromise between Native American people and the U.S. museum, as "repatriation is a religious duty, not a political victory."[81] This chapter discusses NAGPRA's formation, its legal and social effects, and bridges the histories outlined in Chapter 1 to the tangible work completed with the Mount Holyoke Collection, discussed in Chapter 3. It is fitting to place this section between those two chapters, as NAGPRA itself is a law that aims to bridge historical injustices to future action.

In this chapter, NAGPRA is analyzed at length, not only to understand how the law functions, but to explore how its core values could be applied additionally to non-Native human remains. First and foremost, I discuss NAGPRA at length because I am confident that Mount Holyoke is in violation of the law. And, also, I advocate that the mechanisms of NAGPRA can be applied to likely non-Indigenous human remains at Mount Holyoke. It is probable that the majority of the human remains at Mount Holyoke are not Indigenous, because they were likely supplied through the India Bone Trade. However, I argue that NAGPRA could be used as a framework and a motivator to address all human remains at the college. Federally funded institutions are mandated to comply with this law, and therefore NAGPRA can be utilized to force institutions to critically investigate all their collections. In some instances, museums didn't have databases, or complete inventories of their entire collections, until NAGPRA was passed.[82]

---

[81] Chip Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits* (The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3.
[82] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 189.

In other words, restorative collections work for all materials is more likely to garner institutional attention and support when NAGPRA is leveraged. This chapter is split into two main sections. The first section reviews the history of repatriation legislation, who is subject to NAGPRA and what the act dictates, and a few key shortcomings of the law. The second section discusses various institutions' responses to both NAGPRA compliance and ethical futures for human remains who are not Native American.

2.1.1 History of Activism and Return Before NAGPRA

Hard-fought Indigenous activism and advocacy from the 1960s through the 1980s ultimately channeled the ideals of human rights, religious freedom, and repatriation into the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. One of the oldest examples of a reclamation request occurred "in 1883 [when] Apaches demanded the return of looted objects that several cavalrymen had taken from a cave in central Arizona."[83] George Gustav Heye (1874-1957), collector and founder of the Museum of the American Indian, now the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City, was involved in the first documented return of Indigenous belongings to their rightful owners, long before NAGPRA. Hidatsa elders from North Dakota successfully negotiated the return of a sacred bundle from Heye and the museum in 1938.[84]

Efforts focused on reclamation of material belongings and the remains of ancestors

---

[83] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 35. On this point Colwell cites John R. Welch "The White Mountain Apache Tribe Heritage Program: Origins, Operations, and Challenges" *Working Together: Native Americans and Archaeologists* ed. Kurt E. Dongoske et al.,pp.67-83 (Washington, DC: Society for American Archeology, 2000), p. 70.

[84] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 35. On this point Colwell cites, Edmund Carpenter, Two Essays: Chief and Greed (North Andover, MA: Persimmon Press, 2005), pp. 102–12; Cooper, Spirited Encounters, pp. 68–69; Clara Sue Kidwell, "Every Last Dishcloth: The Prodigious Collecting of George Gustav Heye," in Collecting Native America, 1870–1960, ed. Shepard Krech III and Barbara A. Hail, pp. 232–58

accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s as the American Indian Movement was advocating for Indigenous rights and sovereignty. Advocacy included interfering with archaeological digs, and conducting sit-ins at museums.[85] Clyde Bellecourt, co-founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM), organized a takeover of the Department of Anthropology offices at Colorado State University September 27, 1971. He and around forty other AIM members attempted to serve an anthropology professor and eleven students with citizen's arrests for grave-robbing.[86] Previously, Bellcourt and others entered an archaeological excavation outside of Welsh, Minnesota, and burned students' field notes, stole equipment, and filled in the disturbed pits.[87] During the 1970s an increasing number of museums began responding to demands that Native American human remains be taken off display, and "by the late 80s almost every museum in the country had taken Native American human remains off of display."[88] Activism also resulted in the emergence of tribal museums which continue to challenge the misrepresentation of Native history and culture by Western institutions.[89] The pivotal text, *Decolonizing Museums* by Amy Lonetree, delves into this topic at length. Disruptive action combined with continued advocacy by Indigenous movements ushered in a new wave of successful repatriation cases and the passage of new laws at the federal level.

There are instances of repatriation of sacred items from museums to Native Nations occurring before NAGPRA was signed in as federal law. For example, "in 1967 the Iroquois of

[85] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 6.
[86] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 76. On this point Colwell cites Roger Billotte, "American Indians Protest Anthro. Studies," Rocky Mountain Collegian, September 28, 1971; Troy R. Johnson, The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 233; Bert Simon, "Confusion Remains After Indian Invasion," Rocky Mountain Collegian, September 29, 1971; Bert Simon, "Challenges Issued and Bones Returned at Thurs. Meeting," CSU Collegian, October 1, 1971; "Indian Group Think They Have Grave Robbing Case Against CSU," Greeley Daily Tribune, September 28, 1971.
[87] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 77. On this point Colwell cites Vine Deloria Jr., God Is Red: A Native View of Religion (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2003), p. 10.
[88] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 79, 82.
[89] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 18-19.

New York revived efforts from the late 1800s to regain stolen wampum belts. Protests outside the state capitol led to the "Wampum Bill" in 1971, which returned the belts on the condition that a museum be built on the Onondaga Reservation to house them."[90] This piece of legislation allowed for the 1975 return to the Onondaga Nation of thousands of wampum beads, which were previously held by the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.[91] One of the most successful and well-known repatriation campaigns before NAGPRA was the fight for the return of the Ahayu:da, commonly referred to as "War Gods" to the Zuni Nation. Zuni leaders created a strategy for the repatriation of these sacred belongings in 1978, using humanitarian and ethical arguments.[92] Many Ahayu:da were returned from museums across the country; the Smithsonian repatriated two in 1987.[93]

Finally, in 1989, the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAIA) was signed into law. This piece of legislation was the first federal law with repatriation provisions. It mandates the return of Native American remains and cultural objects that are in the Smithsonian's holdings.[94] The following year the Native American Graves Protection and

---

[90] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 35. Fine-Dare, Grave Injustice, p. 78; William N. Fenton, "Return of Eleven Wampum Belts to the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy on Grand River, Canada," Ethnohistory 36, no. 4 (1989): 392–410, pp. 398–401; Richard W. Hill Sr., "Regenerating Identity: Repatriation and the Indian Frame of Mind," in Archaeology of the Iroquois: Selected Readings and Research Sources, ed. Jordan E. Kerber, pp. 410–21 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Elisabeth Tooker, "A Note on the Return of Eleven Wampum Belts to the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy on Grand River, Canada," Ethnohistory 45, no. 2 (1998): 219–36; Watkins, Sacred Sites and Repatriation, pp. 19–20. See also "Indians Disputing State on Wampum," New York Times, March 25, 1967; "Iroquois Are Seeking Return of Wampum Belts Held by State Museum," New York Times, April 17, 1970; and "Rockefeller Signs Bill Allowing Return of Wampum to Indians," New York Times, July 2, 1971.

[91] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 172. The history in this paragraph is covered by Fine-Dare, Grave Injustice, p. 78; Fenton, "Return of Eleven Wampum Belts," pp. 398, 401; Tooker, "A Note on the Return of Eleven Wampum Belts."

[92] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 34, 35.

[93] Merrill, William L., Edmund J. Ladd, and . Thomas John) Ferguson T. J. 1993. "The Return of the Ahayu:Da: Lessons for Repatriation from Zuni Pueblo and the Smithsonian Institution." *Current Anthropology* Vol. 34 (5): 5. https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/cultures/nt23/documents/023.

[94] 20 USC 80q-9(c).

Repatriation Act was passed to cover all federally funded museums in the country, excluding the Smithsonian.[95] This pivotal moment "legalized a process the Zuni had already been using for more than a decade."[96] And finally the flagrant violation of the civil rights of religious freedom of Native Americans was codified.[97] The following subsection discusses the parameters of the law and the outcomes it dictates on the part of institutions.

2.1.2 How does NAGPRA work?

NAGPRA is a federal law that requires U.S. museums to repatriate Indigenous human remains and belongings of cultural significance to affiliated Federally Recognized Tribes. This act uses a definition of "museum" that varies from common parlance; a museum under NAGPRA is any historical agency, medical facility, library, college, or institution that controls a collection, and receives federal funding.[98] NAGPRA applies to Mount Holyoke College even though the human remains in our collection are not associated with any formal natural history or archaeology museum.

Several kinds of "materials" are required to be repatriated under NAGPRA. These items include human remains, associated and unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.[99] "Associated funerary objects" refers to objects that were originally deposited in a burial place with human remains either at their time of death or later. Belongings are deemed associated funerary objects when the federal agency or museum is currently in

---

[95] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 117.
[96] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 46.
[97] Trope, Jack F., and Echo-Hawk, Walter R. "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History" in *Repatriation Reader,* ed. Devon Mihesuah (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 139.
[98] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 116.
[99] Meister, Barbara, ed. 1997. *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide. Understanding and Implementing NAGPRA and the Official Smithsonian and Other Repatriation Policies*. New York: American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation, 10.

possession of both the human remains and these objects. The objects and remains do not have to be under the control of the same museum, but in the possession or control of *a* museum, so the connection between the objects and remains is possible. Additionally, "associated funerary objects" also describes items that are "exclusively made for burial purposes or to contain human remains".[100] The "unassociated funerary object" category refers to "objects [that can be] related to specific individuals, families or known human remains or to a specific burial site of a culturally affiliated individual; and the human remains are not presently in the possession or control of a federal agency or museum.[101] Furthermore, sacred objects are "ceremonial in nature, and needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the present day practice of traditional Native American religions. This includes both the use of the objects in ceremonies currently conducted by traditional practitioners and instances where the objects are needed to renew ceremonies that are part of a traditional religion."[102] Lastly, objects of cultural patrimony are described as those which "have ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or culture itself, and are the cultural property of a tribe, or a subgroup thereof such as a clan or band, and could not have been sold or given away by an individual."[103]

These legal definitions are integral to understanding how objects can and cannot be legally repatriated through NAGPRA. However, ultimately the associated Native tribe determines what falls under which categories, and the burden is put on them to show proof. NAGPRA dictates that ten lines of evidence should be taken into account, when available to make a positive cultural affiliation: "geography, kinship, biology, archaeology, linguistic,

[100] Meister, *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide,* 10.
[101] Meister, *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide,* 10.
[102] Meister, *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide,* 10.
[103] Meister, *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide,* 10.

folklore, oral tradition, historical evidence, other information, and expert opinion."[104] While it is the Native Nations' responsibility to provide a preponderance of evidence for the link between the belonging or ancestor in a museum collection with their community, it is the job of these institutions to conduct the first steps of this process.

