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Ep68_WIA-Alt-Right-Issues-FullEpisode

00:00:12 **Chelsi**

Hi and welcome to the Women in Archaeology podcast, a podcast about, for, and by women in the field of archaeology. My name is Chelsi Slotten and I'm your host for this episode. On today's episode we are joined by Kirsten Lopez and Emily Long. Ladies thank you so much for being here today.

00:00:29 **Kirsten**

Of course,

00:00:30 **Emily**

Always happy to be here

00:00:30 **Chelsi**

We always love getting the gang back together. Today we are going to be talking about a somewhat timely topic which the attempts by the far-right, alt-right, white supremacist, white nationalist groups to co-opt historical figures historical events for their own benefit. So we're going to be breaking this episode up into three different sections. And for the first section, given the huge problem with white nationalism and gun violence in the US, we're actually going to talk about the Confederacy and problems with kind of this like Lost Cause myth which is at its core a racist ideology from the Confederacy. So Kirsten or Emily, do either of you want to jump in with a summarization of that?

00:01:24 **Emily**

so clearly there's a, like Chelsi said a huge rise in white supremacy, neo-nazis and a lot of issues in the United States and we won't necessarily get into the political ramifications of all that by any stretch but there is this ...

00:01:41 **Chelsi**

Can I just say there have been more mass shootings in the US this year than there have been days of the year, think about that.

00:01:47 **Emily**

I mean it's heartbreaking and there's, oh man, there's so much to say about that. But looking at that but

00:01:56 **Chelsi**

we need to talk about why.

00:01:59 **Emily**

All right, so we'll have a lot of articles up on the website of the research that we were doing ourselves and an article I was looking at it's called the Cost of the Confederacy and it's all about how a lot of sites like Confederate monuments, plantations that haven't really done much in terms of addressing issues of slavery- it's more of that romanticized Gone With the Wind style type of interpretation- and it's the sites, these monuments really play into the idea of the white supremacist imagination that there was a better time and they almost feed into these hate groups that, that there was a sacred time that when it was better, that it would have been a better if the Civil War had not been lost, and it's this like fantasy world that well, it's the War of Northern Aggression. This is how it would have been if we had not lost the war and it's deeply concerning because this fed into the Jim Crow laws of the South. If you want to refer to one of our episodes on the monument situation and whether or not we should take down Confederate monuments, I highly recommend looking into that episodes. We talked deeply about that but it's a lot of these ideas that they're feeding into this absurd idea that there was this better time in the past when the white people were in charge and slaves were happy about their situations and it's absolutely ridiculous. But these sites these heritage sites and these monuments play into that...

00:03:37 **Chelsi**

delusion

00:03:38 **Emily**

that story

00:03:39 **Chelsi**

that story, that's way better.

00:03:44 **Emily**

delusions is very good too. And I think it provides unfortunately a way of saying, legitimizing beliefs of like we are better and we are... because we have this history as such of having this background of supremacy and whatnot. And it feeds into like you said that story and that delusion and it's deeply troubling and you can see it from the Reconstruction Era after the Civil War to the Jim Crow laws into the civil rights movement, and we're seeing an upsurge I think and that backlash of having a black president and now it's that under current has always been there of these white supremacist groups, but I think now they're embracing these heritage sites even more and they are now even more vocal and so it's deeply concerning that these historical heritage areas are being

00:04:38 Chelsi

one thing that, I mean your making a case for a history that didn't really exist and the history that could have, could have been better if they'd only won and part of that is trying to restructure the narrative to make it about states rights because the thing that we talked about today in other, you know, hot topic issues whether it be access to guns or abortion rights or legalization of marijuana. What rights do states have to determine what to allow their residents to do versus the national government and basically since the Civil War was lost, I might even say during the Civil War.

00:05:28 Kirsten

Yeah,

00:05:29 Chelsi

They talked about how they were fighting for states rights and one of the most common kind of push backs if you say the Civil War was about slavery, people will be like, "oh no, no the Civil War was about states rights," but the state right that the Civil War was about with the states rights to allow their citizens to have slaves.

00:05:49 Kirsten

That's when it's like shit, it was about states rights to have slaves. And also just you know, remembering that, you know the US as it exists today was not the first draft of the US. The Constitution was written many years after the Declaration of Independence. It's because there was a previous government in that to what we have now and that's not often taught in that we you know, the very first draft was a confederation of states that were independent and it did not work. Like that were fully independant, it was like an EU I guess, of fledgling colonial pieces, but it's not to say that, you know getting into the argument of states rights versus federal whatever, but if we are to work as a country, there are certain things that you have to have that everyone's working together on and if we are looking at in our constitution as human rights and the Bill of Rights specifically that people are always like, you know, you hear the same people that get into discussions on states rights often hold the constitution in a almost a religious document.

