

## “This Place Belongs to Us”: Historic Contexts as a Mechanism for Multivocality in the National Register

Kelsey E. Hanson , Steve Baumann, Theresa Pasqual, Octavius Seowtewa, and T. J. Ferguson

*Since the creation of the National Register of Historic Places, determining eligibility for listing on it has become the fundamental process driving archaeology in the United States. This process affects how archaeological sites are identified, recorded, evaluated, and ultimately how they are protected. Yet less than 6% of properties on the National Register are archaeological sites. Although scholars often lament the rigidity of the National Register and its eligibility criteria, notable revisions in National Park Service guidance pave the way for important changes. One of the National Register’s most pervasive and fundamental concepts—the historic context—remains deeply undertheorized when compared to more familiar terms like “significance” and “integrity.” In this article, we argue that archaeologists are well positioned to reinvigorate the National Register by using historic contexts as a mechanism for recognizing layered relationships to places. Using an example from the multivocal nomination of the Inscription Rock Archaeological District as a case study, we argue that the oft-neglected concept of the historic context can be used to commemorate multivocality, moving from one national history to the production of multivocal national histories.*

**Keywords:** National Register of Historic Places, historic contexts, multivocality, El Morro National Monument, cultural resource management

*Desde su introducción, determinar la elegibilidad para incorporarse en el Registro Nacional de Lugares Históricos (NRHP, siglas en inglés) se ha convertido en el proceso fundamental para direccionar la arqueología Americana como la conocemos. Este proceso afecta cómo los sitios arqueológicos son identificados, registrados, evaluados y finalmente cómo son protegidos. Sin embargo, menos del 6% del Registro Nacional está representado por sitios arqueológicos. Mientras los académicos frecuentemente lamentan la rigidez del Registro Nacional y los criterios de elegibilidad asociados, notables revisiones al protocolo del Servicio de Parques Nacionales pavimentan el camino para importantes cambios. Uno de los conceptos más fundamentales y prevalentes del Registro Nacional —el contexto histórico— permanece profundamente subteorizado cuando se compara con conceptos más familiares como “significancia” e “integridad.” En este artículo, argumentamos que los arqueólogos están bien posicionados para revitalizar el Registro Nacional, mediante el uso de contextos históricos como un mecanismo para reconocer relaciones multidimensionales con diferentes lugares. Usando un ejemplo proveniente de la nominación multivocal del Distrito Arqueológico Inscription Rock como caso de estudio, argumentamos que el concepto de contexto histórico, frecuentemente ignorado, puede ser usado para conmemorar multivocalidad, avanzando desde una Historia Nacional hacia la producción de historias nacionales multivocales.*

**Palabras claves:** Registro Nacional de Lugares Históricos, contextos históricos, multivocalidad, Monumento Nacional El Morro, gestión de recursos culturales

The past is an actively constructed and negotiated narrative that is always situated in the present (Lowenthal 1985). Archaeology offers a means of making the past tangible, and cultural resource management is a booming global activity dedicated to deciding which historic

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properties are worthy of protection. This decision-making process entails constructing historical narratives based on criteria that reflect important ideals and values. But how effective are these systems of criteria in creating representative histories? Recent scholarly dialogue actively reconsiders heritage praxis, especially by questioning the universal applicability of existing managerial systems and their role in shaping the future (e.g., Borck 2018; Harrison et al. 2020; Holtorf and Högborg 2020). Internationally, the UNESCO World Heritage List has been a focal point for evaluating the success of heritage protection efforts, and like the National Register of Historic Places (hereafter, NRHP or National Register), it has been critiqued for its Eurocentric selection criteria, its neglect of intangible forms of cultural heritage, and its lack of input from descendant or local communities (Meskell 2018). In this article, we build on this international discourse by providing a perspective of history-making in the United States, offering an avenue of productive change for protecting and honoring places while respecting diverse value systems.

### The National Register and the Production of National Histories

A prominent and prestigious way to create and memorialize histories in the United States is through listing historic properties on the NRHP. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) and managed by the National Park Service (NPS), the National Register is a comprehensive list of the nation's historic places considered worthy of protection. Since its introduction, determining the eligibility of properties for listing on the National Register for compliance with Section 106 and Section 110 of the NHPA has become *the* process driving American archaeology (Lipe and Sebastian 2009:283–297). Its significance is most obvious in the cultural resource management industry, where millions of federal dollars are spent annually to document and mitigate adverse effects to cultural resources. Compliance efforts are driven by a single question: Are these historic properties worthy of listing on the National Register?

This billion-dollar question is puzzling when contrasted with the current makeup of the

National Register. As of 2019, it lists more than 95,000 properties, less than 6% of which are archaeological sites. Given the NRHP's importance in American archaeology, it is remarkable that archaeological properties are so poorly represented in it. One reason for this very low percentage is that properties deemed *eligible* for listing on the National Register are treated as if they were actually listed. The National Register has a fundamental role in defining our nation's history by producing and reaffirming our public memory (Little 1997), and this role should not be taken lightly. Some scholars criticize the National Register and its accompanying eligibility requirements for being elitist, exclusionary, and often incompatible with archaeological data (Little 1997; Mackintosh 1985). Decisions about what is included can either “commemorate or silence parts of the past,” and certain concepts like *integrity* may operate as “gatekeeper[s] to control access to these lists” (Little 1997:179). This results in a list of historic places overwhelmingly dominated by “notable [Euroamerican] individuals and architecturally substantive buildings designed by architects of recognized status” (Mackintosh 1985:72). In some respects, the National Register is incapable of recognizing the so-called negative heritage (*sensu* Meskell 2002) of minorities whose historic properties are often deemed as having insufficient integrity (Schueckler 2018). Archaeologists—the proverbial scientists of history—often call attention to our disciplinary ability to lend voices to those whose stories were omitted from history books. And indeed, archaeology has a rich history of revealing otherwise silenced histories through careful study of the material record (Little 1997:179); however, the National Register currently does not reflect that legacy.