NAGPRA, when it was passed in 1990, provided museums five years to complete full inventories of their collections.[105] Fifty-eight museums requested extensions when completing their initial inventories because they demonstrated good-faith efforts to complete this process, but were unable to inventory the entirety of their holdings.[106] Once these inventories are completed, the institution has a six–month timeframe in which to notify the affected Native Nations or Native Hawaiian Organizations, based on holdings' provenances.[107] This differs slightly from the summary that institutions are required to complete and submit for unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. It was mandated that more general summaries of these objects as opposed to human remains and associated funerary objects be completed three years after NAGPRA's passing. When writing a summary, the museum must provide information including "the scope of the collection, kinds of objects included, reference to geographical location, means and period of acquisition and cultural affiliation."[108] If a Native Nation responds to a notice of inquiry, either to a summary or an inventory, confirming that they are willing and able to take back an ancestor or belonging, the museum is given 90 days to

[104] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 217.
[105] Trope, Jack F., and Echo-Hawk, Walter R. "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History" in *Repatriation Reader,* ed. Devon Mihesuah (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 146.
[106] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 110. On this point Colwell cites Barbara Isaac, "Implementation of NAGPRA: The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard," in The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy, and Practice, ed. Cressida Fforde et al., pp. 160–70 (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 160.
[107] 25 USC Ch. 32: NATIVE AMERICAN GRAVES PROTECTION AND REPATRIATION 3003 (D) (1) https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title25/chapter32&edition=prelim
[108] 25 USC Ch. 32: NATIVE AMERICAN GRAVES PROTECTION AND REPATRIATION 3004 (A) (General) https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title25/chapter32&edition=prelim

physically repatriate these materials to the tribe.[109]

Section 3006 of NAGPRA details the responsibilities of the NAGPRA Review Committee. Seven individuals make up this committee from nominations made by both Native tribes and museums.[110] If there is a dispute in which multiple Native Nations or Native Hawaiian Organizations claim an individual or objects, this Review Committee settles the disagreement.[111] Beyond facilitating the resolution of affiliation disputes, this committee develops regulations to further implement NAGPRA, can make recommendations for future care of repatriated cultural items when applicable, submits annual reports to congress, and before the recent regulations added to the law in January 2024, compiled a list of culturally unidentifiable human remains.[112] The 2024 NAGPRA changes include:

1. Strengthening the authority and role of Tribes and NHOs in the repatriation process by requiring deference to the Indigenous Knowledge of lineal descendants, Tribes and NHOs.
2. Requiring museums and federal agencies to obtain free, prior and informed consent from lineal descendants, Tribes or NHOs before allowing any exhibition of, access to, or research on human remains or cultural items.
3. Eliminating the category "culturally unidentifiable human remains" and resetting the requirements for cultural affiliation to better align the regulations with congressional intent.

---

[109] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 117.
[110] 25 USC Ch. 32: NATIVE AMERICAN GRAVES PROTECTION AND REPATRIATION 3006 (B) (Membership) https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title25/chapter32&edition=prelim
[111] 25 USC Ch. 32: NATIVE AMERICAN GRAVES PROTECTION AND REPATRIATION 3006 (C) (Responsibilities) https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title25/chapter32&edition=prelim
[112] Trope, Jack F., and Echo-Hawk, Walter R. "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History" in *Repatriation Reader,* ed. Devon Mihesuah (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 149.

4. Increasing transparency and reporting of holdings or collections and shedding light on collections currently unreported under the existing regulation.
5. Requiring museums and federal agencies to consult and update inventories of human remains and associated funerary objects within five years of this final rule.[113]

These new NAGPRA regulations have strengthened the rights of Native Tribes and Hawaiian organizations through both deferring to Indigenous knowledge, and also by taking away the title "culturally unidentifiable remains," which has been used by museums to unjustly retain Indigenous human remains. Ultimately, NAGPRA is Indian Law; it resides in Title 25, Chapter 32 of the United States Code. Indian legislation is to be constructed liberally in favor of the Indians, with ambiguous provisions interpreted, also known as the Indian canon of construction.[114] This law is not a negotiation between museums and Native Tribes. Rather, NAGPRA is a piece of human rights legislation that is designed to protect the identities and the inalienable rights to worship and practice according to one's own beliefs for Indigenous people in the United States.[115] NAGPRA was used as an example for Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, codifying international human rights surrounding repatriation for Indigenous peoples.[116]

If federally–funded U.S. institutions fail to complete collections inventories and respective notifications to Native Nations in the time allotted, they put their federal funds in

---

[113] "Interior Department Announces Final Rule for Implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act." U.S. Department of the Interior, December 6, 2023. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-final-rule-implementation-native-american-graves.
[114] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 255. On this point Colwell cites Sherry Hutt and Jennifer Riddle, "The Law of Human Remains and Burials," in Human Remains: Guide for Museums and Academic Institutions, ed. Vicki Cassman et al., pp. 223–43 (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), p. 236.
[115] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 84.
[116] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 45.

jeopardy as they could receive civil penalties.[117] However, very few institutions have been penalized for their flagrant disregard of this federal law. While NAGPRA is an integral part of Indigenous sovereignty, and rights in the United States, there are myriad ways in which this law is deficient in repairing the wrongs done to Indigenous people perpetrated by U.S. institutions.

2.1.3 Shortcomings of NAGPRA

This subsection unpacks some of the key critiques of NAGPRA, which is integral when advocating for advances in repatriation work. How can U.S. institutions, like Mount Holyoke, proactively address the shortcomings of NAGPRA? I argue that Mount Holyoke should collaborate with descendant communities to take action beyond the minimum requirements mandated by federal law. Understanding the following identified deficiencies of NAGPRA allows for preemptive development of policies, educational initiatives, and dialogues that reach beyond this law. These shortcomings are further expanded upon in the Conclusion in which I briefly discuss future lines of research and next steps.

One limitation of NAGPRA is that the onus of proving ownership of a belonging or the body of an ancestor always rests on the Tribe, not the museums.[118] This creates a few issues, namely that museums can reject a Tribe's evidence, and that Nations have to expend a lot of time, energy, and money in proving ownership. Museums often deny proof provided by Native Nations by claiming that these belongings of material culture were purchased rightly by the donor or museum. An additional shortcoming of NAGPRA is the term "culturally unidentifiable." Before 2024, museums used the "culturally unidentifiable" category to withhold

[117] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 117.
[118] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 181. On this point Colwell cites Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, "Repatriation and the Burdens of Proof," Museum Anthropology 36, no. 2 (2013): 108–9; and Steven Platzman, "Objects of Controversy: The Native American Right to Repatriation," American University Law Review 41 (1992): 517–58, pp. 555–57

ancestors and belongings from being repatriated. Twenty years after NAGPRA's passing, only 27% of Native remains in 650 museums and federal repositories had been affiliated, meaning 115,000 sets of remains still laid in the legal purgatory of "culturally unidentifiable."[119] This category, as of 2024, is no longer viable under NAGPRA, leading to a new wave of collections investigation across the U.S.

Another major limitation of NAGPRA is that only federally recognized Native Nations are able to request, accept, and rebury cultural objects and human remains from repatriation. For example, the Wanapum who live in present day Washington state never signed a treaty with the United States government, are therefore not federally recognized, and cannot be the sole recipients of ancestors and belongings returning home.[120] However, non-federally-recognized tribes still engage with the repatriation process, often looking to federally recognized tribes for aid and alliances. After much debate, the Wanapum collaborated with closely related sovereign nations – the Colville Tribes, Nez Perce Tribe, Umatilla Tribes, and the Yakama Nation – in order to receive the Ancient One (Kennewick Man).[121] Likewise, the previously-unrecognized Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe from present day Eastern Massachusetts worked within the Wampanoag Confederation to secure ancestors and belongings from museums.[122]

Mount Holyoke College has first hand experience with federally recognized and non-federally recognized tribes collaborating for repatriation. As I detail at the end of this chapter, the College's only instance of repatriation of an ancestor occurred in 2020. Both the

---

[119] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 200. On this point Colwell cites Sudhin Thanawala, "Tribes Retrieve Remains from Researchers, Agencies," Washington Post, January 16, 2012.
[120] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 167.
[121] Walker, Richard Arlin. "The Ancient One Takes Another Step toward Home." ICT, November 29, 2025. https://ictnews.org/archive/the-ancient-one-takes-another-step-toward-home/#:~:text=The%20Ancient%20One%20was%20determined,for%20the%20past%20several%20years.%E2%80%9D.
[122] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 179.

Nipmuc Nation and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community collaborated to rebury this individual. The Nipmuc Nation is a non-recognized tribe from central Massachusetts, while the Stockbridge-Munsee are originally from the Hudson Valley and Western Massachusetts, but the Stockbridge-Munsee Community is in Wisconsin.[123] Future directions to extend sovereignty to non-federally-recognized tribes could include allowing them to engage legally in the repatriation process without being backed by a federally recognized tribe.

NAGPRA also only applies to U.S. museums and agencies that receive some form of federal funding. Mount Holyoke College is a private institution that receives federal funding through student financial aid, research initiatives, and more. While NAGPRA covers federal institutions and organizations, like Mount Holyoke, it does not cover every culturally-sacred belonging in the country, as many Native American artifacts markets in the private sector are left unchecked.[124]

Furthermore, NAGPRA does not apply to Native American ancestral remains or cultural objects that were traded or sold outside of the country. European museums are exceedingly reluctant to return any Native American belongings.[125] Additionally, returning ancestral remains and belongings to tribes outside the United States is exceedingly difficult under NAGPRA. For example, the Yaqui Nation, in the Río Yaqui Valley, is bisected by the U.S.-Mexico border. Some members of this group live in present day Southern New Mexico while others live in the Mexican state of Sonora.[126] This means that a portion of their ancestors and belongings would be

---

[123] "Early Historical Background." Milwaukee Public Museum. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.mpm.edu/index.php/content/wirp/ICW-159.
[124] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 127. On this point Colwell cites "The Comancheria Collection," http://issuu.com/dreamedia/docs/catalog_148_comancheria/1 (accessed July 9, 2014).
[125] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits* 56.
[126] Schmal, John. "The Enduring Legacy of the Yaquis: Perpetual Resistance (1531-1927)." Indigenous Mexico, January 11, 2026. https://www.indigenousmexico.org/articles/the-enduring-legacy-of-the-yaquis-perpetual-resistance.

able to be repatriated, under NAGPRA, to those living north of the border, while others fall beyond the U.S. jurisdiction. Ventura Pérez, a professor at UMass Amherst, repatriated a number of Yaqui ancestors who had been slaughtered and then collected by Aleš Hrdlička.[127] Pérez worked on the repatriation of these ancestors to the Yaqui members living south of the border, and he recounts this being a faster process than if he had gone through NAGPRA.[128] The borders of the United States cut through Indigenous nations, and Mexico does not have Indigenous nations like the U.S. which makes repatriation a much more complex process.

NAGPRA has also severely overlooked the issue of reinternment. This act provides a pathway for the repatriation of cultural objects and human remains back to federally recognized Indigenous tribes in the United States, but provides no scaffolding or resources for what comes after that instance of return. Where should ancestors be reburied when the people of a Nation have been displaced hundreds or thousands of miles from their homelands?[129] Or what if a Nation has no land for reinternment? Multiple Nations have chosen to create new rituals, cemeteries or shrines for those that have returned. The Saginaw Chippewa created the Nibokaan Ancestral Cemetery on their reservation in 1995, and between 1996 and 2012 four hundred ancestral bodies and around sixty five thousands funerary objects had been reburied there.[130] The Zuni Nation built new shrines for the returning Ahayu:da so as to not place them in the incorrect location.[131] If there is no land for the remains or belongings to be reinterred, the Nation, through the NAGPRA process, can gain legal control over the items, but may choose for them to stay

---

[127] Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.
[128] Debra L. Martin, Ryan P. Harrod, Ventura R. Pérez, *Bioarchaeology: An Integrated Approach to Working with Human Remains*. (Springer New York, NY, 2013), 44.
[129] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 94
[130] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 127.
[131]Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 52.

with the museum until reburial locations are identified and arrangements are made.[132] The return of ancestral human remains is contingent upon the cultural and religious beliefs of the tribe. For example, the Zuni Nation who live in modern day western New Mexico, religiously refuse to rebury their ancestors, however the Acoma or Hopi Nations will reinter Zuni individuals for them.[133] While it is not NAGPRA's place to prescribe the reburial processes and ceremonies of those who are repatriated under this law, pathways for federal funds and land to be made available to be used for reinterment is one possible route of future advocacy.