00:07:17 Chelsi

Thou shalt not cross

00:07:18 Kirsten

Thou shalt not cross this.. so well, it's made to be malleable one. But if you're looking at that document and you're ignoring the Bill of Rights and the amendments that were made like

00:07:32 Chelsi

The first ten amendments, were made at basically the same time the constitution was made, you know,

00:07:39 **Kirsten**

yeah, it was definitely

00:07:40 **Chelsi**

You can't look at them as separate documents. That's a good point.

00:07:44 **Emily**

And it's so problematic then looking at this document in a way that like, "oh we were meant to have like it pushing other people's rights above another" and it's like no they we have amendments for a reason. Like, oh look now women can vote. You know, it's like a lot has changed and it will keep changing

00:08:02 **Kirsten**

That's a good example and then they're like no no, let's not do that. So that was undone. It's made to be malleable because the, as one would say, the forefathers knew that society changes and that we can change the Constitution slightly to sort of bring it up to our moral code because that's what they did even in the span of, you know, 30 years. So that between the Declaration of Independence and finishing writing the Bill of Rights, I mean, it's all within a generation. So knowing that it's like these are all things that are being written. So it's, it's that constant striving for what is it the pursuit of happiness.

00:08:52 **Chelsi**

Yeah. I mean, it's also worth noting to talk about you know evolution a little bit, but you know species that have survived and thrived in the world have the ability to adapt and the world changes and as species we have to adapt. It's government, its political party is is you know...

00:09:16 **Emily**

And therefore it's that fear of change. That like we'll no longer have one group in charge of another or have the ability to say "No, we're better than so and so" and then it's like that fear of change. I think that we see this weird backlash to be like "no, there was a better time" and it's like really? I'm pretty sure having polio vaccines now, and penicillin and whatnot. I think you know, the confederate south would have really sucked we would have all had malaria.

00:09:50 **Chelsi**

I think it's interesting to note that when people talk about like, "oh wouldn't it be great if you could go back in time and live somewhere else and see different part of the past". Do you know who answers that question the positive? White people. And you know, they assume that they're going to go back and be like high status and have servants and like the past sucked for like 95% of the people. Okay?

00:10:13 **Chelsi**

[laughter]

00:10:14 **Kirsten**

Yeah,

00:10:15 **Chelsi**

But I think Emily made a good point that a lot of it is kind of based on, on fear and I think that there is some people, I think we've seen it in some of the things that politicians or pundits have said, or mouthpieces where they're like "Oh, well, what if someone else gets power what if they treat us like we've been treating them?", you know, which makes it clear that they realize that their behavior is problematic but instead of saying, "oh maybe we should treat people better" they're like "no like, let's cling on to power more" because they can only imagine this world where you have the oppressed and the oppressors. They can't imagine a world where people can get along. And that's profoundly bad to me, actually.

00:10:55 **Kirsten**

Yeah

00:10:56 **Emily**

And instead, I mean it's just kind of bringing it back to these Confederate sites there are several plantations throughout the south that are being interpreted in terms of showing the brutality and the difficult times of slavery while others kind of hide it. I find it interesting those who hide it and those who show it and I think those who hide it, it just again plays into these issues. In the Southern Poverty Law Center there's a great quote in an article that they're working on tracking hate groups, and they say "these sites they are treated as Sacred by white supremacists and represent what this country should be and what would have been if the Civil War had not been lost" and so it's a imagination and twisting of history in such a way that it's taking these historic sites where digs have been done and it shows you know, the slave quarters there have been tons of archaeological evidence showing that slavery was bad, and there's tons of historical evidence showing slavery was bad, but it's just, I find it such a unique situation here in the United States and we see this throughout the world, we'll be talking about that later, taking historic heritage sites and twisting

them in a way where people may be visiting them and may not know enough about the history to ask questions because you know, everybody could necessarily if they're on vacation and they're visiting one of these plantations today say "wait, that doesn't sound right" or "wait isn't there more to this story" and it just plays into that like reimagining of the South. That very much worries me in terms of the rise of white supremacy that we see in the United States.