Driven in part by frustration and ambivalence toward these perceived incompatibilities, and in part by the sheer volume of historic properties needing evaluation, the process of Section 106 compliance has become deeply routinized. Sadly, it is true that “NHPA compliance has become a heavily regulated, bureaucratized process” in which “the completion of the process [is treated as] the goal as opposed to achieving the right preservation outcome” (Altschul

2016:79). Such a fundamental legislated process in American archaeology is surprisingly absent from scholarly discourse (Tainter 2004). In light of these observations and given the National Register's central role in archaeology and in the production of national history, it is time to reevaluate its role in American archaeology: what it is, who it serves, and how we work with it.

Over time, archaeological praxis has become increasingly self-reflexive, embracing the importance of collaboration and multivocality. Given this, how do we ensure that the National Register is representative and accurately reflects the multivalency and multivocality of history? In this article, we argue that archaeologists working in the United States are well positioned to theorize historic properties and that a mechanism to do that already exists. NPS guidance on the National Register has been adjusted to "promote a public understanding of history that includes the complex watershed of the past rather than only the 'mainstream'" (Little 1997:185), although this revision has largely gone unnoticed. It is now up to archaeologists to find ways to work within these changes. In this article we advocate for a revitalized approach to the *historic context*, a concept fundamental to National Register eligibility and to archaeological interpretation generally, yet deeply underdeveloped in practice.

### What Is a Historic Context?

The National Register program is driven by three key concepts: historic significance, historic integrity, and historic context. To be listed, historic properties must be *significant*, and they must exhibit enough *historic integrity* to convey this significance today. These qualities, however, cannot be understood in a vacuum and are therefore evaluated through the lens of *historic contexts* (National Park Service 1990:7). Historic contexts are defined as frameworks "organized by theme, place, and time . . . to link historic properties to important [historic] trends . . . in the prehistory or history of a community, State, or the nation during a particular period of time" (National Park Service 1997:4). They are developed as frameworks for understanding "cumulative and inter-related historical importance of

surviving cultural resources" (Scarpino 2010:24) in evaluating National Register eligibility.

Although often overshadowed in scholarly and managerial discourse by the concepts of significance and integrity, the historic context is fundamental to the NRHP, NHPA, and the Section 106 process (D'Avino 2003; Hardesty 2003). Understanding how a historic property relates to a given historic context is critical to determining whether it is worthy of inclusion on the National Register. It is difficult to ascertain whether a single lithic scatter or an isolated highway bridge, for example, is unique, representative, or historically pivotal without knowing more about how it might fit into broader trends and patterns (D'Avino 2003:19).

The concept of historic contexts is so pervasive but so ambiguous that it has rarely been problematized. This ambiguity, however, makes the concept malleable enough to serve new purposes. An important but underappreciated quality of historic contexts is that they are used to define and evaluate all other aspects of significance so long as they "can be demonstrated, through scholarly research, to be important in American history" (National Park Service 1990:8). This means that a historic context can be produced to represent value systems not typically represented in the National Register.

### Contextualizing the Historic Context

One way to understand the potential of the historic context is to evaluate its scope through time. There are three key changes that have set the stage for a revival of the historic context: (1) the creation of "America's Best Idea," (2) the passage of the NHPA in 1966, and (3) post-modern critiques of history and archaeology in the 1990s. Combined, these shifts in discourse provide a crucial way to understand the changes that have occurred in our production of national histories.

#### *Creation of "America's Best Idea"*

Federal involvement in the production and preservation of national history began with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The Antiquities Act of 1906 gave the president the authority to proclaim and reserve "historic

landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest” as national monuments (54 U.S.C. § 320301–320303). In the early twentieth century, national parks and national monuments were overseen by the Department of the Interior but were managed by many disparate and unrelated agencies. To provide cohesive management of historic properties, the National Park Service (NPS) was established in 1916. Declared America’s “best idea” by historian and author Wallace Stegner, the NPS has the mission of preserving the “natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations” (National Park Service 2020). Whereas the Antiquities Act authorized the president—a single individual—to proclaim which places were significant for our nation’s history, NPS, as an agency, needed to develop its own system of making those decisions.

As the NPS expanded and increased its holdings, the need developed to evaluate how well NPS units represented our nation’s history. Beginning in the mid-1930s, the NPS initiated the Historic Sites Survey to inventory its holdings (Mackintosh 1985) to “ensure that the full diversity of American history and prehistory was expressed” (Page 2009:5–12). To aid in these efforts, Verne Chatelain introduced a “thematic framework” consisting of 23 historical themes and 12 archaeological culture groups (Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments 1937). This nested system was the first nationally codified list of historic themes, subthemes, and facets and was designed to reflect the most important nationally significant historical topics. In this framework, “history” begins with Euroamerican arrival, and archaeology is treated as largely ahistorical, operating entirely outside historic themes and defined only by geographic regions.

In retrospect, it is easy to see that NPS’s desire of having history fully represented through its holdings was a much more difficult task than was expected. Assigning NPS units to the predetermined historic themes required historical or archaeological research that had not yet been carried out. Faced with funding constraints, NPS staff also were required to prioritize the review

of congressionally proposed projects, resulting in delays to the needed research (Sprinkle 2010:271). It also became clear that some themes were overrepresented by existing NPS units, whereas many were not represented at all. No NPS units were identified as representative of the theme “Cultural Developments: Indigenous American Populations,” whereas 32 NPS units were deemed representative of “European Colonial Exploration and Settlement.” Part of this disparity was due to the organization of the thematic framework, which was vague and overly compartmentalized in its original conception. Despite these difficulties in representation, the NPS labored for decades to operationalize this framework in its historic preservation efforts.