The next section covers the institutions that I have investigated through informal professional conversations, when developing a next course of action for the human remains at Mount Holyoke College. These conversations and additional research cover both what these institutions have accomplished under NAGPRA, and also what they hope to do with the human remains in their holdings that are not Native American. I offer a comparative discussion of other U.S. institutions of higher education as a guide for Mount Holyoke's next moves regarding ethical stewardship and return of collections, while remembering that each college's position is unique.

2.2.1 Other Institutional Responses to NAGPRA and Beyond NAGPRA

One of the difficulties in ethical collections reckoning is that there is no one right formula that can be applied to each and every institution. This is because each university or museum has its own unique history, positionality, teaching commitments, etc. Ultimately, no two skeletons in a college basement have the same history, meaning that each situation must be addressed uniquely and examined holistically. As discussed previously in this chapter, NAGPRA does not

[132] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 280.
[133] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 277.

apply to non-Native human remains, leaving many institutions to create their own ethical solutions for their legacy skeletal collections. Many institutions choose to do nothing, as no law requires them to repatriate/investigate these remains. I argue that the futures of non-Native human remains in collections must be critically investigated and addressed, as their status at Mount Holyoke is a product of the marginalization and violence discussed in Chapter 1.

The following section offers a comparative discussion of two case studies from other institutions. The first institution I will discuss is Vassar College, and the second is the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (UMass Amherst). I gathered this information through informal interviews, which I did not audio record, but annotated extensively. I spoke with a number of anthropology professors and museum professionals in my pursuit to better understand the work I hoped to accomplish at Mount Holyoke. Learning from these different institutions' approaches was formative in developing my plans and goals for the human remains at Mount Holyoke College.

2.2.2 Comparable Institution

The comparable institution I investigate here, Vassar College, formerly held a legacy collection similar to our current holdings at Mount Holyoke. Vassar College is a historically women's institution located in Poughkeepsie, New York. This institution was founded in 1861 and began accepting male students in 1969.[134] Around 2,400 undergraduate students attend, making the institution similar in size to Mount Holyoke College.[135] Vassar and Mount Holyoke have related histories and positionalities in the United States, but the colleges have differed in

[134] "The Founding of the Seven Sisters." Vassar Encyclopedia. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/notable-events/the-seven-sisters/.
[135] "Vassar College." Vassar College | Top Northeastern US Liberal Arts College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/.

their responses to NAGPRA. Vassar was initially flagged to me as an important institution of comparison by my Division of Student Life supervisor, Sarah Garijo-Garde. Garijo-Garde is a Vassar alum who graduated in May 2020 and currently works as Mount Holyoke Senior Area Coordinator and Assistant Director of Residential Wellness. Over the summer I was working both on the human remains project and as a Peer Health Educator. In speaking with Garijo-Garde about my work with the human remains they suggested that an investigation of Vassar's NAGPRA noncompliance scandal in 2020 would be beneficial to my work here at Mount Holyoke. Garijo-Garde specifically suggested I contact Anthropology professor April Biesaw.

In 2019, Biesaw discovered that her predecessor, Lucille Lewis Johnson, was illegally holding Native American ancestral remains at Vassar College. These collections included over 200 boxes of human remains and material belongings from 82 Alaskan sites, 20 New York sites, as well as one Chilean and one Egyptian site.[136] Biesaw reported that Dr. Johnson had stolen the Alaskan Native remains in 1989, just one year before NAGPRA passed.[137] Due to the recent acquisition of this collection, there were accompanying informational documents with the remains and material belongings. These materials were repatriated in 2022, with the support of a NAGPRA consultant company, Bernstein and Associates. After the return of Johnson's holdings, Vassar shifted to repatriating their legacy teaching collection. On the college website, they note that, "the department is currently participating in consultations to repatriate individuals from the human skeletal teaching collection, none of which came from known archaeological sites. Without proveniences for these individuals, we have used a variety of forensic techniques to estimate their ancestry and identify all possible descendant groups for consultation."[138]

---

[136] "Repatriation." Anthropology - Repatriation | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/anthropology/history/repatriation.
[137] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.
[138] "Repatriation." Anthropology - Repatriation | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/anthropology/history/repatriation.

Vassar's response to their collection reflects a few key contextual differences between their institution and Mount Holyoke. These distinctions date to the nineteenth-century formations of the colleges' respective natural history museums. In 1862, fourteen years before Mount Holyoke's Williston Hall was built, Matthew Vassar commissioned a "cabinet" of teaching specimens so that Vassar's students would receive a hands-on education.[139] Henry A. Ward, the founder of Ward's Natural Science, created much of Vassar's museum. In addition to Wards' casts, Native American and Native Hawaiian peoples' remains were displayed in Vassar's exhibits.[140] This museum and the collections within it had a different outcome than the museum at Mount Holyoke.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the Williston Hall museum was established in 1876 and, like Vassar, also displayed a number of Ward's casts. However, Vassar's museum did not burn like Williston, but it fell into disrepair and was ultimately disbanded in the 1970s.[141] The human remains held in the museum were then scattered throughout other departments at the college to be used as teaching collections, whereas Mount Holyoke's original natural history collection was destroyed by the 1917 Williston Hall fire. It is highly unlikely that any of the human remains currently held at Mount Holyoke came to the college before 1917 whereas these older remains were held at Vassar. Mount Holyoke is currently in the position that Vassar found itself in regarding the unprovenanced teaching collection: what does an institution do with human remains with no accompanying information?

---

[139] Natural History Museum - Vassar Encyclopedia - Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/collections-and-curiosities/natural-history-museum/.
[140] "Repatriation of Indigenous Ancestral Remains: A Vassar Timeline." Timeline | Decolonizing Vassar | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/decolonizing-vassar/repatriation-timeline.
[141] "Repatriation of Indigenous Ancestral Remains: A Vassar Timeline." Timeline | Decolonizing Vassar | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/decolonizing-vassar/repatriation-timeline.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 quarantine, Biesaw began the process of forensic analysis of the unprovenanced human remains at Vassar.[142] This work resulted in a dozen individuals being identified as most likely to be of Native American ancestry, leading to further NAGPRA consultation. They notified all of the federally recognized Native Nations in the lower 48 states to determine who would claim the dozen individuals who are likely to be Native, as it is unknown what particular community they are from.[143] In 2023, the legal control of the likely Native individuals with unknown geographic origins was transferred to the Stockbridge Munsee and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan.[144] Through this consultation it was determined that the next best course of action was to bury the Native human remains in a historic cemetery on Vassar's campus. The ceremonial reinterment of these individuals occurred in the summer of 2025, just weeks before I visited Vassar and these graves when meeting with Biesaw.[145]

On August 9, 2025, I met with Biesaw to ask specific questions about the NAGPRA process at Vassar, and to solicit advice for beginning this project at Mount Holyoke. We went to three separate locations during this meeting and spoke for multiple hours. Biesaw recounted that when she started this process in 2019, Vassar held fifty Native American ancestors, 25 of which were from the same site in Alaska, and nine of those Alaskan natives were stolen, by her predecessor Lucille Lewis Johnson, right before NAGPRA. These remains and material belongings had accompanying provenance and were the first of Vassar's holdings to be

---

[142] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.
[143] "Repatriation of Indigenous Ancestral Remains: A Vassar Timeline." Timeline | Decolonizing Vassar | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/decolonizing-vassar/repatriation-timeline.
[144] "Repatriation of Indigenous Ancestral Remains: A Vassar Timeline." Timeline | Decolonizing Vassar | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/decolonizing-vassar/repatriation-timeline.
[145] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.

repatriated to their communities.

As consulting regarding these “known” archaeological collections was ongoing, Biesaw began investigating the other human osteological holdings on Vassar's campus. Biesaw gathered bones from the Departments of Biology, Studio Art, and Anthropology, in order to subject them to forensic analyses.[146] Biesaw teaches courses in physical anthropology, including forensic anthropology, and she invited a few students to aid her in these laboratory analyses. They determined that a number of human remains were likely to be Indigenous to North America, so Vassar notified the 347 federally recognized tribes in the contiguous 48 states. Most of the tribes responded that they were uninterested, and or that they had no claim to these remains. Around twenty Nations scheduled Zoom calls with Vassar’s professionals and consultants working on this case. These tribes ultimately stated that they would defer to the Stockbridge Munsee’s resolution. The Stockbridge Munsee Nation decided to bear the responsibility of burying these individuals, because the ancestors had resided on Stockbridge Munsee land, at Vassar College, for over 100 years.[147] The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan supported the Stockbridge Munsee in this process. The Stockbridge Munsee and Vassar brought this case to the NAGPRA committee to argue that there is little likelihood of new information resurfacing in the future about the cultural affiliation of these remains. The committee ultimately supported the repatriation to the Stockbridge Munsee.

These Native people were finally buried with ceremony and respect in Summer 2025, in a historic, secluded cemetery on Vassar’s campus. This cemetery was built in 1807, and contained graves and headstones from multiple individuals from this era. While Biesaw advocated that this plot of land be legally given back to the Stockbridge Munsee, Vassar College refused. The site is

[146] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.
[147] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.

now a designated Native American cemetery, and therefore cannot be disturbed by building projects or infrastructure. Biesaw brought me to this cemetery and spoke to me about the difficulty of the process. Even now as these people rest in the ground, her work does not feel complete.

Finally, Biesaw brought me to her office in the anthropology building at Vassar. She showed me the room where they keep the rest of the human osteological remains that were determined to be likely non-Native. She kept them in black enclosed boxes on metal shelves, with small labels on the outside of each container. Biesaw spoke about her intent for this to be a temporary storage solution while the college determined action steps, but she was skeptical about if or when those next steps would come. She even stated that if it was up to her she would have repatriated all of the human remains to the Stockbridge Munsee for proper burial.[148] Biesaw showed me the horrifically-damaged skulls of adults, the remains of a six-year-old whose bones had been severely altered to model the stages of bone growth, and more. We could hardly speak over the two large dehumidifiers whirring in this tiny room, attempting to keep the summer humidity at bay.

Despite institutional similarities, Vassar's and Mount Holyoke's responses to reckoning with mismanaged legacy collections differ quite starkly. Similarities in geographic location have resulted in MHC and Vassar having collaborated with the same federally recognized tribe, the Stockbridge Munsee, and both institutions began the process decades after the mandated timeline. Thirty years after NAGPRA was enacted, Mount Holyoke repatriated one woman's remains who was already known to be Indigenous. Thirty-two years after NAGPRA was enacted, Vassar repatriated dozens of Alaskan Native individuals who were known to be Indigenous. One key difference between the institutions includes Vassar's work with their

[148] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.

biological or "unknown" human remains.

Because of the work of particular professors, and their students, these human remains were analyzed and some were able to be repatriated. I would argue that this repatriation was accomplished because of Vassar's physical anthropology program. They teach courses in Forensic Anthropology, Archaeology, Evolutionary Anthropology etc. The subject matter experts that began this repatriation work were already present in the department, and students who were interested and able to help in this restorative research were readily available. Mount Holyoke currently has no faculty or staff that have the expertise to carry out a repatriation effort. In other words, Mount Holyoke has to hire outside experts, whereas those professionals were already present at Vassar to conduct this work. On the other hand, the lack of physical anthropology at Mount Holyoke, and therefore the absence of a large archaeological collection, has resulted in an estimated twenty eight individuals, whereas Vassar held twice as many people in their collections.

