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UA-Led Team Documenting Early Hopi-Spanish Relations

UA anthropology professor Thomas E. Sheridan has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to lead a team that is collecting Hopi oral histories about their ancestors' early counters with Spaniards.

By La Monica Everett-Haynes, University Communications
September 11, 2009

Records of early interactions between Hopi Indians and Spanish settlers – including military accounts, missionary records and court documents – are often distorted and biased against American Indians, often leaving out their point of view entirely.

With virtually no existing written records to reflect early opinions held by Hopi Indians, University of Arizona anthropologist **Thomas E. Sheridan** and his research team have been documenting the complex oral traditions Hopis have maintained about early encounters with Spaniards.

The project, "Moquis and Kastilam: The Hopi History Project," has been awarded a \$75,000 **National Endowment for the Humanities** Collaborative Research Project grant.

In 2000, Sheridan worked with Emory Sekaquaptewa, a renowned UA anthropologist, and the former Arizona State Museum director, Hartman Lomawaima, to initiate what would become a series of project studying the Hopi history.

That year, the Hopi tribe entered a formal collaboration with the UA's Southwest Center, resulting in the Hopi Documentary History Project, also known as "Moquis and Kastilam" – Moquis, the term used by Spaniards for Hopi Indians; Kastilam, the word Hopis used for Spaniards.

The current project, the latest in a series of grant-funded efforts, will allow Sheridan, his team and collaborators to tap into the "social memory," as he describes it, and will be funded through June.

The new grant was one of two collaborative research grants awarded by the NEH in Arizona this funding term. The other went to Northern Arizona University.

With the funding, Sheridan is working with a professor of practice in the UA **School of Anthropology**, T.J. Fergeson, and Anton Daughters, a UA graduate student in anthropology, to continue collaborating with Hopi tribal members to build on existing narratives.

"We are such a document-centric society, and a lot of people don't realize that documents are all written from a point of view and may be written out of ignorance as much as out of knowledge," said Sheridan, a UA professor and noted author who conducts ethnographic and ethnohistoric investigations in the Southwest region of the United States and in northern Mexico.

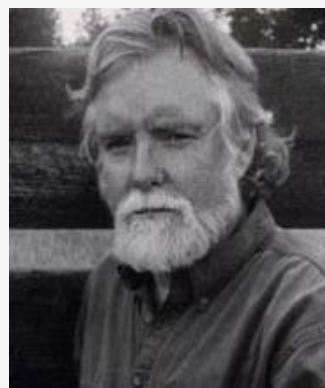
"Simply relying on documents, and documents that were overwhelmingly written by people who were trying to conquer and convert another people, gives you – at best – an incomplete view of history," said Sheridan, who holds a joint appointment with the UA's **Southwest Center**.

At worst, he added, the result is a "terribly distorted view."

Of particular concern: Spaniards did not have a solid understanding of American Indian cultures, philosophies or religious practice. Sheridan noted in his grant proposal that Spaniards deemed such practices as "superstitions" or defined them as "devil worship."

Documenting stories of destruction, abuse and murder, along with those of retaliation and revolt, instances of resiliency and renewal from the Hopi perspective are all important.

In the past at the UA, projects led by Documentary Relations of the Southwest – a program in the **Office of Ethnohistorical Research** located at the **Arizona State Museum** – have focused on ways that presidios and militias developed in New Spain and also on



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governments in Mexico and Central America.

The current project, however, focuses directly on Hopi oral traditions carried forward generation by generation since early contact with the Spaniards.

Sheridan's team, which is conducting field work on the reservation, intends to publish articles related to early Hopi-Spanish relations with plans to publish a book on the historical relations between the two groups.

Sheridan noted that the team's work, in collaboration with the Hopi Tribe, would aid the Hopilavayi Program in Kykotsmovi, Ariz., which is working to preserve the Hopi language.

Some of those conducting interviews and working with Sheridan and his team are affiliated with the **Hopi Cultural Preservation Office**: Stewart Koyiyumptewa, an archivist well-versed in Hopi traditions who works with the tribe; Marvin Lalo, the former Hopilavaya program manager; Leigh Kuwaniswma, director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office; and two of the office's staff members, Anita Poleahla and Donald Dawahongnewa.

Koyiyumptewa has already conducted about eight interviews with Hopi elders and will continue to interview other elders for the "Moquis and Kastilam" project. Meanwhile, Sheridan and Daughters will continue to investigate existing documents on Hopi-Spanish relations currently held at institutions across the United States.

The researchers and interviewers also will work with the Cultural Resources Advisory Task Team, which is a group of more than one dozen Hopi elders.

"The Hopis have this particularly strong oral tradition, and more and more archeologists, historians and anthropologists are coming to see the strength of those oral traditions," Sheridan noted.

"We're trying to provide a different type of history, one that would not only rely on the documentary record, but one that would then compare and contrast that record," he said.

"The Spaniards were writing from their own particular cultural biases," he added. "These oral traditions can complement, supplement and also contradict those documentary records."