### *The NHPA and Memorializing History beyond NPS Boundaries*

The scope of national historic preservation efforts was fundamentally restructured with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This act initiated a system for reviewing federal projects that serves as the backbone of today’s cultural resource management industry. Building on the Antiquities Act of 1906, the NHPA created the National Register of Historic Places, a comprehensive list of historic places deemed worthy of preservation. Although it was managed by the NPS, properties did not have to be NPS units to be listed. This marked a critical shift in the production of national histories. Before passage of the NHPA, the NPS and its management of its holdings provided *the only* system to memorialize, protect, and interpret places of historic significance. By removing NPS ownership as a requirement, the NHPA democratized the process of defining and recognizing significance by expanding federal recognition of historic sites beyond NPS boundaries to include historic properties exhibiting local and state significance.

This process has been routinized in the now-familiar Section 106 process, which requires federal agencies to identify historic properties, evaluate their eligibility for listing in the National Register, and consider how adverse effects of federal undertakings can be resolved. Determining eligibility for inclusion on the National Register is thus critically important in cultural

resource management today. Although often implicit in the Section 106 process, historic context serves as the underappreciated foundation for assessing National Register eligibility. To determine whether a given property is historically significant, it must be understood through the lens of one or more specific historic contexts, the frameworks that guide all interpretation and evaluation.

As stated earlier, the 1936 thematic framework equated archaeological themes with geographic culture areas, rather than true historic contexts organized by theme, place, and time. It reflected a time of "broad consensus" in academic communities and the public (Sprinkle 2010:275), during which history was overwhelmingly driven by "nationalism, exceptionalism, and triumphalism" (Launius 2010:75; see also Trigger 1989). Historic contexts were reserved for communicating Euroamerican material histories, not Indigenous material histories. Revisions to the thematic framework in 1970 and 1987 expanded the number of themes and added more chronological detail, but it was still overwhelming based on "stages of American progress" focusing on the achievements of military and political figures (Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments 1936). Although these revisions were a step in the right direction, they ultimately did not address concerns that began pouring into archaeological discourse.

### *Implementation and Critiques*

Implementing the NHPA resulted in lively discussions as scholars rushed to figure out how to translate this new legislative framework into archaeological praxis. Many quickly recognized the opportunity that NHPA provided (LeBlanc 1983), but it also quickly became apparent that the system was not a perfect fit with archaeological data (Barnes et al. 1980; Klinger and Raab 1980; McManamom 1990; Raab and Klinger 1979; Sharrock and Grayson 1979).

Scholars lamented the difficulty of reconciling the rigidity of the National Register and its accompanying criteria with the uncertainties of archaeological data. Archaeologists have long recognized that the National Register was built to primarily recognize history manifest in

architectural space (i.e., old buildings), with a reliance on documentary history, and that the requisite criteria are often incompatible with archaeological data. This has resulted in a programmatic overreliance on Criterion D, which states that a property need only to exhibit *potential* to yield scientific data to be considered eligible. And viewed through the lens of the National Register, eligible properties are treated in the same way as listed properties. The conceptualization of archaeological sites as scientific data occurred at a time when archaeologists were working to build their scientific credibility, seeking to differentiate themselves from antiquarians and grave robbers to ward off pressures from land developers (Smith 1994:302). But this "play-it-safe" approach has resulted in the routine flooding of reports with redundant site types deemed eligible solely on the fact that they *might* be important for future research (Peoples et al. 2016:5). Scholars are calling for more synthetic research that uses archaeological data to produce historical narratives (Altschul 2016; Kintigh et al. 2014).

An overreliance on the scientific value of archaeological sites, with a concomitant downplaying of their cultural, historical, or social value, also disproportionately silences Native American pasts (Lipe 2009). Under this system, ancestral Native American sites are often commodified and set aside "for the enjoyment of visitors and for scientific study" (Hawkins 2016:82–83) but are otherwise treated as ahistorical, robbed of their capacity to produce histories worthy of protection. In a cogent reflection on the role of Native American involvement in NHPA-driven archaeology, Hawkins (2016:80) notes that early implementation did not consider "how exceedingly divergent from mainstream preservationist or archaeological perspectives that Indian perspectives might be . . . or that those perspectives should matter."

More sustained collaboration with Native American communities demonstrates that many of the requirements of National Register eligibility are misaligned with core Native values (Pasqual 2017). For example, the National Register is predominantly designed for the built environment and is based on a philosophical view that it is separate from the natural environment. As

such, it is generally ill equipped for incorporating natural landscape features like mountains, rivers, and viewsheds, which Native communities often consider just as historically and culturally significant as structural features. Although traditional cultural properties were recognized as historic properties in the 1992 amendment of the NHPA (54 U.S.C. § 302706[a]), they offer only a limited solution. One of the problems is that the National Register recognizes only five property types—district, building, site, structure, and object—so traditional cultural properties still must be defined in relation to a recognized property type to be eligible for listing. Traditional cultural properties have not been fully embraced, and their use in the National Register is uncommon (King 2009) and has generally been met with suspicion: “Because, after all, how could Indians be trusted to not willy-nilly designate every place a traditional cultural property” (Hawkins 2016:81).

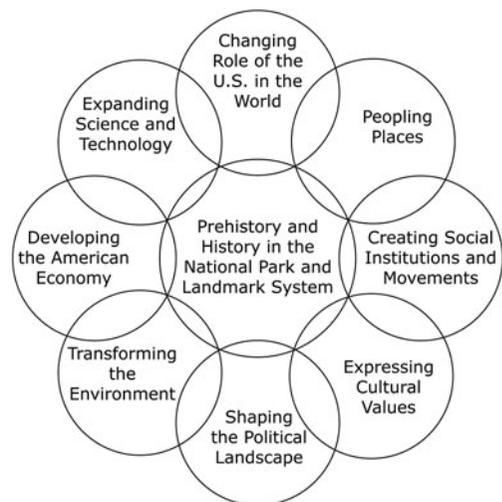
These critiques align with major changes in the theoretical landscape in the United States, where archaeologists have rejected revisionist histories and called for more disciplinary reflexivity to recognize the inherent social and political nuances of the discipline. The postprocessual critique was mirrored by similar critiques in the preservation community, referred to as the “new preservation” of the mid-1990s (Foner 1991; Nash et al. 1997; Thomas 1991), which criticized heritage management strategies for remaining largely apolitical. Scholars called for the involvement of diverse stakeholders in determining significance (Leone and Potter 1992) and in producing archaeological narratives (Atalay 2008). Some scholars argue that more explicit recognition of “competing heritage values” is needed beyond those codified in the NHPA, which would result in an intersection of social and political values that is a “highly political . . . struggle that uses cultural sites and places as symbols in the politics of community, cultural, social, and historical identity” (Smith 1994:302). Although cultural resource management “is the form of archaeological practice which most directly engages with politics” (Smith 1994:300), it has also clung dearly to its claim to scientific authority over cultural or social values (Mason 2006). These issues were well represented in