The absence of a physical anthropology program at Mount Holyoke also means that there is little reason for us to continue to hold these people's remains. There are plenty of arguments for and against the use of human remains in anthropological training and study, which is beyond the scope of this study. Regardless of whether one does or does not agree with the use of human remains, I would argue that Mount Holyoke does not have to grapple with these questions. These remains have not been used in the classroom for years, and they have not been missed.[149] Physical anthropology focuses on the differences between humans; how the physical strain of being a farmer is visible on bone, how a childhood injury heals and affects a person through adulthood, and what the teeth can tell us about diet and health. Because we do not study this at Mount Holyoke, there is absolutely no need for real human remains to be used. Plastic

[149] Sarah Bacon, personal conversation with author, December 16, 2025

models are sufficient for the Mount Holyoke biology curriculum, which focuses on anatomy, not human variation. Conversely, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst responded to their apparent "need" for human remains for scientific study through a new program that is ethical and sustainable.

2.2.3 The Incomparable Institution

This section will describe the work of an incomparable institution regarding NAGPRA compliance, ethical teaching collections stewardship, and future steps. While both the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (UMass Amherst) and Mount Holyoke are a part of the Five College Consortium, they are very different institutions. Over 31,000 students and nearly 2,000 faculty members make up this public institution.[150] UMass Amherst's Department of Anthropology retains a four-field anthropology teaching approach, meaning they provide education in cultural anthropology, archaeology, biological anthropology, and linguistic anthropology.[151] The size of UMass Amherst, accompanied by the robust nature of their anthropology department, has resulted in the use of a large human skeletal teaching collection. This section will first cover the publicly available information on UMass Amherst's NAGPRA response and policy, followed by their current work in response to their legacy teaching collections.

UMass Amherst has been in the process of repatriating Native American individuals and their belongings for three decades. Most of the Native American ancestral remains that were repatriated by UMass Amherst were originally held by Smith and Amherst Colleges. These remains were transferred between 1965 and the 1980s to UMass Amherst and were then

[150] "UMass Amherst by the Numbers." UMass Amherst. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umass.edu/gateway/umass-edge/about-umass-amherst/umass-amherst-numbers.
[151] "Undergraduate Programs : Department of Anthropology : UMass Amherst." Department of Anthropology. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umass.edu/anthropology/academics/undergraduate-programs.

repatriated between 2004 and 2020. They issued 13 separate Notices of Inventory Completion in the Federal Register which included 186 individuals and over five thousand material belongings.[152] The UMass Repatriation Advisory and Oversight Committee is also working on the repatriation of individuals who were collected without consent, such as identified individuals in the University collection that are Black American, West African, East Asian, Australian, Ecuadorian, and Mexican. The identification of possible descendent communities with the goals of consultation and repatriation is being undertaken by the UMass NAGPRA team.[153] However, the remains that are being investigated by the NAGPRA compliance team are not the only human skeletal remains at the university that were unethically obtained.

The UMass Department of Anthropology has a collection of teaching skeletons that are still used in the classroom today. I have had multiple conversations with Sarah Reedy, Lecturer in Anthropology at UMass, about the future plans for the legacy osteological remains. She is committed to the anthropologist's ethical responsibility of correcting the wrongs of the past and works closely with Ventura Pérez, who has facilitated multiple repatriations. Their work at UMass, which I will describe below, has revolutionized the ethical acquisition of human osteological remains at UMass with complete, informed consent from the donors.

The teaching skeletons in UMass Amherst's anthropology lab are of unknown origin and are still being used in classroom education. They are utilized in anatomy, forensic, and archaeology courses. Decades of use and hundreds of students' hands have given these bones a glistening surface. The bones are bleached white and incredibly clean, indicating that these skeletons were professionally processed. The current understanding is that these remains are not

[152] "Repatriation at UMass : Repatriation : UMass Amherst." Repatriation. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umass.edu/repatriation/about-repatriation-umass.
[153] "Repatriation at UMass : Repatriation : UMass Amherst." Repatriation. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umass.edu/repatriation/about-repatriation-umass.

Native American ancestors, but are Indian individuals who were sold to UMass by biological supply companies who supplied them through the India Bone Trade.[154] The question that professors at UMass, like so many others across the country, are facing is: what do we do with these remains? Dawnie Wolfe Steadman, professor of biological anthropology at the University of Tennessee, reached out to the Indian government in hopes of a repatriation process to be developed for those remains from the India Bone Trade, but there are far too many bodies for this to be a realistic action.[155]

Another issue with the ethical repatriation, or burial of the skeletal teaching collection at UMass Amherst is that the anthropology department still uses human remains regularly as a part of their coursework. As I have stated previously, the debate over the need for human remains in the classroom is beyond the scope of this research project, and also the sudden absence of these teaching collections would affect UMass' anthropology department significantly. This led to an innovative new relationship and program spearheaded by Pérez, which began in 2020. Pérez decided to connect UMass Amherst's Anthropology department to the UMass Chan Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts.[156] Since the 1970s UMass Chan has managed the Anatomical Gift Program, a well-regarded body donation program.[157] The partnership between these two campuses is the new supply avenue for the UMass Amherst Anthropology department's ethically sourced human bone material. Donors choose exactly what the UMass Amherst anthropology department is allowed to do to their bones after death. They can choose,

[154] Sarah Reedy, personal conversation with author, October 3, 2025.
[155] Sarah Reedy, personal conversation with author, October 3, 2025.
[156] Ventura Pérez, "Developing Donor- Based Osteological Collections: A Case Study." Paper presented at Bioarchaeologists' Northeast Regional Dialogue conference, Hamden, CT. November 8, 2025. https://calendar.qu.edu/event/39313-2025-bioarcheologists-northeast-regional-dialogue
[157] Welcome - anatomical gift program - UMass Chan Medical School - Worcester. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umassmed.edu/agp/.

for example, that their remains only be used as teaching materials, or for research, or both.[158] Currently, there is no other collaborative program like this in the country, and UMass hopes this can become the gold standard for ethical human bone collection. Another additional benefit to this program is that so much information about the person's life, health condition, age, sex, and so on is known. This creates a multitude of rich research opportunities that are not available with unknown legacy collections.

Reedy estimates that within the year the body donation collaborative program will have yielded enough complete skeletons to officially retire the legacy collection.[159] UMass faculty and students in Anthropology will then create biological profiles of each of the individuals from the original collection before they are buried respectfully. Their plots will be inventoried carefully so that if any information resurfaces about their origin they can be retrieved from this resting place.[160] Reedy explained that burial for these nonconsenting individuals is an important measure of respect, because they will no longer be able to be used for teaching purposes, or scientific research.[161]

Even though these skeletal remains are likely not those of Native American individuals, and therefore not subject to NAGPRA, UMass Amherst is thinking critically about their legacy collection. Pérez has created a new program that bridges various campuses and departments to uplift the importance of ethical human remains collections built upon body donor consent. This program is bringing ethically acquired skeletal remains to the UMass anthropology department, with the ultimate goal of proper burial for the unknown individuals held in their legacy

---

[158] Ventura Pérez, "Developing Donor- Based Osteological Collections: A Case Study." Paper presented at Bioarchaeologists' Northeast Regional Dialogue conference, Hamden, CT. November 8, 2025. https://calendar.qu.edu/event/39313-2025-bioarcheologists-northeast-regional-dialogue

[159] Sarah Reedy, personal conversation with author, October 3, 2025.

[160] Sarah Reedy, personal conversation with author, October 3, 2025.

[161] Sarah Reedy, personal conversation with author, October 3, 2025.

collections. While this action is not mandated by any federal law, it is the morally just course of action as UMass continues to use human remains in many sectors of their research and learning. UMass Amherst faculty and students are arguing, through these practical actions, that the respectful treatment of human remains in science is non-negotiable. Not only are the individuals donated from this program ethically acquired, they also expand the research and learning opportunities for students and scientists. Some donors even choose to write poems to the students who will be learning using their corpses.[162] Pérez's students have had the opportunity to go to the donation ceremony, hear from the families of the deceased, and understand that their scientific practice does not have to come at the expense of someone's humanity or dignity. There are two other institutional responses that I would like to touch on briefly in the next section.

2.2.4 Other Short Institutional Examples

Professor Sarah Reedy invited me to attend the Bioarchaeologists' Northeast Regional Dialogue conference, held on November 8, 2025, at Quinnipiac University. A majority of the participants in the conference were connected to the UMass Amherst Department of Anthropology. One of the conference poster presentations outlined the status of human remains in a teaching collection at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. A recent alum, Aimee Holland, was presenting this case study, which includes an estimated seven to nine individuals' remains with no provenance. Skidmore provides an education in cultural anthropology, archaeology, and biological anthropology, which differs from Mount Holyoke's curriculum.[163] These human remains were used in the classroom as teaching "specimens" until

[162] Ventura Pérez, "Developing Donor- Based Osteological Collections: A Case Study." Paper presented at Bioarchaeologists' Northeast Regional Dialogue conference, Hamden, CT. November 8, 2025. https://calendar.qu.edu/event/39313-2025-bioarcheologists-northeast-regional-dialogue

[163] "Anthropology." Anthropology | Skidmore College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://catalog.skidmore.edu/departments-programs/anthropology/#text.

2023. Since then, the Skidmore Department of Anthropology has offered a course dedicated to collaboratively creating an ethical future for these collections. They came to the conclusions that these conversations need to be opened to a larger portion of the Skidmore community, and that returning as much personhood to these individuals is an integral next step.[164] Skidmore is focusing on campus-wide discourse and education, and uses biological anthropology to learn more about these remains. This ongoing work is another example of the ethical issues that are being faced in institutions across the United States.

On November 7th 2025, I spoke with the NAGPRA program director, Carol McCarty, at Rutgers University, New Brunswick campus. I had met McCarty's colleague, Lauren Neitzke-Adamo, a month prior when speaking about the human osteology collection, in conjunction with Mount Holyoke's paleontology collection at the Geological Society of American (GSA) Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Neitzke-Adamo's GSA talk presented the discovery of Indigenous human remains at the Rutgers Geology Museum, which was built in 1872 and is the oldest geology museum in the country.[165] In discussion, Carol McCarty advocated for the intense archival research of these collections, so as to reconstruct the historical context of the institutions with the hope of finding documents that reference certain human remains. She also believes that the NAGPRA compliance effort at an institution should be a single united effort. For example, the NAGPRA coordinator for the Art Museum and the scientific collections should be the same position/person, rather than siloed efforts. McCarty gathered archival information over two full semesters in 2019 and spent the following two years advocating to the university administration about the severity of the situation. This archival

[164] Aimee Holland, personal conversation with author, November 8th, 2025.
[165] Konczal, Eddie F. "About Us." Geology Museum, The School of Arts and Sciences | Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://geologymuseum.rutgers.edu/about-us-geology-museum#:~:text=The%20Rutgers%20Geology%20Museum%2C%20the,George%20Hammell%20Cook%20in%201872.

research has led to repatriation of human remains that are not subject to NAGPRA, and the collaboration with Native nations for those that are. Around a year and a half ago the University reburied the remains of formerly enslaved individuals. Through archival research they discovered these enslaved persons' remains in the collection, and then created an advisory council to determine the procedures to rebury these individuals. Community programming centering education around the history of slavery in the area was implemented and these people were reburied. McCarty recounted that she feels proud that they were able to work "in the spirit of NAGPRA" on this case, burying these individuals with ceremony and respect.[166] Since then, they have continued the consulting process with Native American nations for the return of human remains through NAGPRA. Finally, I will briefly discuss the previous repatriation of human remains from Mount Holyoke.

