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Assignment II-Poverty Point

Writing for the Society for American Archaeology Journal can be a difficult task. Every journal has their standards and goals for submissions, such as the SAA's goals of providing research and archaeological knowledge to the community. The society represents professional, student, and amateur archaeologists alike. The SAA article *Poverty Point and the Archaeology of Singularity* by Professor Tristram R. Kidder, assistant professor Anthony L. Ortmann, and doctoral candidate Lee J. Arco fits the standards, scope, and goals of the journal appropriately.

Poverty Point, Louisiana has been a point of interest for archaeologists since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, the structure and culture of this Neoglacial site has been investigated multiple times. It has been found to be a hunter-gatherer society with the unusual features of the enormous constructed mounds and ridges that notably mark the site. However, what Kidder, Ortmann, and Arco focus on is the uniqueness of Poverty Point and the society of the people that lived there, as well as an excavation of Mound A. Their approach was to abandon traditional views of hunter-gatherer societies and present the idea of looking beyond traditional evidence of these societies, such as what the people ate, to view the history of the settlement. Their approach is certainly innovative and has not been attempted before. As mentioned in the article, one mound at the site, Mound A, "has been sporadically investigated but was never the focus of concerted research efforts until we recently placed 89 cores into the mound" (Kidder et Al. 10). Overall, the approach of the project was innovative and very focused. Previous research at the site has focused on retrieving information on the culture, and even involved some attempts at explaining the functions of the mounds and ridges. Kidder, Ortmann, and Arco instead set out to "synthesize the limited research previously undertaken" (Kidder et Al 10). In order to combine previous research with their own, Kidder's Poverty Point team had to first summarize some of the previous and relevant work done at the site. First, the uniqueness of the site was explained, including finds of radiocarbon dates, the amount of earth moved, normative perceptions of hunter-gatherer societies in Southeast America, and the features of mound-building and its constructors.

Even though it is assumed that readers of this article will have previous knowledge on the subject, the authors fail to go into enough detail or give specific examples in the beginning of the article. For instance, when mentioning "a suite of radiocarbon dates," "recent work at the site demonstrat[ing]...massive program of earth moving," "the site was home to a recurring trade fair," or that "mound building was an egalitarian project" (Kidder et Al) no specific examples of research, dates, names of excavators, or evidence is given. For better understanding, more detail could have been placed here. When describing their own research, the authors are more thoroughly detailed and they transition details well. Unlike in the beginning of the article, details of their own research make connections relevant to the research question and give reasons or evidence behind their conclusions. Starting with the description of Mound A and the history of work done, the authors then present the innovations of their work a couple sentences that are clearly wrote (Kidder et Al 10). Unlike content in the beginning of the article, where information is not well-connected to evidence, there is one instance where the process of transition is well done. In the paragraph describing the normal perceptions of hunter-gatherers, they glide from the introduction of the subject, to the reasons why hunter-gatherer groups are seen the way they are,

and finally to why and what the expected norm of such groups are in a completely smooth and easily understood process. More of the content in the article, particularly the summarization of previous work at Poverty Point, should have been conducted in such a well-written manner, making sure to connect concepts with evidence or data.

Moving on to the design of the research, it can be said that overall the project was innovative yet not detailed when dealing with the process of excavation. All that is mentioned is that 89 core samples were taken from Mound A, making this project difficult for other researchers to replicate unless the authors were contacted directly. The findings were listed with fantastic links between evidence and their meanings, yet the process is not mentioned, and so it is hard to fully analyze the design of the research. Finally, the analysis of data within the article and its level of significance were mixed aspects of this article. Throughout the reading, specific measurements or statistics, such as the research on the layers of Mound A, were not given. It would have been relevant to provide this data, as it may help the reader further understand Kidder, Ortman, and Arco's conclusion that Mound A was built rapidly. To be fair, they did provide analysis of the coloring of layers and evidence for why they believe this theory, such as no signs of erosion or intact uncarbonized plant roots.

Just before concluding the article, the authors may be understood to contradict themselves at one point. In the third to last paragraph, they state "the function of Mound A is unknown" and yet in the next paragraph they mention that it "has always been understood as a ritual feature" (Kidder et Al. 11). This is a somewhat confusing set of statements and could have been announced in a different way. Also, the introduction of some of the cultural aspects of Poverty Point near the end is not very sensible, as it leads to the possibility of new questions and essentially confuses everything. A better placement for this section would have been directly after explaining the time span of Mound A's construction because the ritual theories and time frame tie together. The concluding paragraph itself is very well-written. It incorporates the concept Kidder, Ortman, and Arco were trying to make, that traditional examinations of hunter-gatherer societies do not consider the symbolic and ritualistic aspects of them, right away. It also points out the singularity of Poverty Point, stressing the importance of how the site proves that "hunter-gatherers are unambiguously more complex and variable than we ever imagined" (Kidder et Al. 12). Furthermore, the conclusion to the article leads the way for future investigations of Poverty Point, similar sites, and hunter-gatherer societies in general. This idea may lead other archaeologists to examine previously visited sites with hunter-gatherer activity, and therefore allow them to possibly discover new information about these societies.

In conclusion, the article was suitable for the Society of American Anthropologists Journal. It was written in a manner that was easy to read, the vocabulary was not overly complex, the sequence and transition was excellent for the most part, and the presentation of information was good, though could have been improved with more evidence and details. The content of the article provided both a good summary of previously found information about Poverty Point and introduced innovative concepts for researching the site. The only flaws of the article were that data was not analyzed enough, and that some relative data was not provided, leaving out descriptions or specific pieces of evidence to help explain concepts mentioned. Also, at one point, new information was introduced at an irrelevant or confusing time. If the article were to be resubmitted, it would be suggested to first resolve those few points, to add a picture of the site where the mounds and ridges can be more clearly seen, and to describe the process of excavation in better detail.

## REFERENCES CITED

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