the operative thematic framework of the time, and it was clear that revisions were desperately needed to address these critiques.

### *Revisions to the Thematic Framework and Their Implications: The Democratization of Significance*

Recognizing these insufficiencies, Congress, through Section 1209 of Public Law 101-628 that passed in 1991, instructed the NPS to dramatically restructure the thematic framework (National Park Service 1994). In a “significant departure” from previous frameworks, the NPS unveiled a “less compartmentalized approach” to history that “emphasizes the process of how to study history but does not identify what to study” (Figure 1). Instead of focusing on discrete events, the system was organized into 8 themes, 43 subthemes, and 281 facets that are topical in nature, emphasizing topics that can be explored in many times and places.

Unlike the original 1936 thematic framework, which treated historic contexts as boxes to check when they were exemplified by NPS units, the revised framework is presented as a loosely structured conceptual starting point to be supplemented and enriched by interdisciplinary dialogue and research. The revised themes are not intended to be mutually exclusive, comprehensive, or final



**Figure 1.** Revised thematic framework, adapted from “NHL Thematic Framework” (National Park Service 1994).

but should reflect the diversity and multivalency of historic places. In fact, recognizing that the pace of change in scholarly discourse requires flexibility in accompanying NPS guidance, the revised framework invites evaluation and interpretation of historic sites through "analysis based on the best of current scholarship" (National Park Service 1994). The framework was also created to inform preservation and interpretation efforts at local, state, and regional scales, another significant departure from the original system, which was only concerned with nationally significant historic properties owned and managed by the NPS.

In 1997, the revised framework was published in its entirety in the *Society for American Archaeology Bulletin*, and its importance for archaeologists was outlined in an article in the *Journal of Historical Archaeology* (Little 1997). The combined implications of these revisions, however, have yet to be fully realized by the archaeological community.

The 1994 revisions also mark a critical shift in responsibility that enables the production of more representative histories (Little 1997; National Park Service 1997). Under the revised framework, individuals and agencies outside the NPS are encouraged to develop and use their own historic contexts in the evaluation and interpretation of historic properties. This revised framework recognizes that history is not a static record but is actively produced and reproduced. Archaeologists can and should have a more explicit role in this process. Although under the NHPA we are still required to evaluate properties using the familiar National Register criteria, the flexibility of historic contexts can be used to help produce more nuanced applications of these criteria. Again, the historic context is the temporal, cultural, historical, and conceptual framework through which significance and integrity are evaluated. This shift in responsibility provides a unique opportunity to create the terms by which properties are evaluated.

#### *Who Produces Historic Contexts?*

Although the utility of historic contexts has largely flown under the radar, some archaeologists have picked up on its importance. Beginning in the late 1990s, a small number of State

Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), such as those in Arizona and New Mexico, began sponsoring the production of thematic historic contexts. The Arizona SHPO, for example, produced intensively researched historic context studies covering topics like the study of historic trails (Stein 1994) and lithic scatter sites (Slaughter et al. 1992). Although they have been largely ignored by the academic community (Altschul 2016:73) and are now outdated, these studies provided an indispensable resource for evaluating sites as part of a broader research program in historic preservation activities.

Today, historic context studies are actively solicited by State Historic Preservation Offices, produced as part of management plans, and increasingly are part of nominations to the National Register. Some independent agencies produce historic context studies in partnership with federal and state agencies. Colorado State University's Public Lands History Center, for example, partners with land management agencies to produce historic context studies to support diverse heritage management programs, including National Register nominations and amendments (e.g., Andrade 2012). Sometimes, historic contexts are developed on a more case-by-case basis, like the four historic contexts developed for the University of Minnesota Morris (UMM) Preservation Plan to provide the university with "planning tools to make informed choices about managing the physical environment in ways that would strengthen and preserve UMM's diverse physical and cultural assets" (University of Minnesota Morris 2005:3).

Guidance on producing historic contexts is explicitly outlined in an NPS bulletin on the preparation of Multiple Property Documentation Forms (MPDFs; National Park Service 1991). Historic contexts are a core component of the MPDF, providing the frameworks needed to interpret multiple, physically disparate properties. The MPDF *Portage Trails in Minnesota 1630–1870s*, for example, uses two historic contexts (Vogel and Stanley 1991). One recognizes the contact period from the 1630s to 1837, which is associated with Eastern Dakota, Ojibwe, French, British, and US trade. The second focuses on the postcontact period from

1837 to the 1930s and is associated with Native American communities and reservations.

Although some scholars treat historic contexts as only applicable for understanding multiple properties (Scarpino 2010:24), in its original use the concept was intended to “pertain to all nominations and property types” (Wyatt 2009:1). Producing historic contexts as part of individual National Register nominations, although less common, provides an underappreciated mechanism to produce more representative and multivocal histories. In the remainder of this article, we demonstrate the utility of this mechanism with a recent example from El Morro National Monument in New Mexico.

