



# In Cahoots with Marginalized Communities: Anthropology at the University of Oregon

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Received: 📅 March 19, 2026

Published: 📅 March 30, 2026

## Abstract

During the 1990s and 2000s, the University of Oregon's (UO) Department of Anthropology supported a diverse group of graduate students—including more than a dozen Indigenous Native Americans and Pacific Islanders—in their efforts to earn Masters and PhD degrees in archaeology and cultural anthropology. In a recently published article, however, Brian Haley accuses me, the UO Department of Anthropology, and higher administration of being “in cahoots” with students falsely representing their Indigenous identity and, in doing so, depriving legitimate Indigenous students of support. Here, I refute those claims while admitting to being deeply “in cahoots” with marginalized individuals and communities seeking to better preserve and revitalize their cultural heritage resources.

## Introduction

In the 1990s and 2000s, the University of Oregon's Department of Anthropology gained a well-deserved reputation for its commitment to help diversify the academy. My faculty colleagues and I mentored numerous students, both graduate and undergraduate, from communities underrepresented in academia, including Native American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and African American individuals, as well as numerous Caucasians and graduate students from Japan and Korea. It was a remarkably diverse and vibrant community, including masters and doctoral students from several federally-recognized Oregon tribes (3 from the Coquille Indian Tribe, 2 from the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, 1 from the Klamath Tribes, 1 from the Burns Paiute), a member of the Walker River Paiute (Nevada), and two who identified as Chumash Indian descendants. As part of a broader campus imperative that came to be known as the Native American Initiative, our efforts

were supported by the UO's Graduate School, College of Arts & Sciences, Libraries, Law School, and distinguished UO President, Dr. David Frohnmayer. I was the faculty advisor for one aspect of that initiative known as the Southwest Oregon Research Project, led by Native American PhD students (George Wasson, Jason Younker, & David Lewis) who retrieved more than 100,000 pages of historical and ethnographic documents from the Smithsonian Institution and other archives, then copied and distributed them to tribal governments in the Pacific Northwest during the first inter-tribal Potlatch (or “Giveaway”) ceremonies held in Oregon for more than 150 years [1]. I deeply appreciate the support the UO provided to so many students and faculty who helped build lasting connections to Indigenous communities along the Pacific Coast and beyond.

In a career as an archaeologist, professor of anthropology, and museum director that spans nearly 50 years, I have worked

closely and collaboratively with Native American tribes and individuals from Alaska, Oregon, and California. My research spans investigations at Spanish missions and presidios in California, 19th century Chinese abalone middens, Viking Age sites in Iceland, and Native American sites ranging in age from 200 to more than 15,000 years old. My center of gravity has always been in the territory of the Chumash Indians of southcentral California, however, where I was born, schooled, worked, and now live again after 30+ years residing in the Pacific Northwest. I have actively worked with members of the Chumash community since 1977 [2] including the federally-recognized Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, the state-recognized Coastal Band of Chumash Indians, and other Chumash groups and individuals—to help them protect the archaeological sites and other heritage resources they consider sacred.

### In Cahoots?

Contrast this picture, with Brian Haley's (2024) article in the journal *Genealogy*, which relitigates a tired old debate that began nearly 30 years ago with the publication of Haley and Wilcoxon's (1997) [3] article "On the making of Chumash tradition" (see also Erlandson 2022; Haley 2022) [4,5,6]. In his 2024 article, Haley castigates me, a five person PhD committee, the UO Department of Anthropology, Graduate School, and College of Arts and Sciences for an imagined failure to find fault in Dr. Deana Dartt-Newton's (2009) [7] dissertation and refusing to force her to renounce her family's multicultural Chumash/Californio heritage.

Haley implies that Dartt's committee—as well as the entire UO administration—was unduly influenced by me and my scholarly reputation. He ignores the fact that I was a junior member of the committee co-chaired by well-known cultural anthropologists Dr. Lynn Stephen and Dr. Brian Klopotek [8] (now in the UO Department of Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies) that also included Native Alaskan scholar Dr. Shari Huhndorf (currently the Class of 1938 Professor of Native American Studies and Coordinator of the Native American Studies Program in the Ethnic Studies Department at UC Berkeley), and a prominent member of the Chumash community, the late Roberta Cordero, JD. Haley characterizes me as a "pre-Columbian ecological archaeologist" unqualified to weigh in on Chumash identity issues, ignoring my extensive work on historic era sites (and cultural processes) as well as my nearly 50 years of working closely with members from across the Chumash community.