2.3 Mount Holyoke's Response to NAGPRA

A majority of this section reviews Aaron Miller's work to repatriate a woman's skeleton from Mount Holyoke to the Stockbridge Munsee and Nipmuc in 2020-2021. Miller began working at the college in 2012 at the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum.[167] Through his ten years at MHC he shifted away from the Skinner Museum and was hired as an Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture at the Mount Holyoke Art Museum. During this time he acted as the NAGPRA Coordinator for the college. Miller facilitated the transfer of hundreds of archaeological materials from the Geology Department to the Art Museum. He collaborated with now-emeritus Geology faculty member Stevie Dunn on this initiative. Miller also discussed a historic anthropology museum, separate from the Skinner and Art Museum, about which I have

[166] Carol McCarty and Lauren Neitzke-Adamo, personal conversation with author, November 7, 2025.
[167] Aaron Miller, personal conversation with author, May 1, 2025.

found no further information. The repatriation of the Indigenous ancestor was possible because of an archival letter describing how the remains came to Mount Holyoke. I have quoted this letter in Chapter 1. Mount Holyoke publicly describes the repatriation in these terms: "the College legally repatriated the remains to the Stockbridge-Munsee community of western Massachusetts in 2020, and they, in turn, physically repatriated the remains to the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Nation on Oct. 15, 2021."[168] The timeframe of this repatriation is congruent with other institutions' responses to NAGPRA, such as Vassar, Skidmore, and the body donation program at UMass.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter seeks to impart a common understanding of NAGPRA, and various repatriation efforts at other institutions which have directly shaped the work completed at Mount Holyoke College. I looked to these case studies, and advice from professionals when beginning the project, and continually reached out for advice when issues arose. I was most influenced by the stories of institutional work surrounding biological, or nonprovenanced, human remains. The tangible work with the human remains, discussed in the following chapter, is in direct conversation with these instances of repatriation and ethical collections stewardship at other institutions. It is paramount that we look to other institutions for guidance, comparison, and critical dialogue as organizations across the country reckon with these collections. Mount Holyoke can look to other institutional repatriation efforts also to determine what would not be applicable or helpful in the circumstance here. As I have previously stated, each university/museum's path to NAGPRA compliance and ethical collections stewardship is

[168] "Repatriation of Indigenous Ancestral Remains." Mount Holyoke. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.mtholyoke.edu/news/news-stories/repatriation-indigenous-ancestral-remains.

contextually bounded.

Chapter 3: Reckoning with the Collection

3.1 Introduction

While beginning to audit and research the Mount Holyoke paleontology collection in Summer 2024, I repeatedly encountered jarring and uncomfortable ‘materials’ in Clapp. Stashed in the cupboards of an unlocked display cabinet in the basement, I found a human skull cap and more than two dozen human vertebrae. I remember cancelling dinner with a friend that night because I was feeling uneasy about the possibility of going into work the next day to find more human remains. This was not my first run–in with human remains in Clapp either. I can recall acquainting myself with Clapp’s confusing layout in my first year at the college. I was with a friend, walking through the hall of the second floor, when we suddenly found ourselves gazing through the voyeuristic glass pane of one of the articulated skeleton storage cupboards. We were taken aback by what we assumed were unconcerned attitudes of the Biological Sciences professors who allowed this set of human remains to remain on display. At this time, none of the three articulated skeletal cabinets had locks on them, so I opened the other two cabinets. I remember the feeling of opening one of the cabinets and being met with a skeleton missing every single tooth, with every rib broken, too tall for his cabinet as both feet dragged on the hard wood. I still experience this unsettled feeling, one of sadness for the lives lost and disgust at their treatment, every time I interact with the human remains in Clapp.

Discovering these human remains while working in the paleontology collection led me to questions with no answers. What is one supposed to do when they find these materials? Does the person with the most experience in this area have a moral obligation to improve the condition of these remains? What are the tangible next steps that can be accomplished to restore dignity to these bones and how can I get the approval to start this work? I felt a sense of duty to work with these remains. The staff of science technicians at the college who were trying to improve the state of the bones, and other materials in Clapp, had noble goals, but no biological experience. In

Spring 2025 I felt confident in my ability to improve the condition of the collections based on my research in the paleontology collections, my museum studies training, and my pivotal study abroad field school experience.

After discovering the remains in Summer 2024, I reported my findings to science center staff, Heather Chenoweth and Willie Perreault, and I officially joined an effort they had been heading for over a year, to gather the human remains in a secure location. They began bringing hundreds of human and non-human animal bones found throughout Clapp's classrooms, display cases, and cabinets to a dank overcrowded storage room in the basement. Chenoweth began working at Mount Holyoke College on December 1, 2022, and ended up with an office in the basement of Clapp. Because she came to the college at the end of the semester, she was largely left alone to explore Clapp basement. Soon after, Perreault was hired on January 1, 2023, and joined this exploratory mission. He originally had an office in Carr but Chenoweth and Perreault decided to take over a shared office space in the Clapp basement in Spring 2023. They quickly found that the basement was in poor condition. There were discarded light fixtures and trash lining the halls, and the natural history collections were in a state of clear neglect.[169] Early in Spring 2023 Chenoweth and Perreault attended a Biological Sciences department meeting where the chair of the department cavalierly stated that there were fluid preserved human fetuses held in the basement. Chenowth and Perreault both recount feeling disgusted by this flippant statement. After this meeting they began the effort to find these remains. They located dozens of keys to open cabinets, and when they couldn't find matching keys they would remove the hinges to search for these fetuses. Chenoweth and Perreault began to advocate that the state of these fetuses was untenable. Jared Shwartzer, then director of the science center, gave the directive for

[169] Heather Chenoweth and Willie Perreault, personal conversation with author, February 19th, 2026

Chenoweth and Perreault to begin gathering the fetuses.[170] It took over a year for them to find all of the human fetal remains in Clapp Hall.

In the effort to locate the fluid-preserved human fetuses, hundreds of human bones were discovered. Chenoweth states that the directive from her superior to locate and move all of the human fetuses empowered her to implement the same protocol for the human osteological remains.[171] The designated storage room received the human osteological remains that were previously held in the drawers of display cabinets. Willie Perreault recalls that a significant amount of osteological material was held in this room before he began transporting bones here. Some of the first human osteological remains that Chenoweth and Perreault moved to this room were being utilized in a display case. Human bones were on display in the large case that lines the right hand wall in the basement corridor that leads outside to the lower entrance to Kendade. Multiple sets of human remains were used in this anatomical display when Chenoweth and Perreault joined the college. This dusty exhibit contained the "exploded" skull (a disarticulated skull), two other hemisected adult skulls, and a skull with their colette (skullcap) removed. Because of Chenoweth's and Perreault's initiative focusing on the respectful treatment of human remains, these skulls were finally taken off display. As Chenoweth and Perreault opened more cabinets and sifted through more natural history materials, they put anything that looked remotely human, to their untrained eyes, in the bone cabinet in the original storage room. When I began this project this was the condition in which I found most of the human remains.

This chapter reviews the decisions that have resulted in a "human osteology collection," as opposed to the mismanaged human bone assemblage scattered throughout Clapp with which I began. The discussion that follows has been divided into discrete sections for the benefit of

[170] Heather Chenoweth and Willie Perreault, personal conversation with author, February 19th, 2026
[171] Heather Chenoweth and Willie Perreault, personal conversation with author, February 19th, 2026

clarity, however, none of this project was linear and many of my tasks bled into each other temporally. In other words, to my disappointment I found more human bones while I was still describing and documenting others. Additionally, this type of cataloging work is iterative. As it progressed, I realized that I had initially done things inefficiently and decided to redo my work. There is currently no subject matter expert at Mount Holyoke in physical anthropology, which made my work extremely difficult and slow. The entire summer I relied on osteological textbooks, combined with my experience with animal and human remains during my study abroad experience at the Turkana Basin Institute Human Origins Field School in Kenya.

This chapter describes the step-by-step process of the practical, hands-on work I completed with the human remains at Mount Holyoke. I open by outlining the gathering and preliminary categorization of the bones that were found in various locations in Clapp Laboratory. The following section tracks the transportation of human remains from room to room over the summer, as a more permanent location was identified. Then I describe the ways that I created a collection out of a random assemblage of bones, focusing on identification and documentation. Finally, I discuss the respectful restorage process that began over the summer and was completed in Fall 2025.

3.2 Gathering and Preliminarily Organizing The Human Skeletal Remains

Over the summer, there were multiple waves of "discovering" and then gathering the human skeletal materials that were stowed away in seemingly arbitrary rooms throughout Clapp Laboratory. When I began the project a majority of the bones were held in an overcrowded humid storage room. Chenoweth and Perreault had designated this small space as the location to gather all human osteological remains they found. By putting the skeletal remains away in this

room, they were not being handled, disturbed, or removed by students, faculty, or staff. I was first introduced to the room, and the human remains held there, in Summer 2024. I was appalled by the condition of the space. This room has no humidity/climate control and, at the time, it was filled with commingled human remains, animal bones, fluid preserved specimens, coral, taxidermy specimens, and much more. Many of the skulls have mold growths, particularly on the teeth, from their time in this humid room. The majority of the remains rested on the bare, hard wood shelves with no protective padding. This is particularly damaging to the fragile bones of the skull and face. It was always abundantly clear that this room would never be a suitable storage area for the human bones. On top of all of the aforementioned untenable conditions in this room, there was simply no space for me to work.

I decided to transport the human remains from this original storage room to an empty lab space. Because this was a summer project, classroom space was at far less of a premium, and I utilized the ecology lab, Clapp 8. This space is an above ground basement room with windows on two sides. I kept the shades down for the entirety of the summer to control the stifling heat and to prevent pedestrians from unduly viewing the remains. The lab had previously been outfitted with two window air conditioning units that kept the room at a steady temperature of 71 degrees fahrenheit. This space had likely not received any renovation in 40 years, but it worked well for the task at hand. Two large tables take up much of the center of the lab, which total over twelve feet long. The room has two sinks which were integral when thoroughly washing my hands before and after touching the human remains. The room has a large blackboard on wheels that I used daily to draw references when identifying some of the trickier bones. A very large blackboard lines one wall, which I used when estimating the possible minimum number of individuals represented in the assemblage.

Before beginning the transportation process, I preliminarily organized the commingled remains into categories. I deemed it necessary to create imaginary boundaries within this assemblage to begin the process of transportation, identification, and documentation in a controlled manner. It is important to note that if another person had done this work they likely would have chosen different elements to distinguish between groups, or they might have chosen not to categorize them at all. I sorted the human remains into the following four categories: Ward's box, loose materials, models, and articulated skeletons. The Ward's Natural Science supply company box is a wooden chest that is specifically designed to store a complete human skeleton. It is unknown when Mount Holyoke purchased this box, and the human remains within it, but there are Ward's science catalogs advertising the sale of commodified remains dating back to the 1890s.[172] I chose to begin with the remains inside this chest for three reasons. The Ward's box is relatively easy to transport, it could be assumed that a majority of these bones came from the same individual, and I was able to postpone the issue of restorage by returning each skeletal element to their original location within the box. The closed nature of this entity provided a sense of security that was integral while finding my footing in the first few weeks of this process.