### Case Study: The Inscription Rock Archaeological District

Inscription Rock, otherwise known as El Morro (Spanish for “headland”), is a massive sandstone promontory rising high above El Morro Valley in northwestern New Mexico (Figure 2). El Morro is principally known for its hundreds of Spanish and Euroamerican inscriptions carved into its sandstone cliffs. Its most famous inscription is that of Juan de Oñate in 1605, which is the oldest Spanish inscription known in the United States. El Morro was established as a national monument by presidential proclamation in 1906, making it the second national monument established under the Antiquities Act. Additional protection came with the passing of the NHPA, which triggered the administrative listing of all national monuments in the National Register of Historic Places.

Unlike nominations prepared today, where detailed and persuasive cases for National Register listing are made based on extensive research, the accompanying documentation for properties whose listing was triggered by the NHPA is notoriously sparse. Like many administratively listed properties, El Morro’s original listing on the National Register is paltry compared to modern standards and only recognizes the significance of Inscription Rock as it relates to Spanish conquistadors and Anglo-American settlers (Morris 1970:197; Pitchaithley 1978). Notably absent is explicit recognition of the two pueblos Atsinna and North Atsinna, each with several hundred

rooms, located on top of Inscription Rock (Figure 2). Well known in archaeological literature, these pueblos have played an important role in the interpretation of late fourteenth-century aggregation and coalescence in the Cibola region. Furthermore, the Pueblo of Zuni and Pueblo of Acoma still use El Morro in their traditional cultural activities. These omissions left a remarkable gap in the National Register representation of El Morro, which overlooks the historic importance of Inscription Rock for Native American and other communities.

To address these shortcomings, the NPS and the School of Anthropology at the University of Arizona entered into a cooperative agreement to evaluate the National Register eligibility of the archaeological properties not included in the operative National Register listing. Although the initial goal was to evaluate the National Register eligibility of Atsinna and North Atsinna, archival research and review meetings with culturally affiliated tribes quickly revealed many other potentially significant properties beyond these two pueblos representing a palimpsest of cultural activity from at least AD 1100.

#### *Multivocal Preparation of a District Nomination*

Recognizing this complexity, the project was quickly modified to include the preparation of a district nomination. The revised project benefited greatly from working closely with representatives from the Pueblo of Acoma and the Pueblo of Zuni, whose cultural affiliation was determined by the NPS based on an extensive study conducted by the Museum of Northern Arizona (Hays-Gilpin 2012; Hutt 2014). Consultation meetings and site visits helped us recognize new site types and modify the district boundaries to include them (Figure 3).

The newly delineated Inscription Rock Archaeological District (IRAD) documents 44 properties, including six pueblos and eight small structures, most of which are located on the top of Inscription Rock, as well as three rock-shelters in Box Canyon, six hand-and-toe-hold trails carved into the sandstone cliffs providing access to the top of Inscription Rock, three water resource sites, and 24 petroglyph, pictograph, and inscription sites along the base of Inscription Rock (Hanson et al. 2020).

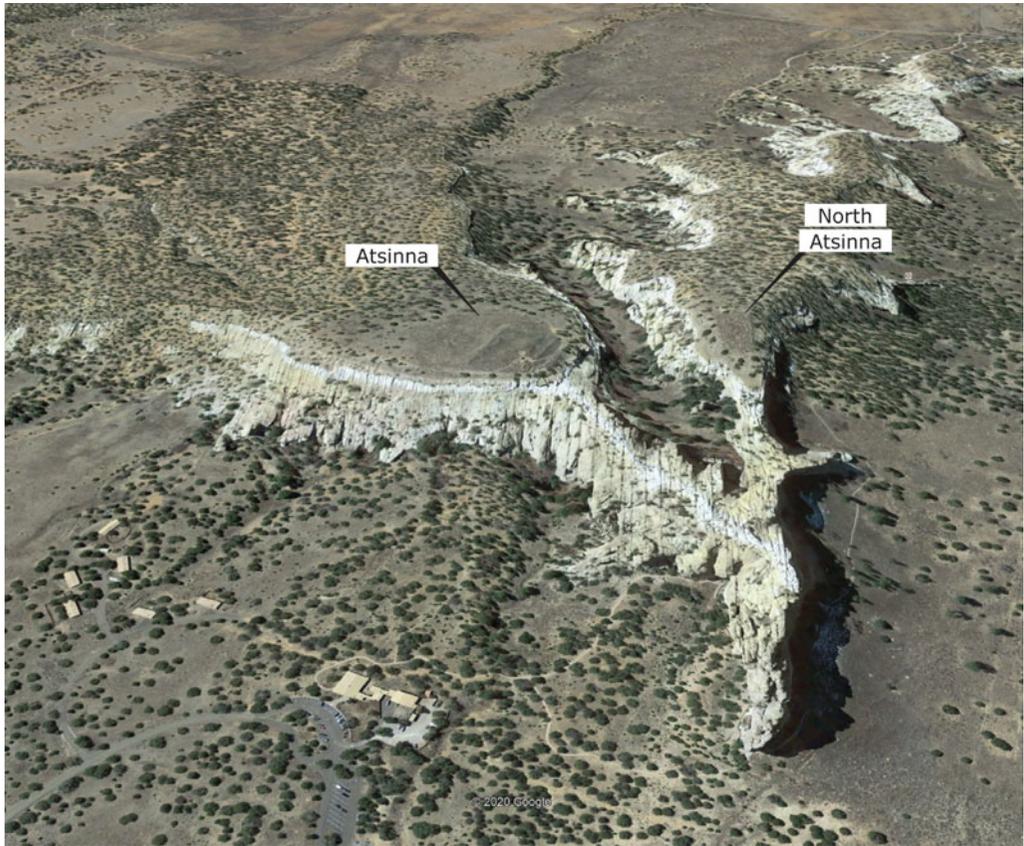


Figure 2. Three-dimensional orthoimagery of Inscription Rock indicating locations of Atsinna and North Atsinna on top of Inscription Rock (2020 Google Earth and INEGI, Landsat/Copernicus). (Color online)

Site visits with Acoma and Zuni tribal members also helped us identify property types that would not have been considered through archaeological survey alone. Tinajas, for example, are natural water catchment basins formed in bedrock that collect rainwater, and these occur in considerable numbers on the top of Inscription Rock (Figure 4). Called *heloshokta* in Zuni and *guwaishak'atsi* in Acoma, tinajas are deeply significant because they are homes of certain deities and are referred to as "life-holders." They serve to protect the community spiritually and to provide strength to passersby, especially those on pilgrimages. It is customary to drink from tinajas and to leave offerings. Frequent scatters of pottery sherds in and around tinajas are interpreted by Pueblo tribal members as a testament to the longevity of this important relationship. Although representatives from both tribes offered slightly different perspectives, everyone

agreed that tinajas were culturally significant features that warranted the same protection as other routinely recorded archaeological sites.

