

In 2018, the Supreme Court of the State of Hawai'i ruled that construction of a major telescope project could commence on Mauna Kea, a sacred volcano located in a conservation zone on the island of Hawai'i¹. Protests for and against construction of this astronomical observatory are ongoing²; and in fact, this situation is not unique. Several contemporary examples of tensions between science/technology and indigenous rights include the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States³, the ongoing battle in Brazil about indigenous land rights in the Amazon vs. commercial farming⁴, and the struggle in Colombia for indigenous land rights and self-determination⁵.

Many biological anthropologists, be they experts in primatology, paleoanthropology, genetics, skeletal biology, or some other specialty, work in settings that either directly or indirectly include indigenous communities. For instance, bioarchaeologists often study the skeletal remains of Native peoples, and human geneticists can engage in ascertaining identity or origin of an ancestor via haplotype and other analyses.

The goal of our work is often nobly cited as knowledge production, but this ignores the consequent personal benefits of prestige and economic security that can result, as well as the inherent power and privilege disparity between scientists and members of indigenous communities.

Therefore, choose one area of biological anthropology (for example, including but not limited to: bioarchaeology, human biology, primatology, or human genetics) and discuss the ethical tensions between doing field or lab work in the chosen area (domestically or abroad) and affected indigenous communities. How can our work best respect and champion self-determination of indigenous communities⁶ while simultaneously addressing questions of scientific importance? Further, how can the AAPA Ethics Committee best provide specific guidance to practitioners as they formulate their research plans so that consideration and respect of indigenous sovereignty are a departure point from where the methods are conceptualized?

¹ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2018/10/supreme-court-approves-thirty-meter-telescope/>

² <https://twitter.com/laurenmweiss/status/1155437892828745728?s=21>

³ <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-treaties/dapl>

⁴ <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-07-16/bolsonaro-reignites-decades-old-fight-over-land-between-indigenous-people-and>

⁵ <https://latinamericanpost.com/27098-colombia-why-do-the-indigenous-people-of-cauca-protest>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenypeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>