

Southeastern Archaeological Conference  
Listening Sessions: *Southeastern Archaeology* Image Policy Changes  
15 May, 25 May, and 12 June 2023

In (remote) attendance: Kandi Hollenbach, Ramie Gougeon, Carol Colaninno, Karen Stevens, Lindsay Bloch, Raelynn Butler, Rob Beck, LeeAnne Wendt, Susan Becher, Turner Hunt, Deanna Byrd, Everett Bandy, Elizabeth Toombs, S. Miller, Karen Brunso, Ben Yahola, David Frank, Miranda Panther, Ian Thompson, Beau Carroll

[R Gougeon, reporting]

President Hollenbach opened each meeting with an overview of the changes to the image policy as developed in 2022 and announced at the annual meeting in November 2022. She further outlined the scope of the petition to rescind this policy. The petitioners are following a process laid out in SEAC bylaws (Article IV: Referendum). Hollenbach delivered the timeline of listening sessions, publications of position pieces in the August newsletter, and a forum planned for the annual meeting in October 2023. The referendum will be held in November, shortly after the annual meeting.

Participants in the listening sessions were given the opportunity to make statements about the image policy or ask questions of Executive Committee (EC) members. Comments and questions heard in these sessions included:

- Interest in writing position pieces for the August newsletter. Questions were asked about the length of these pieces (no page limit was needed as the newsletter is a digital document). Another participant noted that THPOs, for example, are ambassadors with limited capacity to speak on behalf of or represent Tribal governments or people. Any 'official' position from a Tribe/Native Nation would likely have to come from or with the permission of a Tribal government. Those writing position pieces were encouraged to take this question of authority into consideration.

- Enthusiasm for the policy. A number of participants expressed appreciation for the changes to the *Southeastern Archaeology* image policy. Reasons for this support included an impression that non-Native archaeologists don't regularly collaborate with Native people and researchers. The new policy requires evidence of collaboration in order to publish line drawings or other representations of funerary objects. Relatedly, Native researchers don't always have the time or capacity to collaborate with everyone, so this policy helps capture sensitive topics that should be addressed collaboratively, even if later in the research and publication process.

Others noted that the policy makes SEAC more inclusive and is respectful of the wishes and beliefs of descendant communities. Native "ways of knowing" are to be respected and having the opportunity to share them in a journal *without* offensive imagery is important. Another commented that asking Native people what they think is important.

One participant felt the new policy is "righting a wrong" and that it was an important step but the "bare minimum" for an ethical professional to follow. Another noted that the new policy is quite equitable to archaeologists and reflects basic ethics. Having this policy removes the potential of harming a Tribal member who might inadvertently view images of funerary objects in the journal. There were several comments expressing the hope that other organizations will follow SEAC's lead.

Another participant felt the policy takes some burden and work off THPOs. Listening to Natives (both in these sessions but also through collaboration on articles featuring images of funerary objects) is appreciated.

- Unsurprisingly, Tribal views on the image policy are not monolithic. Some individuals suggested their Tribe could support line drawings of objects, while another suggested their Tribe was opposed to any representations of sacred or funerary objects in the journal. A concern was raised as to whether the current policy as written might unintentionally lead to “tribe shopping” to find a collaborator more amendable to publishing images of funerary objects.

Lastly, in recognizing his own ‘psychological conditioning’ that normalized seeing Native remains and funerary materials in publications, one Native participant noted that “taking off the cloak of colonization” involves changing behaviors now viewed as unethical. Trying to reverse hundreds of years of colonization in the span of months or years requires a lot of work. He hoped SEAC’s members and Tribal partners will work toward a good resolution to this issue and in the process of doing so be sensitized to the needs of others (“and Natives in this instance are the *others*”).

Not every participant offered their particular Tribal or organizational affiliation. Gougeon estimates that at least seven (7) traditional Southeastern Tribes were present at the listening sessions, including Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Quapaw Nation, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Thlopthlocco Tribal Town, and Choctaw Nation.