#### *Recognizing Multivocality through Multiple Historic Contexts*

Evaluating how these diverse property types are considered significant among different stakeholders required the production of multiple historic contexts. Although the original National Register listing for El Morro focused exclusively on the significance of the early Spanish and Anglo-American inscriptions in Euroamerican colonial histories, it was clear that the multiplicity and complexity of the IRAD properties required additional cultural, temporal, and topical frameworks. Combining archaeological, ethnographic, and archival data, we developed three distinct yet complementary historic contexts to capture more fully the diverse ways in



**Figure 3.** Tribal consultation meeting to review IRAD draft nomination on August 3, 2018 (photograph by T. J. Ferguson). (Color online)

which these places are significant in terms of both scientific significance and ongoing social and cultural importance. Note that although some historic contexts may emphasize certain data types over others (i.e., archaeological, ethnographic, documentary), they all require the convergence of many lines of evidence. Further, most IRAD properties communicate multiple historic contexts. This demonstrates not only the utility but also the necessity of a layered approach to historic contexts.

*Historic Context 1: Ancestral Puebloan Aggregation, Reorganization, and Depopulation of El Morro Valley, AD 1100–1385.* The first historic context captures the dramatic shift in Indigenous residential strategies from dispersed settlements to defensible high-elevation locales in the mid- to late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which has captured the attention of archaeologists for decades. Each occupying an arm of Inscription Rock, Atsinna and North Atsinna are pueblos with several hundred

rooms that have been important focal points in research conducted by some of the most prominent figures in early southwestern archaeology and ethnography (e.g., Bandelier 1892; Fewkes 1891; Spier 1917). Built quickly and occupied for only a few generations, both pueblos exemplify the historic trend in El Morro Valley of aggregating large populations in high-elevation settlements, a trend seen in several other contemporaneous pueblos. Zuni cultural advisers explain that Atsinna is an ancestral Zuni village that represents a stopping point during the Zuni journey to the Middle Place (Ferguson 2012: O39–O58). Similarly, Acoma cultural advisers stated that Inscription Rock is a major landmark and trail marker and that the pueblos on top of Inscription Rock were occupied by Acoma ancestors during their migration to Haaku (Acoma Pueblo; Zedeño et al. 2001:175).

The remaining IRAD sites demonstrate that the rapid shift to densely inhabited settlements cannot be fully appreciated without considering the full



**Figure 4.** Octavius Seowtewa and Presley Haskie from Zuni Pueblo discuss the cultural significance of tinajas with Kelsey E. Hanson, Steve Baumann, and Rick Green during the tribal review meeting (photograph by T. J. Ferguson). (Color online)

suite of accompanying land-use strategies. Many IRAD properties predate the construction of Atsinna and North Atsinna, providing an important opportunity to investigate settlement dynamics immediately preceding the construction of aggregated pueblos. Four pueblos constructed before Atsinna and North Atsinna reflect the activities and occupations of early aggregated communities, representing initial attempts at aggregation on top of Inscription Rock.

The diversity of other IRAD site types reflects the full range of activities conducted both before and after construction of Atsinna and North Atsinna, as well as activities supporting construction. Quarry sites, for example, are an important and understudied site type that would have had a critical role in supporting major construction events. In many cases, construction materials were taken from older pueblos. Small pueblo structures are often functionally ambiguous but are generally interpreted as fieldhouses used during

resource gathering. Rock alignments are likely related to water-control features that supported agricultural fields. Rockshelters are interpreted as locations for temporary resource gathering and processing activities. Hand-and-toe-hold trails provide information about how different locations of Inscription Rock were accessed.

Histories of aggregation, reorganization, and depopulation are also represented in the thousands of petroglyphs and pictographs at IRAD. Perspectives from culturally affiliated and traditionally associated tribes<sup>1</sup> demonstrate that the petroglyphs and pictographs represent migration histories, stories, clan affiliations, and the diversity of relationships to Inscription Rock over time. For Acoma and Zuni, pictographs and petroglyphs are considered physical markers of ancestral ties to the landscape and reflect histories of Puebloan aggregation. The motifs, styles, and production techniques present at Inscription Rock are directly related to migration traditions

of the Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni people (Zedeño et al. 2001:187). These markers on the landscape—archaeological sites and glyphs alike—reinforce “their perception of themselves as a people intimately linked to their particular landscape where powerful beings dwell and where significant events of the past took place” (Young 1988:238). The ongoing well-being of these entities is of the utmost importance for ensuring greater community well-being.

*Historic Context 2: Ongoing Traditional Uses of the Inscription Rock Archaeological District, AD 1385–1970.* The second historic context was developed to illustrate the ongoing traditional uses of IRAD. Although the IRAD properties are principally appreciated for their scientific significance, they are also important in ongoing traditional practices for descendant communities. Even though the spirit of this context is intended to recognize that traditional uses are ongoing, we use 1970 as an arbitrary end date to comply with NPS standards, which state that properties must be at least 50 years old to be considered historically significant.