Dr. Dartt-Newton's PhD committee took Haley's allegations seriously but found no evidence of wrongdoing. The same is true for separate investigative committees in the UO Graduate School and the Dean's Office for Responsible Conduct of Research, which found no evidence that Dartt-Newton purposely or knowingly committed research misconduct. Haley (2024) plays fast and loose, however, in his selective interpretation of the PhD committee's responsibilities and written response to his complaints. To clarify

the record and allow readers to decide for themselves what the doctoral committee meant in responding to Haley, I quote the bulk of our letter below<sup>1</sup>:

We have received and reviewed your communications . . . regarding the dissertation of Dr. Deana Dartt-Newton and would like to take this opportunity to respond. . . . To begin, we address your allegations around Dartt-Newton's stated identity as a Chumash person and our responsibility to verify it. We reject your accusations on several grounds. First, as scholars based at a public university, we do not ask our students to prove their identity through genealogies or other means, nor would it be legal for us to do so if we were so inclined. Second, while we respect the value of written records from the California missions and other early historical documentary sources, we are aware that descriptions of race, origin, and family ties are not completely reliable and are often open to interpretation, even before the accuracy of translations and paternity questions are considered. Oral histories, of course, are another means of preserving ancestral knowledge that may not be recorded on paper. We also disagree with your essentialized characterizations of various historical figures as "Spanish" or "Mexican," as many of the soldiers and "settlers" sent to missions or pueblos in the Santa Barbara Channel area were also Native Americans from areas to the south. As you know, committee member Jon Erlandson has worked extensively with multiple Chumash groups (both federally-recognized and not) for over 30 years. He is knowledgeable about Chumash history, modern politics, and the complex nature of Chumash identity claims, and he agrees with the rest of the dissertation committee that these are issues for Chumash people (not museums, universities, or white anthropologists) to decide. We feel Dr. Dartt-Newton did an admirable job of recognizing her mixed Californio heritage and discussing the contested nature of identity politics among the Chumash.

As to the allegations of scholarly misconduct, we find none and concur with the findings of the letter from Lynette M. Schenkel, Assistant Vice President for Responsible Conduct of Research, and Christina Booth, Director of the Human Research Protection Program. In fact, viewing the entirety of the dissertation, we find Dr. Dartt-Newton's contributions to the field to be both original and highly valuable. Some of the most important contributions of this dissertation are in the several chapters in which she unpacks the problematic assumptions with the racial/ethnic/national classifications of "Californio," "Mestizo," "Indian," "Spaniard," and other staple categories of California history to reveal the historical complexities of disease epidemics and demographic collapse, migration, labor recruitment, inter-marriage, religious conversion, and nation building that converge in the story of the Spanish Missions and the birth of California as a state out of post-colonial independent Mexico. By revealing the false boundaries drawn by such categories which later get translated into "genuine" Chumash

versus “Spanish” or “Mexican,” in the contemporary context, Dartt-Newton carries out critical ethnohistorical work that reveals the “border” and “California” as parts of complex regional histories that involved continual shifting of racial and ethnic categories through time as colonial and then independent states (Spain, Mexico, and the U.S.) came to power in the area. Dartt-Newton argues for a more complex ethnohistory that will reflect the spectrum of mixed heritage communities today that are the legacy of Spanish and U.S. colonialism. Among the Chumash today, there continue to be intermarriages (often with children) between families you would label as “authentic” vs. “neo” Chumash, further blurring the boundaries between your essentialized categories. Furthermore, some of the statements in the dissertation that you take issue with are quotes from individuals interviewed, while others happened “behind closed doors” and are tantamount to “he said-she said” accounts that we could not mediate.

Dartt-Newton suggests how the experience of many Chumash and other Native Californians, forged primarily through cultural circuits and maintenance of shared activity with other Native Americans, exists outside of the dominant narrative expressed in museums and earlier scholarly account written by those who claim to be the “real” keepers of heritage. Her honest discussion of the complexities and challenges of identifying and talking with representatives of four different Chumash groups, Ohlone communities, and other Natives who work with museums reveals how highly contested belonging and authenticity are in a climate where most groups lack federal recognition. We recognize your position in this debate and that Dartt-Newton dissents with your views. Nonetheless, we think her interviews and questionnaires of 31 Native study participants suggest an “authentic” and shared experience of “loss, extinction, and abandonment” as reflected in participants’ feelings about regional museums that interpret the history of California Indians through the “pre-contact,” and colonial Spanish, Mexican, and American periods. We feel that the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History acted inappropriately in preventing an accomplished University of Oregon PhD student from conducting legitimate research, especially in requiring Deana Dartt-Newton to renounce her own family traditions and identity. We believe her PhD dissertation is a valuable critique of California museums and other interpretive centers that depict the Native American history of the state. Her dissertation provides excellent documentary and analytical material for rewriting contemporary museum narratives and policies that could fundamentally alter the ways that museums engage with Native peoples. We believe her work has enormous potential to positively impact the relationship between museums and Native peoples.

As you know, public narratives about Indians remain absolutely foundational to understandings of indigeneity, dispossession, and continuity of Native people in the United States, so museum and other public history narratives are sites bursting with potential

for critical intervention. We encourage our students to enter those critical public debates and we are proud of Dr. Dartt-Newton’s integrity and courage in doing so. Finally, we believe the appropriate forum for engaging her ideas is in the academic arena. We are proud to be part of a major research university that supports academic freedom and promotes scholarly debate, and we stand by Deana Dartt-Newton’s participation in that longstanding tradition”.

