

UNL a step closer to giving back American Indian remains

BY JOSH FUNK

The university's collection of American Indian remains will stay under lock and key while administrators try to secure its return to tribes.

But a cumbersome federal law, an overtaxed federal administration and strong emotions, both new and centuries old, all color the process outlined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

The 1990 law mandated the return of American Indian remains and artifacts to their tribes or origin.

The university's repatriation efforts have been in the news during the past two years following allegations of mishandling of the remains.

Two independent investigations cleared the university of the charges, but the process has been marred by those incidents.

Long-awaited repatriation

notices published early this month brought the University of Nebraska-Lincoln closer to fulfilling its obligations under NAGPRA.

The two notices, which deal with culturally unaffiliated remains, are indicative of the lengthy and sometimes difficult process of returning long-held remains and artifacts to the rightful owners.

"These remains are connected to some very racist acts," UNL's NAGPRA Coordinator Priscilla Grew said. "This stuff just has so much baggage."

The reburial of remains raises several difficult issues for tribes that must deal with the history of these remains and decide how to handle reburial. Many tribes have no ceremony or tradition for reburial.

"Definitely it's a very sensitive and delicate issue to get these remains reburied," said Shirley Schermer, burials program director in the Office of the

"These remains are connected to some very racist acts. This stuff just has so much baggage."

Priscilla Grew
coordinator, UNL NAGPRA

Iowa Archeologist. Museums in Iowa were dealing with repatriation issues long before many others because of a 1976 state law mandating the return of remains.

The University of Nebraska's experience with repatriation is not unique among the nation's universities and museums which are also dealing with the difficulties of NAGPRA.

The law required museums to submit a summary of their collections by 1993 and a detailed inventory by 1995.

At Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley, where the second and third largest collections in the

nations are housed, scientists are still inventorying the remains under extensions of the 1995 deadline.

The University of Nebraska, like the universities of Oklahoma, Iowa and others, met both federal guidelines for summarizing their collections by 1993 and providing a detailed inventory by 1995. These institutions have also published notices in the Federal Register identifying the origins of groups of remains, so they can be repatriated.

But nationwide, few of those remains and artifacts have been returned.

"It's emotionally painful for

the descendants to talk about and see some of those things (remains)," said Julie Droke, who directs repatriation for the University of Oklahoma and the state's museum of natural history. "Museums have to realize that, and (this process) can't be rushed."

The 1990 law designated the National Parks Service as the clearinghouse for repatriation notices and the agency responsible for inventorying the federal collection of remains.

The result was a backlog of notices which further delayed publication in the Federal Register.

"Generally it's been pretty slow and everyone has been frustrated," Grew said.

That is evident in UNL's two Oct. 2 notices, both of which deal with groups of culturally unaffiliated remains and have been in the works since 1998.

Those are remains and artifacts that cannot be linked to a

specific tribe.

The procedure for returning those culturally unaffiliated remains was not outlined in NAGPRA, Grew said, so institutions have had to develop their own procedures in consultation with the American Indian tribes.

The University of Nebraska partnered with a coalition of 16 tribes that are or were in the state to repatriate some of its unaffiliated remains. Those tribes will then make arrangements for reburial.

"In a way, it has been like inventing the wheel," Grew said of the repatriation process.

In a way, NAGPRA has tried to reconcile the interests of science with human rights, but the process also raises difficult issues that must be handled carefully.

"It's an ongoing process, and we're trying to do the right thing," Shermer said. "We can always make greater efforts to communicate and cooperate."

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China policy points to U.S. as 'enemy No. 1'

A defense paper issued last week finds the United States to be the chief troublemaker in threats of force against Taiwan.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING - In word and deed - namely its biggest military show in 35 years - China has made clear that it views the United States as potential enemy No. 1.

Besides blowing up targets, test-firing missiles and driving tanks, the military displays at four land and sea sites in northern China proved new capabilities to attack stealth warplanes and cruise missiles, state media reported.

Meanwhile, a Chinese defense policy paper issued last Monday once again raised threats of force against Taiwan and pointed to the United States as chief troublemaker.

Should Beijing's communist leaders order the People's Liberation Army to recover the island that split from China 51 years ago, Chinese generals are planning against expected U.S. military intervention.

"Do they prepare against the United States? My answer is very clear: yes," said Yan Xuetong, an expert in international security at Beijing's prestigious Tsinghua University.

Yan believes war with Taiwan is inevitable. Others are less pessimistic. In a report

Thursday, the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies said China is preoccupied this year with domestic issues, among them preparing to enter the World Trade Organization. It forecast only "a remote possibility" of confrontation over Taiwan.

Moreover, China-U.S. relations have improved this year and their militaries have expanded contact through reciprocal ship visits and trips by Chinese officers to the United States.

Beijing itself says it wants to peacefully recover Taiwan through negotiations - a goal repeated in the defense policy paper.

But talks are stalemated, and the paper said the situation "is complicated and grim." It reiterated that China would "adopt all drastic measures possible, including the use of force" if Taiwan formally splits from China or continues indefinitely to refuse to negotiate unification.

China's generals have to assume an attack on democratic, capitalist Taiwan might provoke an American military response. That is why they are preparing for the worst.

Chinese fears were sharpened by NATO's air war on Yugoslavia last year to protect ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Beijing saw unsettling parallels with its own restive minority regions, like Tibet, and felt NATO's intervention on human rights grounds set a dangerous

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Yan Xuetong
international security expert, Tsinghua University

precedent for meddling over Taiwan.

The scenario seems highly dubious right now. Unlike Yugoslavia, such a conflict could at worst go nuclear, and even if it didn't, it could wipe out U.S.-China trade worth nearly \$95 billion last year, according to U.S. figures, and trigger global economic catastrophe.

Still, Chinese suspicions have been heightened by Washington's efforts to develop anti-missile shields, by congressional attempts to expand military ties with Taiwan, and by continued U.S. arms sales to the island. Yan said the Pentagon was moving more submarines to the Pacific and stockpiling cruise missiles on the Pacific island of Guam.

What should China's leaders conclude from that? "That the U.S. military has prepared for war against China," Yan insisted.

The Chinese defense paper was peppered with criticisms of the United States, among them that U.S. support has emboldened Taiwan's anti-China camp.

With prospects for a peaceful unification of Taiwan and because of "hegemonism and power politics" - Beijing's code words for U.S. meddling -

"China will have to enhance its capability to defend its sovereignty and security by military means," said the paper.

But it also sought to allay foreign concerns by saying the military buildup was "purely for self-defense," and that this year's defense budget of \$14.6 billion is just 5 percent of Washington's. Overseas analysts, however, believe China spends up to five times more than it says it does.

The Gulf War shocked Beijing by exposing its technological inferiority. It has since focused attention on the importance of air power in modern wars.

Military experts say Chinese generals have studied how Yugoslav forces hid equipment from NATO attacks, have installed Russian-made surface-to-air missiles on the coast opposite Taiwan, and have improved air defenses around big cities.

But analysts say the Chinese military would be hard-pressed to take Taiwan, and lags far behind the United States.

"The gap is enormous. They're just not in the same league," said Robert Karniol, Asia-Pacific editor for Jane's Defense Weekly.

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