

April 14, 2009

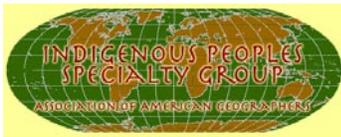
Rogelio Hernández, Agente de policía municipal
Bernardino Montaña Mendoza, Presidente del Comisariado de Bienes Comunales
San Miguel Tiltepec, Oaxaca

Aloha,

As the co-chairs of the Indigenous Peoples Specialty Group (IPSG) of the Association of American Geographers (AAG), we can assure you that our membership shares your concerns about the Bowman Expeditions/México Indígena project. Our group is made up of many kinds of geographers, some who are Indigenous, some who are not, some who work with Indigenous communities, some who do not. However, what we share in common is best described in the mission statement of our group,

- To foster pure and applied geographic research and geographic education that involves the indigenous peoples of the world, past and present
- To encourage approaches to research and teaching that empower indigenous peoples, and
- To help build relationships of mutual trust between communities of indigenous peoples and academic geographers.

We believe research should be initiated from within a community and researchers should be in service to you, the Indigenous community. We believe information must flow both ways. All information a researcher can access about any project must be shared with you. This does not just mean telling you where the funding is coming from, it also means researchers must take the time to share and explain all documents pertaining to the research and the community, and describing the potential good and bad that the shared information can have to their best ability. We believe Indigenous communities have the right to know as much about the people doing the research as the researchers intend to learn about you. After all, every person's experiences directly affect how they see the world and how they see the world frames what they are capable of understanding. Lastly, we believe all information shared by Indigenous communities is the intellectual property of the community. This means that no data or information can be shared, published, or presented without the express consent of the community thus helping to protect the wisdom of Indigenous forebears and communities from continued colonial appropriation.



As a group the IPSG has decided to address your concerns by endorsing the letter by Joe Bryan and Joel Wainwright calling for an AAG inquiry into role of the U.S. Army's Foreign Military Studies Office in the Bowman Expeditions' México Indígena project. Although the AAG does not have the legal authority to investigate this matter, the Executive Committee unanimously passed a resolution to form a taskforce to examine the AAG Ethics Statement and make recommendations for modifications because of the controversy your concerns have created. We have written to the AAG to request that the task force should include Indigenous representation. Ideally this would include a member of your community. However, we do not believe the AAG will agree to have a member of your community on the task force. Thus, we would like to offer you the opportunity to help us craft our own Ethics of Conduct for Research and Indigenous People. Doug Richardson, Executive Director of the AAG indicated the AAG would be open to referencing any new IPSG ethical research guidelines as part of their Ethics Statement modifications.

As a group we will also urge the AAG to begin a dialogue with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to more thoroughly address research with Indigenous communities. We believe this is necessary because in 2003 the IRB issued a statement in conjunction with the Oral History Association and American Historical Association "that taking oral histories, unstructured interviews (as if for a piece of journalism), collecting anecdotes, and similar free speech activities do not constitute IRB-qualified research, and were never intended to be covered by clinical research rules."¹ This means much of the qualitative research geographers do within Indigenous communities is not regulated. This needs to change.

Many things need to be attended to if we want to see real consequences come from your concerns. We hope to be of service to you as you walk this path of injustice and pray your resolution will be swift, just, and worthy of your ancestor's approval.

Me ke aloha pumehana (with warm aloha),

Sincerely,

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Co-Chairs,
AAG Indigenous Peoples Specialty Group

c: Union of Organizations of the Sierra Juarez (UNOSJO), Oaxaca

¹ Wikipedia(2009) "Institutional Review Board" (webpage,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutional_review_board#Problems_with_IRB_review_of_social_science)