00:12:41 **Chelsi**

I think it's one thing that's not just American citizens though. I remember there was a tweet that went viral of a week, a week and a half ago that was, you know a screenshot of a Yelp review for a plantation in the South and it was someone who comes from Europe and saying they didn't fly- I don't know if they were from Europe they talked about they didn't fly seven hours, eight hours. But like if you're in the southern US like Canada, Latin America, Europe... like if you start looking at the kind of time you have to spend on the plane- but they didn't go on this long trip to come see a plantation to be lectured about how like evil white people were and I'm white, but like my ancestors never did this and I don't want to hear about it. I just wanted to like see it pretty location and gave this site a really, really bad review because they were talking about the brutal realities of slavery that occurred on a plantation that like is an architecturally beautiful house and like has a nice landscape but these horrors occurred there and you need to be aware of them and the fact that having this architecturally very beautiful house was only possible because this family had all of this wealth because they owned human beings and treated them like crap and there are people who just don't want to hear that.

00:13:57 **Emily**

And people didn't want to hear that and it's like yeah, well then don't visit this place,

00:14:04 **Kirsten**

right?

00:14:05 **Emily**

If you know anything about history deal with it.

00:14:09 **Kirsten**

You should know what you're walking into. Well that gets I mean, I don't know, it's one of those topics that I always feel like I don't even know where to start with the I mean, this is where you really get Archaeology is political by nature.

00:14:26 **Emily**

Oh, yeah, and we can't stay out of it. It's literally we can't just be like no. It's not our place.

00:14:36 **Kirsten**

No and that's one of the things that I think it's important, and it's good to see on the occasions that I see it, are archeologists doing like public outreach or public archaeology programs that really delve into these tough topics or even just you know, it would be nice to see archaeology on TV or in media that actually portrays reality like I feel like it once did

00:15:01 **Emily**

Did it?

00:15:06 **Kirsten**

To a minor- I think one thing that from the 90s, the early 90's probably, but they did a show on History Channel in the 90s on Otzi when some of that was first excavated and I think in the past certain programs were less biased and you didn't have things like ancient mermaids and "aliens" and like, you know fill in the blank bullshit that tends to draw more public attention than actual archaeology anymore. Like it's actually difficult to find and that gets into you know are people actually understanding or do they really have no idea what the history is

00:16:01 **Emily**

And then they go to these heritage sites and it's like do you get what happened here?

00:16:06 **Kirsten**

Yeah, and so it's one of those, it's difficult for most people I think to parse out truth, like reality from something like a type of propaganda that has an agenda. So I think it's part of our job, not entirely but part of our job is archaeologist is to reel in educators and really trying to help people understand how all this is is reality or not reality.

00:16:37 **Chelsi**

Definitely and I think that we want to talk a lot more about that in section three for sure.

00:16:44 **Emily**

Yeah and I mean it's just an anecdote in terms of like these types of heritage sites . My brother and I were visiting a plantation in South Carolina. I was like, "wow, this is gonna be fascinating" there was nothing on slavery the boards, like there was like interpretation boards about slave quarters that were turned inwards, not outwards. So you had to go around to go find them and the interpretation staff we're talking about the servants and how hard it was for the family after the Civil War- they lost everything and on and on

00:17:21 **Kirsten**

WOW,

00:17:21 **Emily**

and my brother, out loud, delightful historian, brother just went "but they owned slaves so fuck them" and walked away. And I was like maybe we need to be doing more of that kind of thing as visitors to really ensure a more open interpretation that could be more accurate and showing hey, some of us actually want the real story here.

00:17:44 **Chelsi**

In terms of kind of accurate interpretations, I think it's also really important that the article you mentioned earlier the Cost of the Confederacy, which was a Smithsonian Institution article

00:17:53 **Emily**

A very good article.

00:17:54 **Chelsi**

Yeah, we'll definitely be linking to that. One of the things that they mentioned was the amount of money that had been spent on, taxpayer money, government money right including Katrina relief, that went towards those monuments and sites, including plantations. And in the last decade its rounding \$40 million dollars. It's not an insignificant amount of money, and that in and of itself is important. If the government is giving you money that is like tacit support, tacit approval and there doesn't seem to be a lot of oversight for funding agencies to go back and go "no you're not actually telling the truth." You know you're talking about slaves being happy and that's not right and that's really problematic. One of the things that I find particularly troubling is that a lot of the money often or at least state money, not federal money, but a lot of state money gets sent to the United Daughters of the Confederacy fund, which is kind of like the Daughters of the American Revolution, but for the confederacy and that they're responsible for giving out money to fund cleaning up confederate graveyards or you know, protecting monuments they're doing this kind of like preservation work and it's almost a way of trying to like whitewash or like to clean up the image of what's happening because a lot of white supremacy and mysongeny sees women as not as capable and keepers of hearth and home and that can't really be that threatening but it also worth nothing that white women owned slaves too and there are accounts of them being pretty brutal slave owners. There's a recent book that came out called "They were her property" talking about the fact that you know women would often arranged for female slaves to be raped hoping that they would get pregnant so they could have wet nurses when they gave birth and I think that there's a really important gender component that we need to take into account both in terms of how the past is

portrayed and who is doing terrible things because it isn't just men it wasn't just women, It was everybody,