The second, and largest, conceptual section I created is entitled "loose materials." This is an incredibly varied group spanning from dozens of commingled vertebrae, to stray long bones, to many skulls of varying completeness. Most of these loose bones were located in the wood cabinet in the original storage room, and were not in any type of storage container. Throughout the summer, as more bones were being located and gathered with the rest of the assemblage, this category worked as a catch-all grouping that could accommodate a wide variety of remains. In the middle of the summer I opened a large plastic tub in a separate corner of the original storage room that I believed only contained casts/models of hominid skulls, brains, and long bones.

[172] Ward project. Accessed April 26, 2026. https://wardproject.org/.

When I opened this container I found that real human bones were intermingled with these plaster casts. In this case, the remains were identified, documented, and added to the loose materials category. There is a display case in the landing between the first and second floors of Clapp. Previously it held an exhibit on vertebral morphology across species and included fish, mammal, and human remains. Behind the glass panes hung a partial articulated skeleton (vertebral column, ribs, pelvic and shoulder girdle). Below this partial axial skeleton sat five adult vertebrae. While Chenoweth and Perreault had known about these remains, they were not previously removed due to the display cases' inaccessibility. We spent one morning dismantling a portion of the case to finally take these remains off of display. While I could have accessioned the torso as a partially-articulated skeleton, or even as a model, I again decided to categorize these remains as "loose". Towards the end of August, Chenoweth and Perreault found three human feet in a drawer in the bottom of a display cabinet in the basement. These feet were again put into the loose material category.

The next category I will describe are the anatomical models that utilize real human skeletal materials. Only eight separate elements make up this third category titled "models." I define this category as bones that have been mounted, altered, and/or marked for use in anatomical instruction, but do not include the complete articulated skeletons. Some examples of the models in our collection include temporal bones with alterations to demonstrate the workings of the inner ear, a half-skull with faux muscle, tendons, nerves, and veins attached, and an exploded skull. An exploded or Beauchêne skull involves first cleaning and bleaching the skull, followed by boiling the remains until the sutures that hold the twenty two bones of the adult human skull together are able to be pulled apart.[173] The bones were then punctured/drilled to be

[173] The Beauchêne method: Creating an exploded skull | the bulletin of the royal college of surgeons of england. Accessed April 27, 2026. https://publishing.rcseng.ac.uk/doi/10.1308/rcsbull.2022.85.

fitted onto a brass armature. This practice began in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century in France.[174] The remains in the model category have been purposefully defaced to be used as teaching/display tools.

One may assume that these models were all purchased from outside sources, however this is not necessarily the case. For some, like the exploded skull, there is a biological supply company, Deyrolle, marked on the base of the model. Others, I suspect, were created by Mount Holyoke faculty, staff, or students. One of the main reasons for my distinction between models and loose materials stemmed from the difference in accessioning procedure. For example, within the loose materials there is a disarticulated skull that is not mounted. This is a skull from a teenager/young adult, who passed away and then the skull pulled apart in the same manner as exploded skulls. Even though they have the same number of bones, I labeled the model exploded skull as one entity whereas I gave a separate accession number and description to each bone of the disarticulated skull that is not mounted. While one recommendation for an ethical future for these models could be dismounting the human remains from this exoticized, macabre display, I decided that this was a distant prospect and that the better accessioning procedure would be to label each model as one element.

Finally, I decided that each of the four articulated skeletons, which are each almost complete bodies, received one accession number. The reason these four skeletons were grouped in this way is similar to the reasoning behind the models. These articulated skeletons are a single entity, and presumably each is one individual. However, because each of the four skeletons are nearly complete, I decided to give them their own spreadsheet subsection to detail each region of the body. These skeletons were grouped together and were processed last because of their

[174] The Beauchêne method: Creating an exploded skull | the bulletin of the royal college of surgeons of england. Accessed April 27, 2026. https://publishing.rcseng.ac.uk/doi/10.1308/rcsbull.2022.85.

original location on the second floor of Clapp. I was only able to work to accession and analyze them when a new bone storage room was created.

These different conceptual sections enabled me to systematically transport the human remains from their original location to the lab in which I began the identification and documentation processes. The order that I have discussed each category is the chronological order in which I processed the remains, understanding that accessioning was not linear as more bones were being found throughout the summer. Transportation proved an incredibly difficult part of this project. Considerations while moving the remains included keeping originally spatially correlated bones together, preventing damaging the remains, timing their transportation when no one else was in the hallway, and handling the remains with as much care and respect, as this situation allows, at all times.

3.3 Transporting the Remains

The first remains transported from their original location were the bones held in the Ward's box. The Ward's box was stored in the wooden bone cabinet in the original storage room. Cataloging this closed system with a finite number of materials was less daunting than beginning with the large and ever-growing number of loose bones. There was no complete skull held in the Ward's box, which was also beneficial when starting out. Skulls, in my experience, are particularly difficult to work with. It has raised interesting questions for me about what we are socialized to recognize as human and what we do not. For example, I don't ever forget the life lived when encountering a skull, but this tends to be obscured when working with a finger bone. This influenced my choice to begin with the Ward's box. Starting there felt necessary for me to gain momentum, confidence, and skill to then tackle the more difficult remains.

After weeks of planning, the day came to finally begin the hands-on, osteological work I set out to accomplish. I placed the unwieldy, bone-filled box on a rolling cart that Perreault and I had altered to be fit for the task of hauling human bones. We removed the top two shelving units of the cart to increase stability, and affixed foam covered by plastic sheeting on the remaining three shelves. Moving the Ward's box was relatively simple, even though one of the brass handles is broken and there was a continuous worry that the bottom paneling would fail under the weight of the bones. With this box, I did not have to worry about any remains rolling off the cart, or waiting for a hallway free of people. The "loose materials" and models were a completely different story. Because they were not in any storage vessels, the skulls and other loose bones were placed directly on the foam covered cart shelves. For the remains that do not lay evenly, or are incredibly fragile, I carried them swiftly and nervously through the hallway, making many trips. The teaching models often contain small metal hinges that allow a portion of the bone to swing open for a view of the internal anatomy. During transit I held their sturdy mounting bases as well as the moveable portion of the bone to relieve any undo strain on the delicate hardware.

The articulated skeletons, which I will discuss in detail in the restorage section, were the most complex, physically straining, and emotionally challenging to transport. Three articulated skeletons were stored on the second floor of Clapp southern hallway near the stairwell. These skeletons are held in flimsy wooden boxes, and one of these cabinets has a window pane through which the entire skeleton is visible. An additional articulated skeleton, referred to as "Bill Bones" in the 1948 Newspaper clipping quotes in Chapter 1, has no accompanying storage box. He resided in the corner of the original storage room when I started the project. "Bill Bones" was hanging on a modern, rolling skeleton stand. I rolled him slowly through the hallway and into

Clapp 8 with the rest of the hundreds of loose bones, models, and the Wards box materials that took up both of my work tables. When moving the skeleton, I made sure that his swaying limbs did not collide with the stainless steel metal rod holding him up. His presence in the lab during those formative first weeks acted as a daunting reminder that I would have to somehow move and catalogue three other articulated skeletons before summer's end.

While the fear of damaging the bones in transit was ever–present in my mind, the greatest difficulty of this transportation process was avoiding the middle school aged summer camp children traipsing through the halls. Multiple academic summer programs utilized classroom space in Clapp, resulting in dozens of curious children walking through the basement throughout the workday. Thankfully, there were no meetings between the children and any of the human remains. As I brought portions of the bone assemblage into the lab room, I began identifying and cataloguing each element. I first brought the Ward's box into the lab for cataloging, once those remains were accessioned I began bringing the loose materials in the lab to catalogue, and so on. The following section describes the documentation and identification processes, which were the main goals of this work.

3.4 Assembling a Collection

On June 5th, 2025, I created the procedure document that outlines the organizing, cataloging, and identifying methodological approach taken to inventory the human osteological remains at Mount Holyoke. The procedures varied slightly between the different sections of the collection, due to the fact that different information about models vs. complete articulated skeletons vs. single loose bones can be analyzed. During my study abroad experience I received training in both vertebrate and human anatomy, and felt confident in my ability to identify a

majority of human bones, however, the remains in Mount Holyoke's collection brought their own set of challenges. For instance, I had never seen the internal bones of the skull before and had a very difficult time identifying them. The Ward's box contained small shavings of bone tissue that were completely foreign to me. Only later did I find out that these are the unfused annular epiphysis of adolescent vertebrae. *The Human Bone Manual,* by Tim White[175], was instrumental when identifying every single bone in the collection. The textbook also provided scaffolding for the type of information that would later be included in the spreadsheet, such as integral bony landmarks, bone color, and photographs.

I documented various details about each known human bone. First, the bone element was assigned an accession number, "MHC HOC #". MHC stands for Mount Holyoke College and HOC means Human Osteology Collection, and the accession numbers ascend in the chronological order in which I documented each element. Both singular bones, as well as articulated elements of multiple bones received one accession number. One lone wrist bone and an entire articulated skeleton each received just one number. I wrote the accession number and the analysis of each bone on index cards. Where able, I attached these physical labels to the bones with a piece of string. It was not possible to affix the ID cards to very small bones or the skulls, so these remains were placed on top of the index cards, and were carefully moved together. I then ascertained and documented the following information: the accession number; a colloquial description of the bone; details on any visible writing on the bone; the number of bones in this entity; the bone identification; the color; pathologies or trauma; postmortem damage hardware/alterations present; a photograph of the remains; comment; and my name and date. This information is kept in a spreadsheet entitled "Human Osteology Collection Working

[175] Tim White and Pieter A. Folkens *The Human Bone Manual*. Amsterdam (Elsevier Academic Press, 2005).

Spreadsheet." I decided to take photographs of the human remains, never to be used for research purposes, but as a safeguard in case the bones were separated from their ID label. I felt it was important to be able to visually correlate the remains with their accession number (which rests beside the remains in each photograph) so none of the information gathered would be lost.

I completed this tedious, but straightforward, process for nearly 1,500 human bones, and teeth, over the entire summer. This cataloging process was the logical next step when stewarding and caring for these long disregarded human remains. Because I carefully documented the human osteological assemblage, proper storage materials were purchased, an estimated number of 28 different individuals in the collection was determined, and the scattered body parts of various individuals were united. This preliminary inventorying process was a necessary starting point to all the work that must come next to reckon with these remains. How can we talk about the repatriation of human remains when we have no understanding of the extent of this collection? This documentation process was directly helpful in the final stage of the work initiated over the summer, restorage.

3.5 Respectful Restorage

The proper and respectful storage of the human osteological remains was one of the central goals of this summer research project. The key to this restorage was finding a climate–controlled, secure room with no former use in Clapp. Perreault, Chenoweth, and I wracked our brains identifying contenders, but opportunity space on this campus is few and far between. The chemistry stock room in Carr was a contender, but I felt adamant about the importance of the bones remaining in Clapp. We very briefly thought about the rock storage room near Hooker Auditorium in Clapp, however that room is barely suitable for rocks.

Ultimately we converted the old shop room into a natural history collections storage and work area. This space previously housed a professor's laboratory who had recently retired, and was then used in the 2024–2025 year as a workshop area. Earlier in the summer it had been emptied, remediated from mold, and repainted, as a lab for Chenoweth to teach larger groups of students microscopy. However, through day-long negotiations, emphasizing the clear need for a separate space for these collections, Chenoweth graciously forwent this desperately needed teaching space to be used to store collections.