For Acoma and Zuni tribes, Inscription Rock is a deeply important, named landmark. The Zuni name for Atsinna pueblo is Heshoda Yałta, meaning “ruins on top of El Morro” (Ferguson and Hart 1985). A’ts’in’a is a Zuni name meaning “where pictures are on the rock” or “writing on the rock” (Ferguson and Hart 1985). The confusion in names for Atsinna pueblo comes from a miscommunication that occurred when archaeologist Richard Woodbury asked his Zuni workers for the Zuni name of the site, and they provided the name for El Morro. The Acoma refer to El Morro as K’aadyadran-isr’a, meaning “place where there is writing” (Theresa Pasqual, personal communication 2011, quoted in Bradford 2013). The Diné (Navajo) are traditionally associated with El Morro and refer to it as Tsék’i Na’asdzoof, meaning “rock that has marks (or writing) on it,” or Tséikiin, meaning “refugee rock” or “rock where there is water and food” (Young and Morgan 1987).

Although Inscription Rock has not been physically inhabited since the mid to late 1300s, Acoma and Zuni people retain a strong association with IRAD through ongoing ancestral

ties, traditional cultural use, subsistence activities, and trade with neighboring pueblos (Ferguson 2012; Zedeño et al. 2001). During their visit to Atsinna in 2011, Zuni participants pointed out similarities between Atsinna and Zuni Pueblo in architecture, ceramics, ritual paraphernalia, and burial practices (Ferguson 2012:O.33, O.58). Similarly, Acoma research participants said that Atsinna was located on a high mesa likely for defensive purposes and is reminiscent of their own home, “Sky City,” which is also built atop a high mesa.

Today, IRAD historic properties are significant for the Acoma and Zuni people because they value them as ancestral settlements that are still inhabited by ancestral spirits and because El Morro is a place where they come to pray and leave offerings (Zedeño et al. 2001:186). Petroglyphs and pictographs are important in communicating migration histories and clan affiliations today and in teaching young tribal members about their history. Consultation with Acoma representatives demonstrates that the petroglyphs and pictographs refer to stories, some of which have been lost for a long time. Acoma people see the petroglyphs and pictographs at Inscription Rock as “an important reminder of their traditions and past” (Zedeño et al. 2001:184). Additionally, the area in the vicinity of Inscription Rock was traditionally used for ceremonial activities, hunting, gathering, and grazing of livestock. Inscription Rock is also a traditional eagle gathering place (Ferguson and Hart 1985:127).

Tribal review meetings resulted in a strong consensus among tribal participants that Inscription Rock is a shared Pueblo place. The tribal representatives at the meetings all agreed that their ancestors had been together at Inscription Rock and that contemporary Puebloan groups share ancestry that can be traced to places like Inscription Rock. Tribal representatives emphasized the importance of the IRAD properties in communicating their shared tribal histories. For example, both Acoma and Zuni individuals indicated that petroglyphs and pictographs at Inscription Rock are significant to their communities today, with imagery that is stylistically distinct from Diné petroglyphs and pictographs. As Octavius Seowtewa said, “This place was used

by all the Puebloan groups. Our people were together a long time ago. We share a common heritage. It can't be reduced to individual tribes." This sentiment calls on us to reconsider how we characterize and operationalize cultural affiliations to places.

Consultations associated with the development of IRAD also demonstrate that several tribes can share relationships to the same place. Research with the Ramah Navajo demonstrated that the Diné people have a traditional association with El Morro National Monument that is based on affinity for and use of the land during the historic period after the occupation of Atsinna ended (Hays-Gilpin 2012:46). During research conducted by the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, Ramah Navajo people stated that they "did not claim any descent from the ancient peoples who built and inhabited Puebloan ruins, but stated that their ancestors did use the parklands and lived within its current boundaries" (Zedeño et al. 2001:174); their ancestors used Inscription Rock and its surrounding area for hunting, gathering, and sheepherding. Indeed, these practices have been archaeologically documented at the monument and represent an important historic use of Inscription Rock (Bradford 2013:29–31). These relationships are further demonstrated through petroglyphs exhibiting distinctively Diné motifs, including Ye'ii figures, star ceilings, and motifs seen in sand paintings.

*Historic Context 3: Spanish Colonialism and Westward Expansion across El Morro Valley, AD 1605–1906.* The third historic context reflects the importance of Inscription Rock as a stopping place for Spanish conquistadors, Euroamerican colonists, missionaries, and settlers during the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. Physical remains of Spanish and Euroamerican presence are captured in many IRAD properties, particularly in the numerous historic inscriptions that have been the focus of historic recognition since the national monument was established in 1906.

Juan de Oñate and his men stopped at El Morro on April 16, 1605, on their return from an expedition to find the Pacific Ocean, and Oñate's inscription was carved on the sandstone cliffs of Inscription Rock. Hundreds of

individuals followed Oñate's lead, transforming Inscription Rock into a physical record of Spanish colonialism represented by hundreds of historic inscriptions documenting names, dates, and historic moments (Slater 1961). This period of Spanish colonialism had profound and catastrophic effects on the Indigenous peoples of New Mexico. Ecclesiastic efforts of the Spanish colonists resulted in dramatic restructuring of Indigenous cultural practices, sometimes by violent means. Although El Morro Valley and the Western Pueblos are often considered peripheral to the centers of Spanish settlement and colonialism along the Rio Grande (Bradford 2013:165), the historic inscriptions at Inscription Rock serve as a physical testament to this dynamic and harrowing history.

Throughout the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, US explorers and migrants inscribed their own contributions on the walls of Inscription Rock. Participants of numerous military reconnaissance surveys and expeditions passed through, including Lt. James H. Simpson and artist Richard Kern as part of Lieutenant Colonel John Washington's military reconnaissance (Simpson 1964 [1852]), Captain L. Sitgreaves's wagon road survey from Zuni to the Colorado River (Sitgreaves 1853), Lieutenant A. W. Whipple's 100-man wagon road survey party (Whipple 1854), officers from Fort Defiance in 1857 (Bradford 2013:35), and Lt. Edward F. Beale with his famous expedition of camels, to name a few. Emigrant wagons passed through El Morro on their way to California in 1858 (Bradford 2013:35–36; Dodge 1980).