00:20:07 **Kirsten**

yeah.

00:20:09 **Emily**

Yeah, and that a lot of the white supremacist ideology also has women in the back seat as well and like women in what they imagined as a better time for women of hearth and home like you were saying. So it's not only white men. There's so much

00:20:31 **Chelsi**

And I feel like we could do 10, 20, 100 episodes on this topic and never run out of things to say but we are at the end of this segment. yes. So we'll be back right after this short intro to talk some about the far rights use of medievalism and Viking age history to attempt to justify their alternative narrative.

00:21:03 **Ad**

During this break why not check out the Women in Archaeology blog and see the types of posts we've been putting up over the last two years. We've been discussing many different types of topics from surveys that have been done in the field on what archaeologists are experiencing, all the way to just random subjects that interest us at this time. You can also see the backlog of episodes and it's also way you can contact us about your interest in the episode and any topics you would like us to cover some time. Thanks for listening.

00:21:43 **Chelsi**

Hi and welcome back to the Women in Archaeology Podcast. So far on today's episode we have been talking about some of the issues with white supremacists and far-right leaders co-opting the history of the past. So far we have discussed the Confederacy in the US and in this segment, we're going to go global a little bit and talk about some of the issues with Classical Greece and Rome, issues with [incomprehensible] and I'm probably going to sound off a lot about Vikings. So get ready.

00:22:19 **Emily**

This is gonna be awesome.

00:22:23 **Chelsi**

As many will probably know if you seen all of the shootings that have been happening in the US and around the world, and if you haven't you should read more news, but there are unfortunately a lot

of people in the far right who are going in on these shooting sprees and referencing various different classical historical groups in their shootings. The shooting in Christchurch in New Zealand, the shooter made reference to Norse "religion" because I don't think that he actually understood what it was but, you know his interpretation of it and the interpretation from a lot of the far right and this unfortunately is something that's been going on for a couple centuries. We've known about the Greeks and the Romans for a long time and for a long time their aesthetic has been looked at as being classical and beautiful and the best thing in the world and minimalist and used to support the fact that they liked white people because white statues but I know Emily you really wanted to go off on this. So I'm going to stop talking and let you jump in before I just rant.

00:23:32 **Emily**

Okay. Oh, oh, I'm so excited about this. Okay, buckle your seatbelts. All right, so like Chelsi was saying this was a major issue in the United States and worldwide where neo-nazis and white supremacists use Greek and Roman history as an idea of whiteness, but if you look at any of the mummy paintings that we see in classical Roman history, if you look at pretty much anything, there was a variety of color in the Greek and Roman world. In the world of classical Antiquity race did not mean what it does today. And there wasn't this idea of like white purity and the idea that this white purity is coming from white marble statues [is wrong] when in fact, there's tons of evidence that the statues and the Parthenon and pretty much any marble architecture would have been painted.

00:24:36 **Chelsi**

They were straight up garish.

00:24:37 **Emily**

Ugly very, I mean, I think it looks ugly cuz I think we're so used to seeing white marble that seeing it painted like, whoa,

00:24:47 **Chelsi**

Although some of their color combinations. Like chartreuse and eggplant.

00:24:55 **Kirsten**

Yes, they did not fit our modern aesthetic let's just say. but it was of it's own period

00:25:03 **Emily**

Exactly and the statuary that we have is the idea of like the best looking a certain way and it's like a style. It doesn't reflect reality and we, I think that these groups, neo-nazis, white supremacist they forget there were African Emperor's. There was mixing of peoples all over the Greek and Roman world. Their issues with status had more to do with money and you know ancestry, than it did to

race and color and it's such a unique thing to think that this idea of like a racially pure Greek and Roman world did not exist. The statues do not prove that it was like a racially pure world. So by these groups trying to embrace this idea of the Greek and Roman world being somehow purer than others- clearly haven't been to Rome or Egypt or the Middle East. Its like there's a lovely spectrum of people.