We decided to fill this new space with a significant portion of the natural history collection. We moved multiple cabinets, and thousands of biological materials into these two adjoining rooms. This entailed an entire week of pulling dozens of drawers from cabinets, placing them on our biggest carts, moving the empty cabinets into the new storage room with dollys, and then replacing the shelves in their cabinets. Two cabinets full of miscellaneous, commingled materials now reside in the new storage space. One of these cabinets had previously been organized and catalogued by a student as a summer project. The other sat in the original bone storage room and has not yet been processed. We also moved two metal cabinets filled with small game skulls, into this new space. There is a work station and a portable photography rig to be used by student workers when tending to these collections. The new space holds both animal, and human skeletal remains. One-third of the room on the left hand side, which includes a sink, is overflowing with unorganized, uncataloged animal bones. Most of the bones had previously been stored in the original storage room, some resided in the lab Clapp 8, and others were taken off display from the glass cabinets lining the walls of the basement hallway. There is so much work to be done in caring for and restoring the animal bone assemblage. Finally, the other two-thirds of the new bone storage room was designated to hold the human osteology collection.

Moving all of these materials into this new storage space was an involved and lengthy ordeal. First I measured the plans for the furniture placements, and marked the entire room with tape. Once I was convinced all the materials would be accommodated, Perreault and I began transporting the articulated skeletons and their associated cabinets from the second floor down to the basement. We decided to put these skeletons in the new space first because their placement determined the rest of the available space. On the second floor, next to the articulated skeleton cabinets there was an old, heavy skeleton stand. I brought this down to the basement and temporarily put the articulated skeleton who does not have a box, "Bill Bones" onto this stand. I used the modern, stainless steel, rolling skeleton stand to transport the three articulated skeletons from the second floor of Clapp down to the basement. I began by taking the articulated skeleton from each of their cabinets, placing them on this rolling stand which I had fitted with bubble wrap so as not to damage the bones in movement, and rolled them through the second floor hall, into the elevator, and to the basement.

Once a skeleton was secure in the basement, Perreault and I went back up to the second floor to retrieve the related cabinet. We used a dolly to move these surprisingly flimsy wooden boxes and slid them into their designated spots in the bone room. There is a window in the new bone storage room that looks out to the walkway between Clapp and Kendade Perreault and I took special care to make sure that none of the remains are visible by passersby, particularly the cabinet with the window that looks into the skeleton. Once one cabinet was in place, I picked up the articulated skeleton from the rolling stand and placed them back in the box they were originally in. It was not an easy task, as the entire skeleton is quite heavy, especially accounting for the hardware adjoining every single bone. Perreault and I then repeated this process for the other two articulated skeletons and their associated storage cabinet. One cabinet is so tall that we

could barely fit into the Clapp elevator. Perreault had to remove the elevator light fixture for those integral extra two inches of space. Once this onerous task was completed, I began transporting the rest of the human skeletal remains into this new "bone room". At this point I did not have the proper storage materials, so I created a temporary storage plan: all of the bones that were previously in the Ward's box would remain within the chest and all of the other bones would be squeezed into a small white cabinet in the bone room. I lined the cabinet's shelves with foam padding and plastic sheeting to house the loose materials, and placed the models on top. This was not a perfect solution, but was a vast improvement to returning the bones to their previous storage room. All of the known human osteological remains at Mount Holyoke were in the new bone room at the start of the Fall 2025 semester. This marked the first time that all of the human bones at Mount Holyoke were held in one room, and the first time none of the human remains were on display.

To obtain restorage supply materials, I had created a spreadsheet, in early August, outlining the resources necessary to properly restore the human osteology collection. Through conversations with experts at other institutions (Aaron Miller, April Biesaw), and museum best practices, I determined that procuring archival "specimen" boxes was the correct next step.[176] Using the completed inventory catalogue that I had created over the summer, I calculated the necessary number of boxes, amount of unbleached muslin to respectfully cover the bones, and the correct cabinet size.[177] The biology department purchased the materials from Gaylord Archival, which arrived in early September. I finished restoring all of the remains during Fall break (Oct. 11–14). Where applicable, each individual was placed in their own box. Separate

[176] "How to Handle & Store Natural History Artifacts." Resource Center. Accessed April 26, 2026. https://info.gaylord.com/resources/handle-store-natural-history-artifacts#:~:text=55%25%20relative%20humidity.-,Handling:%20Wear%20nitrile%20gloves%20to%20protect%20yourself%20and%20the%20specimen,Provide%20adequate%20support%20during%20transport.
[177] April Biesaw, personal conversation with author, August 9, 2025.

entities that I had no reason to group with other bones (e.g. articulated foot, portions of skull) were also allotted their own box. I placed the identification index cards that I had originally attached to each bone in the new box. Some of the storage boxes came with foam padding, while others did not. I cut pieces of the foam padding that was originally on the lab table to place inside the boxes, followed by unbleached muslin. The models do not have their own boxes, they are kept within the white cabinet in the bone room, as opposed to the large metal cabinet that holds the rest of the human remains.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the first steps taken to reckon with the human osteology collection held at Mount Holyoke College. The practical work completed in Summer 2025 has resulted in the identification and cataloging of nearly 1,500 human bones and teeth. All of these remains are now centralized in a climate–controlled, secure room, and are temporarily stored in a more respectful manner. There is much more that can be done with the human remains to accurately estimate age at death, sex, occupation, etc. This analysis, done by osteology consultants, can restore some aspects of personhood to the remains and hopefully lead to their repatriation.[178] The final chapter of this thesis more clearly investigates possible next steps for Mount Holyoke to truly reckon with these collections.

Conclusion

[178] de la Cova, "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection," 152.

This final chapter will outline possible routes of future work with the goal of ethical and respectful care of human remains in museum collections. These proposed institutional changes would not only improve Mount Holyoke's policy regarding human remains on campus, but also implement positive effects for other mismanaged materials on campus. First, I discuss broader calls to action at the federal and state levels. The context specific next steps that could be implemented at Mount Holyoke College follow. The intervention discussed in the previous chapter is only the beginning of a very long process.

1.1 Next Steps for and Beyond NAGPRA

The fact that human remains and objects of cultural importance can only be claimed by Federally Recognized Tribes under NAGPRA is one significant gap in the legislation. The estimated 400 non–federally–recognized tribes in the United States have no current route to repatriation, besides collaborating with federally recognized tribes.[179] California passed CalNAGPRA into law in 2001, which seeks to address the pitfalls of the federal regulations.[180] CalNAGPRA requires that all museums and agencies that receive state funding, as opposed to federal funding, also comply with NAGPRA's regulations. Furthermore, this law opens a path to repatriation for non federally funded tribes. What could similar state level protections look like in Massachusetts, or New England as a whole?

Additionally, NAGPRA has been criticized as it does not account for the unique status of Native Hawaiians in the United States. Because there is no sovereign Native Hawaiian tribal

[179] Office, U.S. Government Accountability. "U.S. Gao." Indian Issues: Federal Funding for Non-Federally Recognized Tribes. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-12-348#:~:text=Why%20GAO%20Did%20This%20Study,tribes%27%20federal%20funding%20and%20eligibility.

[180] "Calnagpra." California Native American Heritage Commission CalNAGPRA Comments. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://nahc.ca.gov/calnagpra/.

government, NAGPRA can only mandate that museums and universities collaborate and repatriate to Native Hawaiian "organizations."[181] This term "Native Hawaiian Organization" is too broad, as there are no centralized sovereign powers that can make decisions about repatriation claims and outcomes. This leads to many Native Hawaiian groups claiming affiliation with a given set of ancestral remains or cultural objects.[182] There have been calls for a separate repatriation statute for Native Hawaiian remains and belongings, to amend the shortcomings of NAGPRA.[183]

Furthermore, NAGPRA could be more forcefully upheld to push institutions to conduct this work, by increasing monetary federal penalties. In other words, law does not have much bite. Between 1990 and 2010, there were 64 allegations of failure to comply with the law on the part of museums. Thirty one of these allegations were investigated, and only 15 museums were found noncompliant and eight of those museums were forced to pay a measly $42,679 in fees in total.[184] Repatriation enforcement has often relied on societal pressure to hold institutions and museums accountable. However, is the threat of bad optics enough in the current political climate to make museums comply with this human rights law? I argue that the past 36 years that museums in America have been given to conduct good faith efforts to repatriate stolen Indigenous kin and belongings is long enough. Now the straggler institutions that have not abided by the law, both through malicious intent or mismanagement and neglect, should be held accountable for their human rights violations.

Additionally, there have been calls for the development and implementation of a new federal law, one that would provide a path to repatriation for the human remains of enslaved

---

[181] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 103.
[182] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 101.
[183] Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA,* 107.
[184] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 118.

individuals. This act, the Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act (EGPRA) would work in similar ways to NAGPRA, with a few key distinctions. One difference is the legal structures for Native Americans and African Americans in the United States. African Americans do not have sovereign nations within the United States with which to negotiate repatriation. I maintain that the difficulty in finding linear connections between enslaved ancestors and current kin "should not preclude the reburial of these remains."[185] This work elicits conversations about what repatriation or reburial looks like with no known direct descendants. What would the repatriation of enslaved peoples' remains to cemeteries already protected by the African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program look like?

However, this brief discussion of possible congressional routes for repatriation legislation development does not preclude individual institutions from beginning this work. More and more institutions are beginning the process of repatriating the remains of likely-enslaved individuals, based on ethical concerns, rather than federal mandates. Initial reports of these cases include Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, and the Smithsonian, among others.[186] This brings us finally, to a discussion of what can be done next at Mount Holyoke College.

2.1 Next Steps For Mount Holyoke

[185] Nathaniel Gray Sommers, Repatriating the Dead: The Necessity of an Enslaved Peoples' Grave Repatriation Act to Break One of the Surviving Chains of Slavery, 75 Case W. Rsrv. L. Rev. 697 (2024): 723. Available at: https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev/vol75/iss2/8

[186] Crimmins, Peter. "Historic Skulls of Black Americans to Be Repatriated by Penn Museum." WHYY, April 14, 2021. https://whyy.org/articles/penn-museum-to-repatriate-skulls-of-black-americans-and-slaves-from-cuba/. "Descendants Call for Immediate Return of Human Remains in Harvard Museum Collections, Criticize University Report: News: The Harvard Crimson." News | The Harvard Crimson. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2022/9/26/call-for-return-human-remains/.

Mount Holyoke College is in a unique position, in that there is currently no use that these human remains serve to the college. They have not been used as teaching specimens for over a decade, and biology professors on campus don't seem to miss them.[187] Mount Holyoke offers no physical anthropology courses, unlike other institutions discussed in this thesis, such as UMass, Skidmore, and Vassar. This is not to say that institutions that continue to utilize human remains in their educational offerings should not examine their holdings critically. Rather it is to emphasize yet another reason that Mount Holyoke should not hold these remains. Unlike UMass, Mount Holyoke will not have to engage in laborious conversations around how to ethically procure new human remains for teaching purposes. Our task, however, is to determine how to ameliorate the harm done by Mount Holyoke in collecting and retaining these human remains.

First, Mount Holyoke College must become NAGPRA–compliant. While there is no known provenance for the human remains, the college has not yet hired experts in the field to assess the holdings. Bernstein and Associates is a NAGPRA consultant firm that specializes in forensic osteological analysis, NAGPRA notice submission, and facilitating collaboration between institutions and Native Nations.[188] Hiring this consulting firm, which has been in the repatriation business for over three decades, is the next step for Mount Holyoke. The Bernstein and Associates team has experience across the United States, facilitating between Native Nations and universities, museums, and federal agencies.

