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## **Paleopathology of Violence in North America**

The identification of violence and trauma in an archaeological context requires a nuanced and detailed analysis of both material culture and human remains. Bioarchaeology offers an extremely useful approach to the classification and interpretation of traumatic injuries that is often indicative of conflict and violence. Bioarchaeology accomplishes this by bridging the chasm between biology and the social and environmental dimensions of the populations being engaged.

Violence is a key feature in human interactions. It is maintained through linguistic, cultural, psychological, political, economic, and social forces. Throughout human history, periods of relative peace have been marred by eruptions of interpersonal or institutional violence. In the pre-Columbian past of the Americas, the challenge lies in trying to decipher the complexity, variability, and ambiguities in the total picture of the mortuary behavior and its relationship to abandonment, migration, conflict, resource scarcity, ethnic identity, settlement patterns, and other factors that could lead to violence and warfare.

This presentation draws largely from the author's research regarding the taphonomy of violence using case studies from the United States and México. Advances in understanding taphonomic processes have helped to illuminate subtle alterations on human skeletal remains and their meanings. The complexities surrounding the reconstruction of past lifeways and the social personas of archaeological skeletal material is often exasperated by the confusion that can arise in determining the cause of skeletal changes. This is particularly acute when researchers attempt to classify skeletal changes to specific categories such as trauma, "cannibalism" ritual mortuary preparation, carnivore damage, burning, and water, soil, and root damage. Recent advances in bioarchaeology, taphonomic, and forensic sciences have added a significant level of required precision to the evaluation of data used in drawing inferences regarding human behavior from skeletal material.

The study of violence has often been conducted with little or no consideration for the specific and often unique cultural meanings associated with it. Warfare and violence are not merely reactions to a set of external variables but rather are encoded with intricate cultural meaning. Some of the human skeletal assemblages discussed in this presentation are disarticulated, broken, chopped, burned, and often dismembered. Some scholars interpret these collections as representing cannibalism, witchcraft retribution, warfare, or ritualized dismemberment. Other assemblages demonstrate evidence of healed trauma, sharp force trauma, and gunshot wounds. This presentation will present my findings on interdisciplinary techniques and new methodologies in the analysis of human remains from archaeological contexts that allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the paleopathology of violence.

## References

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