The genealogical research of Haley and his colleagues on Chumash ancestry and identity relies on a variety of historical sources, prominently including Spanish Mission documents recorded by the Franciscan priests who enslaved the Chumash and other California Tribes during the late 1700s and early 1800s. These records are valuable sources of information on Chumash demography just before and after European colonization, but their interpretation is fraught with problems. It cannot be assumed, for instance, that: (1) all California Indians entered the Mission system; (2) that the Franciscan fathers did not make errors in recording what Indigenous neophytes at the missions told them; and (3) California Tribal members always told the Franciscans the truth about paternity and other issues. What of cases of rape by Spanish soldiers or priests, for instance, or of “infidelities” that were acceptable in traditional Chumash society but broke much stricter Catholic taboos? One cannot minimize the potential for error in interpreting such documents, recorded during a time of enslavement and genocide that saw as much as 90 percent of the Chumash population die from violence, disease, and despair. To me and many of my colleagues—including many Chumash descendants I have communicated with over the years—basing identity solely on the records of Spanish, Mexican, and American colonial regimes who stole the lives and lands of the Chumash is simply wrong.

The significance of these and other problems are largely dismissed by Haley, but they are serious enough that the California Native American Heritage Commission (CNAHC)—chaired by the honorable Reginald Pagaling, a member of the federally-recognized Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians—recently proposed changing its official guidelines related to determining California Tribal ancestry: California Mission Rolls are no longer a criteria for consideration of inclusion on the Contact List. The Commission made this decision after receiving feedback during tribal consultation about the numerous problems with these records which were confirmed through our own review. Specifically, the majority of these records only indicate the race of an individual and not a tribal or cultural affiliation. Additionally, confirming the connection of a present-day individual to someone on the Mission Rolls is difficult because the Spanish speaking Catholic priests who prepared the documents did not always correctly spell Indigenous names. As such, proving these connections often requires the use of a genealogist and there are no clear standards as to what makes a genealogist legitimate (CNAHC 2025:1) [9].

## Conclusions

The CNAHC recognizes the problems inherent in proving ancestry through the analysis of genealogical research based solely on the records of biased colonial representatives of successive Spanish, Mexican, and American regimes. Many Chumash Tribal members from federally-recognized and state-recognized groups have expressed anger or disgust at the meddling and misinformation of white anthropologists who they view as trying to divide the larger Chumash community and protect the privileged position anthropologists have held in writing their histories and determining the fate of Chumash archaeological sites, museum collections, and public displays. Not surprisingly, however, for determining who is or is not Indigenous, Haley (2024:2) continues to claim that “In most cases, the ideal authority is an anthropologist or someone else engaged in indigenous studies.” I believe, in contrast, that such decisions should be made by Tribal governments or other Tribal organizations themselves.

As Haley continues to tilt at his old windmills, the world around him has changed. The state of California now officially recognizes (and requires consultation with) numerous bands of Chumash and other California Tribes not currently recognized by the federal government. Recent changes to the 1990 federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the passage of a California NAGPRA cedes greater authority to Indigenous communities (both federally- and state-recognized) over their heritage, including repatriation and reburial of ancestors, grave goods, and other sacred objects long-held in museums and university collections. In the last several years—more than 30 years after NAGPRA became law—hundreds of Chumash ancestors (and untold thousands of associated grave goods) held in museums for many decades have been repatriated and reburied in the soil of their homeland.

In his fixation on demeaning the identity, scholarship, and career of Dr. Deana Dartt-Newton, Haley does a grave injustice to the outstanding work done by Dr. Dartt, her fellow graduate students, and the faculty in the UO Department of Anthropology to diversify the academy and help Indigenous communities protect and revitalize their cultural heritage. Although Haley’s characterization of my expertise, experience, ethics, and motivations is deeply flawed, I happily plead guilty to being deeply in cahoots with Chumash and other Native American communities in working with them to preserve their ancestral sites and sacred objects.

## Notes

1. The records of a UO investigation into potential student misconduct would normally be considered confidential. Haley

breached that confidence, however, and I enter our letter into the record with the permission of Dr. Dartt herself.

2. Along with many of my colleagues (including Chumash friends), I have long wondered what fuels Haley’s obsession with Chumash identity and claims that many CBCN members were not Chumash. One prominent member of the CBCN who worked with Haley and I on an archaeological project in the 1980s hypothesized that it started with a humiliating prank by a CBCN monitor, who farted in an empty 5-gallon bucket, sealed it, then had Haley open it in front of the crew during a lunch break.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Crystal Jones and Robert Thomas for encouraging me to submit an article to JAAS and for managing the review and production process. After reading Haley’s latest salvo on the topic of Chumash identity, I contacted the editor of *Genealogy* to request that I be allowed to write a rebuttal, but my inquiry went unanswered. In writing this essay, I was aided by discussions with Deana Dartt, Kristina Gill, Michael Khush, John Ruiz, Lynn Stephen, Mati Waiya, and Nakia Zavalla. Nonetheless, the opinions expressed here are solely my own.

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