Furthermore, I suggest that Mount Holyoke hire an expert whose entire position would focus on ethical stewardship of the entirety of the collections at the college. There are nearly fifty thousand specimens that have been wasting away in Clapp with little to no professional care for decades. The work that student employees as well as Heather Chenoweth and Willie Perreault

[187] Sarah Bacon, personal conversation with author, December 16, 2025
[188] Bernstein & Associates. Bernstein & Associates. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://nagpra.info/.

support is important, of course, but a unified effort working towards the same goal under one Mount Holyoke position would yield far better results. The vastness of the collections warrants a collections team, but one dedicated professional staffer would suffice initially. How will the hundreds of poisonous taxidermy specimens be made safe for classroom use? Who will care for the fluid-preserved human fetuses? How many independent studies, theses, and learning opportunities could be available to interested students if they had a mentor with the necessary education and experience? This collections expert that Mount Holyoke could hire would also act as the main point of contact for the Bernstein and Associates consultants.

Additionally, calls for future work expand beyond what will be done with the physical human remains. Educational initiatives and programming that could be provided by the college concerning the topics covered in this thesis are severely needed. Understanding histories of collecting, Indigenous activist history, and contemporary ways colonialism persists in western Massachusetts would all be incredibly rich topics of campus wide education. I often find that when I explain my senior thesis to fellow students on campus, even with professors, they are surprised that there are human remains at Mount Holyoke. They often give me a disgusted look, and I choose to explain NAGPRA through what they are more familiar with. I say something along the lines of, "Oh you know when art museums have an empty podium where an object once was, and now they have an index card that says 'This Object is Under Review for NAGPRA'. That law also pertains to human remains." It is paramount that Mount Holyoke facilitates campus-wide engagement to learn about the structures that produce the violence of human remains in institutions. What would it look like if next year's annual Mount Holyoke common read was the pivotal book *Decolonizing Museums* by Amy Lonetree? What if Mount

Holyoke's Skinner Museum, a temporarily closed historic museum on campus, was completely reimagined?

The research presented in this thesis is in no way the end of the work that must be done. I have always conceptualized this work as the catalyst to facilitate broader conversations about the future action steps. This intervention began at its core because there was absolutely no basic information about our holdings. How could we take next steps when the college doesn't even know where the human bones are? When we don't know simple information about the number of bones, the number of people, etc.? While there are clear next steps Mount Holyoke can take, this will take time and money. This thesis calls for further action, and is a synthesis of the work that has been completed so far. I hope that it will inform future discussions about ethical collections futures, as there is still much to do.

Bibliography

"About Repatriation at UMass : Repatriation : UMass Amherst." Repatriation. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umass.edu/repatriation/about-repatriation-umass.

Agarwal, Sabrina C. "The disposability and inclusion of Brown bodies." *American Journal of Biological Anthropology,* 186(1), e25003. (2025): https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.25003

"Anthropology." Anthropology | Skidmore College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://catalog.skidmore.edu/departments-programs/anthropology/#text.

Annual Report 1931/32 written by Mignon Talbot, Geology and Geography Department Files, LD. 7092.6, Folder1, Series B, Reports 1930/31-1933/34, 1935/36-1940/41, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

Bernstein & Associates. Bernstein & Associates. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://nagpra.info/.

Blakey, Michael L. "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology." *Critique of Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (October 1987): 7–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275x8700700203.

"Calnagpra." California Native American Heritage Commission CalNAGPRA Comments. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://nahc.ca.gov/calnagpra/.

Carney, Scott M. *The Red Market: On the Trail of the World's Organ Brokers, Bone Thieves, Blood Farmers, and Child Traffickers.* William Morrow, 2011.

Chari, Sangita and Lavallee, Jaime M.N. *Accomplishing NAGPRA : Perspectives on the Intent, Impact, and Future of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*. Oregon State University Press, 2013.

de la Cova, Carlina. "Marginalized Bodies and the Construction of the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Skeletal Collection: A Promised Land Lost" in *Bioarchaeology of Marginalized People*, edited by Madeleine L. Mant and Alyson Jaagumägi Holland. Academic Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-815224-9.00007-5.

Crimmins, Peter. "Historic Skulls of Black Americans to Be Repatriated by Penn Museum." WHYY, April 14, 2021. https://whyy.org/articles/penn-museum-to-repatriate-skulls-of-black-americans-and-slaves-from-cuba/.

"Descendants Call for Immediate Return of Human Remains in Harvard Museum Collections, Criticize University Report: News: The Harvard Crimson." News | The Harvard Crimson.

Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2022/9/26/call-for-return-human-remains/.

"Early Historical Background." Milwaukee Public Museum. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.mpm.edu/index.php/content/wirp/ICW-159.

"How to Handle & Store Natural History Artifacts." Resource Center. Accessed April 26, 2026. https://info.gaylord.com/resources/handle-store-natural-history-artifacts#:~:text=55%25%20relative%20humidity.-,Handling:%20Wear%20nitrile%20gloves%20to%20protect%20yourself%20and%20the%20specimen,Provide%20adequate%20support%20during%20transport.

"Interior Department Announces Final Rule for Implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act." U.S. Department of the Interior, December 6, 2023. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-final-rule-implementation-native-american-graves.

Kevin P. Ray, NAGPRA and Its Limitations: Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Heritage, 15 J. MARSHALL REV. INTELL. PROP. L. 472 (2016).

Kohlstedt, Sally Gregory. "Curiosities and Cabinets: Natural History Museums and Education on the Antebellum Campus." *Isis* 79, no. 3 (1988): 405–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/234673. (409)

Konczal, Eddie F. "About Us." Geology Museum, The School of Arts and Sciences | Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://geologymuseum.rutgers.edu/about-us-geology-museum#:~:text=The%20Rutgers%20Geology%20Museum%2C%20the,George%20Hammell%20Cook%20in%201872.

Lonetree, Amy. *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Martin, Debra L., Harrod, Ryan P., Pérez, Ventura R. *Bioarchaeology: An Integrated Approach to Working with Human Remains*. Springer New York, NY, 2013.

McCallister, Danielle C., Moore, Tara L., Pokines, James T. "The Effects of Taphonomic Color Alteration Upon Skeletal Recovery Rates During Surface Searches." in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* Volume 71, Issue 1 (2026): 525-32. https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.70201

Meister, Barbara, ed. 1997. *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide. Understanding and Implementing NAGPRA and the Official Smithsonian and Other*

Repatriation Policies. New York: American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation.

Mihesuah, Devon A. et al. *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

Mount Holyoke College | History, women's education, Seven Sisters, & Facts | Britannica. Accessed April 27, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mount-Holyoke-College.

Morgan, Lynn. *Icons of Life: A Cultural History of Human Embryos*. CA: University of California Press, 2009.

"Mount Holyoke College Art Museum." Mount Holyoke College, December 15, 2022. https://offices.mtholyoke.edu/hr/handbook/art_museum.

Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly - fall 2024 from the archives: 'cornelia and concrete'. Accessed April 27, 2026. https://magazine.mtholyoke.edu/mthaq/fall_2024/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=2026907.

Mount Holyoke News, November 19, 1948 Page 1, continued on Page 5, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections

Natural history museum - vassar encyclopedia - vassar college. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/collections-and-curiosities/natural-history-museum/.

Office, U.S. Government Accountability. "U.S. Gao." Indian Issues: Federal Funding for Non-Federally Recognized Tribes. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-12-348#:~:text=Why%20GAO%20Did%20This%20Study,tribes%27%20federal%20funding%20and%20eligibility.

"Our History." Deyrolle. Accessed April 26, 2026. https://deyrolle.com/en/pages/notre-histoire.

Raja, N.B., Dunne, E.M., Matiwane, A. *et al.* Colonial history and global economics distort our understanding of deep-time biodiversity. *Nat Ecol Evol* **6**, 145–154 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01608-8

"Repatriation of Indigenous Ancestral Remains: A Vassar Timeline." Timeline | Decolonizing Vassar | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/decolonizing-vassar/repatriation-timeline.

"Repatriation." Anthropology - Repatriation | Vassar College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/anthropology/history/repatriation.

"Repatriation of Indigenous Ancestral Remains." Mount Holyoke. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.mtholyoke.edu/news/news-stories/repatriation-indigenous-ancestral-remains.

Report of the Building Committee of Lyman Williston Hall to the Trustees of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary November 15, 1876, Page 10, Buildings and Grounds Collection, Box 106, Williston Hall, General 1873-1874, Folder 2, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

Roberston, E. Bruce. "Curiosity Cabinets, Museums, and Universities." In *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation*, edited by COLLEEN J. SHEEHY, NED-New edition., 43–54. University of Minnesota Press, 2006. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv73x.8.

Schmal, John. "The Enduring Legacy of the Yaquis: Perpetual Resistance (1531-1927)." Indigenous Mexico, January 11, 2026. https://www.indigenousmexico.org/articles/the-enduring-legacy-of-the-yaquis-perpetual-resistance.

Smithsonian's 'Bone Doctor' Scavenged Brains, Thousands of Body Parts - Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/interactive/2023/ales-hrdlicka-smithsonian-brains-racism/.

"The Founding of the Seven Sisters." Vassar Encyclopedia. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/notable-events/the-seven-sisters/.

The Beauchêne method: Creating an exploded skull | the bulletin of the royal college of surgeons of england. Accessed April 27, 2026. https://publishing.rcseng.ac.uk/doi/10.1308/rcsbull.2022.85.

The Zoological Laboratory Photo, Undated, Buildings and Grounds Collection, Box 108, Folder 3, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections

Toensing, Gale Courey. "107 Years Later." ICT, November 28, 2025. https://ictnews.org/archive/107-years-later/.

"UMass Amherst by the Numbers." UMass Amherst. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umass.edu/gateway/umass-edge/about-umass-amherst/umass-amherst-numbers.

Undergraduate Programs : Department of Anthropology : UMass Amherst." Department of Anthropology. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umass.edu/anthropology/academics/undergraduate-programs.

"Vassar College." Vassar College | Top Northeastern US Liberal Arts College. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.vassar.edu/.

Ventura Pérez, "Developing Donor- Based Osteological Collections: A Case Study." Paper presented at Bioarchaeologists' Northeast Regional Dialogue conference, Hamden, CT. November 8, 2025. https://calendar.qu.edu/event/39313-2025-bioarcheologists-northeast-regional-dialogue

Walker, Richard Arlin. "The Ancient One Takes Another Step toward Home." ICT, November 29, 2025. https://ictnews.org/archive/the-ancient-one-takes-another-step-toward-home/#:~:text=The%20Ancient%20One%20was%20determined,for%20the%20past%20several%20years.%E2%80%9D.

Ward project. Accessed April 26, 2026. https://wardproject.org/.

Welcome - anatomical gift program - UMass Chan Medical School - Worcester. Accessed April 25, 2026. https://www.umassmed.edu/agp/.

White, T. D., and Pieter A. Folkens. *The Human Bone Manual*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Academic Press, 2005.

Williston Hall Fire January 21, 1918 by Abby Howe Turner, Page 1, Buildings and Grounds Collection Box 106, General 1873-1874, Folder 2, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

25 USC Ch. 32: NATIVE AMERICAN GRAVES PROTECTION AND REPATRIATION