Cemetery Demography

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Field Exercise

This will begin as a field exercise at the local cemetery and end with a lab at the university. Please be prepared to consider the place of ethnicity, gender, age, religion, mortality, and class from the sample that you have selected from the cemetery. One of the outcomes of this exercise will be to consider the value of data sets, sampling, and statistics in attempting to understand early California history. The range of dates that you are likely to find identified with the cemetery ranges from the late 1840's through the present. The historic periods to be considered in this instance are as follows:

- Mexican Republican: AD 1822-1848
- Early Euro-American: AD 1849-1870
- Victorian Revivalist: AD 1870-1890
- Vernacular American: AD 1890-1940
- Modern American: AD 1940-Present

You will learn about the fundamental procedures used by historical demographers or "census takers" to collect information from long-dead informants. In addition, you will consider such approaches as "sampling strategies," "frequency seriation," and "socio-cultural assessment" used by archaeologists to group materials of known age with those of unknown age.

Part One: Sampling Strategies

1. Before proceeding with the collection of data, you will need to consider the most appropriate "sampling strategy" for collecting the most reliable cross-section, or "representative sampling," of the data to be had from the cemetery artifacts available to you. You may use either one or more of the following "archaeological" sampling strategies:

(a) "Transect Sampling" – A method in which you divide up and walk in equidistantly spaced straight lines across the length and breadth of the cemetery…or a section thereof. This method approximates that used by archaeologists to search for and document unrecorded archaeological sites. Along you path, you should collect information on every grave marker that lies in your path; or

(b) "Random Sampling" – A method that requires you to select areas or "samples" of the cemetery at random. For example, you may designate names or numbers for different areas of the cemetery, record said numbers or names on pieces of paper, and then have a member or members of your group pull the numbers or names out of a hat in much the same way that the lottery is conducted.

2. Having selected the areas for the sampling strategy, you are to proceed with the collecting of data needed to conduct the (a) seriation study, or (b) the socio-cultural analysis.

Part Two: Seriation

1. *Seriation* is a method used in archaeology to produce "relative" dates for objects, artifacts, or sites of unknown date or age. This is accomplished by finding items of known age that co-occur with the items of unknown age, and then extrapolating dates for the items of unknown age. Consider the following features of the grave markers when attempting to "date" unmarked or undated markers:

- *Technological* (material type or techniques for inscriptions)
- *Formal* (shape, symbols, motifs)
- *Stylistic* (organization of elements, curvilinear versus rectilinear elements)
- *Linguistic* (contents of inscriptions, languages used)

2. As noted, the first part of the assignment will be to do a seriation of grave markers from a selected sample available at the cemetery. You should collect the following information from each of those grave markers that you sample in each instance.

- Full Name
- DOB (Date of Birth) & DOD (Date of Death)
- POB (Place of Birth) & POD (Place of Death)
- Ethnicity (Where Known or Suspected)
- Spouse (Full Name & Aforementioned Info)
- Cause of Death (If Stated)
- Grave Marker Data (Material type, relative size, inscriptions, etc.)
- Class (Your assessment of the person's relative wealth)

Part Three: Race, Class, and Ethnicity

Having collected the aforementioned data from your cemetery sample, you are to consider the following questions in thinking about the information collected. Questions are based on Barber (1994: 210) Doing Historical Archaeology: Exercises Using Documentary, Oral, and Material Evidence, Prentice-Hall.

1. Which groups appear with the greatest frequency in your sample? For example, such groups may be discerned from such variables as age, ethnicity, gender, date of death, or class standing based on the relative expense of the grave marker.

2. Why was life expectancy increasing or decreasing over time?

3. Why might a mortality spike have occurred at two cemeteries or among one economic class and not another?

4. Why did one ethnic group have higher mortality rates than another, particularly in terms of infant mortality?

5. Why was life expectancy lower for women than men in one ethnic group, while the opposite pattern was true in another?

6. What does the relative size, materials used, and elaboration of the grave markers or crypts say about the occupants of those graves? What ethnic groups appear most highly correlated with the most elaborate tombs, and by contrast, with the least elaborate or simple of the markers or crypts?

7. Based on the information that you collected and the observations that you made, what can you say with some level of assurance about the population of old San Juan through time?

8. If you could paint a picture of the history of early California based on what you have learned from the cemetery data, what could you say about the history and culture of the early Californians?

9. Do you feel that the San Juan Cemetery data that you collected provides a reasonable representation of the types of people that populated early California?