In 1901, the General Land Office recommended that El Morro be set aside for a park and that El Morro National Monument be managed by the NPS beginning in 1906: these changes marked the end of this historic context and the beginning of its current function as a tourist destination (Sievers 1970:1). The historic inscriptions document significant historic moments, especially the many historical intrusions suffered by Acoma and Zuni Pueblos. Together, the historic inscriptions and other material evidence from multiple ethnic groups provide ample opportunities for research into the timing and effects of Spanish colonialism and American westward expansion.

### *Layers of Significance*

Although the original National Register listing only recognized Spanish and Anglo-American relationships to Inscription Rock, we demonstrate the value of revising existing National Register listings to offer more accurate representation of stakeholders. Several consultation meetings and site visits helped capture multivocal relationships to Inscription Rock among members of descendant communities who were initially omitted from consideration. By developing multiple historic contexts, the National Register listing now captures the diversity of Indigenous, Spanish, and Euroamerican relationships to this place through time.

### **Toward Multivocal National Histories**

Decisions made about what to protect have a profound role in shaping historical memory (Lowenthal 1985), in normalizing certain forms of sociopolitical organizations (Borck 2018), and in justifying contemporary access or ownership (Flexner 2014), all of which have profound implications for future societies (e.g., Harrison et al. 2020; Holtorf 2020; Holtorf and Högberg 2020). In this context, the omission of some places is an act of erasure, one that can have dire consequences for minority communities. It is time to critically evaluate our role in this process and find paths for recourse.

Determining eligibility for listing on the National Register—the proverbial goal of the Section 106 process—remains the driving force behind this decision-making process in the United States. Many archaeologists criticize the National Register and its accompanying eligibility criteria for not readily accommodating archaeological properties or alternative value systems. These critiques are valid, but as we demonstrate in this article, several programmatic changes offer more flexibility than are typically realized. Although early historic preservation programs sought to memorialize only the nation’s most important historical events and people, the NHPA expanded federal recognition to include properties with local, regional, and state levels of significance. Later revisions to the NPS thematic framework introduced a critical shift from NPS staff assigning

NPS units to predetermined national historic contexts to localized historic contexts produced on a case-by-case basis. Although this shift has largely gone unnoticed, these revisions allow for a far more fluid approach to determining National Register eligibility, making the National Register itself far more flexible than we give it credit in practice.

With these revisions in mind, it is time to go beyond narrowly focused programmatic compliance to “think big” and look for new and innovative ways to make archaeology relevant today (Altschul 2016). It is time for the archaeological community to pick up where the NPS left off and offer creative uses of our existing legislative criteria and processes. We argue that historic contexts provide a means of operationalizing this newfound flexibility to produce multivocal nominations.

The National Register, as our nation’s living document of places that “Americans believe are worthy of preservation” (National Park Service 2020), should be relevant to all communities. Archaeologists have long struggled to reconcile Indigenous cultural values with a rigid NHPA framework, but we argue that the production of new historic contexts provides an important mechanism to honor the multivocality of relationships to place. Ultimately, the revisions outlined here reveal that we can and should have a more active role in creating the interpretive frameworks by which we evaluate historic properties. IRAD is an example of constructing historic contexts to accompany a National Register nomination, but historic context studies can be produced on their own. One way to continue this work elsewhere is to work closely with SHPOs, Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, and descendant and local communities to conduct stand-alone historic context studies that are widely applicable so that they can guide cultural resource management decisions (Hardesty and Little 2009:28). Working to produce multivocal historic context studies allows us to actively incorporate the values, concerns, and cultural frameworks of descendant communities that have historically been neglected in the production of national histories.

The multivocal approach that we advocate for here also helps respectfully acknowledge

conflicting histories and histories of conflict when preparing nominations. Such an approach was successfully implemented in the 2007 nomination of Mount Taylor as a traditional cultural property to the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties by the Pueblos of Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni; the Hopi Tribe; and the Navajo Nation. Recognizing that each tribe had unique relationships to Mount Taylor, the tribes chose to pursue a traditional cultural property nomination with multiple historic contexts to allow each community to put forth its own history and relationship to the mountain. Doing so can be challenging because historical periods of raiding and warfare between Athapascan tribes and the Pueblos led to ongoing tensions between these communities that continue today. Acknowledging those periods of conflict where points of cultural conflict arose, the tribes spent time discussing how best to proceed. This resulted in a nomination that both reflected the tribes' common interests and preserved those parts of tribal history that remain in conflict with each other. Using a multivocal approach embraces the diversity of tribal histories and does not assume a pan-Indian approach to history. Instead, it holds space for those points of the past that hold significance, even if they remain in conflict with one another.

We, as archaeologists, have long applauded our use of material data to challenge historical biases and to give voices to those not represented in documentary sources. Although it is true that archaeologists have much to offer, we are not the only ones who can make important contributions. The multivocal approach that we propose fosters an important shift from a system that has historically been exclusive to an inclusive one that encourages the input and value systems of multiple communities (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006). Tribal cultural advisers who work on multivocal projects like the El Morro National Register nomination often come away with the feeling that "this place belongs to us." This helps shift the dialogue between tribal advisers, archaeologists, and federal land managers into a two-way flow of information. This reciprocity is a new way of interacting with federal agencies for many tribal representatives, who encourage more federal agencies to take this

approach. We should continue to embrace collaborative, multivocal approaches to ensure that the rich tapestry of human experience is commemorated, moving from the production of one national history to the production of multivocal national histories.

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*Data Availability Statement.* All data used in this article are managed by the National Park Service and through the sources listed in the References Cited section.

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## Note

1. These are NPS concepts that distinguish people who share an identity with the past group that occupied a place (cultural affiliation) from other tribes who have a record of traditional cultural, spiritual, and physical associations with a place.

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