00:26:07 **Kirsten**

Yes, and also reminding people that the ancestry is not race. Like they're often conflated, but they are not the same.

00:26:21 **Emily**

Thank you. Yes, but yeah, but it's just co-opting a history again like with the Confederacy and whatnot. Its trying to bolster an ideology that's not true and an incorrect narrative and delusional but it's using these histories to try to create a true narrative even though you it's wrong.

00:26:45 **Chelsi**

and what oh, Kirsten go ahead.

00:26:48 **Kirsten**

Okay. I was just going to tag on. So the classical narrative was used in some of the legitimization of westward Movement as well in the U.S. So if you take a look at a whole lot of older documents, and this is something that's come into vogue a few times over the last century as well where people start to discuss the lost tribes of Israel. The Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans have all been to the United States before, and this is where they're small towns along the Mississippi have Egyptian names like Cairo and Thebes. The idea that the history of the people here couldn't have built these monumental structures that exist. So what do we know from what we have on a pedestal historically. So looking back from that time period, looking back to classical history because it was so, you know the the ideal at the time or at least that the false history was the ideal. Using a lot of those made-up story lines to be like, nope we were here first people, white people were here first. They're the ones that built the Mounds in the midwest and the south, they're the ones that built casagrande and various other pieces of larger architecture that we know that was not the case. But it does get brought up periodically and was part of the legitimization for westward Movement in the 19th century. So it's been used not just today in white nationalist propaganda but has been used in the past. So it's been around a long time and that's something you guys mentioned too early on in the last segment is this stuff's not new. It's always been there. It's just how much it's being legitimized by our lovely head of state

00:29:03 **Emily**

And social media is not helping.

00:29:06 **Kirsten**

No, it's not.

00:29:07 **Chelsi**

No social media is not helping it at all. The Vikings, the Norse have also had a couple centuries of having their history co-opted. So I mean, it's interesting just quickly to note the term Viking was actually invented like a Modern English term that actually comes from the early 19th century. What this has been used to mean is people of Scandinavian cultural identity from the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries. And when you think of a viking everybody has this idea of like this tall blonde guy with like a horned helmet carrying a battle-axe and a sword and that's bullshit.

00:29:52 **Kirsten**

Right.

00:29:53 **Chelsi**

Yeah, that isn't actually true. First of all, a horned helmet is a terrible, terrible decision in a battle because you're basically giving your enemy handles to grab

00:30:01 **Chelsi**

onto don't do it. But in Old Norse the noun vikingr actually translates roughly to sea warrior. So it had absolutely nothing to do with an ethnic or cultural identity, it was an activity. There were people who went a viking. They got on ships and they went and they raided and they also traded and settled. They weren't just kind of raiding barbarians. This, the combination of Viking as the word that talks about people from Scandinavia from the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries, and it's been kind of conflicted with this warrior ideal has been around basically, since people started talking about the Vikings in the 19th century and looking at their archaeology. We certainly see there are historical examples of...Wagner who wrote operas, absolutely loved the Norse/ Scandinavian history and created that in to the Völkisch movement. It's used as a historical narrative to bolster kind of a white German nation state and that was a lot of what Hitler was pulling from in World War II and he talks about the kind of aryan master race the Scandinavians.

00:31:48 **Emily**

aaah.

00:31:48 **Chelsi**

I'm just like, I can't, I can't. That's BS. The best description I've ever heard of Vikings is as cultural chameleons. So the Vikings adapted...

00:32:00 **Emily**

That's an excellent characterization. That's so cool.

00:32:02 **Chelsi**

Right? And anywhere, America, Iceland, Greenland, hang out in the British Isles. They went down, we have evidence of their influence in southern Europe. They sacked France and Germany a whole lot. We also know that they went East into Russia. They went down into Constantinople, which today is Istanbul. They had this massive geographical spread and wherever they went and wherever they settled or traded they adopted the local habits, language, and religion to their benefit. For example, if you were trading in a Christian area, there were a lot of Carters that forbade Christian traders from trading with pagans. So they would go through, it's been characterized as baptism lite which is basically like a "you're not such a bad Pagan that we won't trade with you."

00:32:51 **Chelsi**

Snort and laughter

00:32:55 **Chelsi**

And you have some guys who flip flop back and forth between religions and women as well that we know were participating and settling places and trading and participating in this economy

00:33:04 **Emily**

You mean women weren't just sitting by doing nothing? [sarcasm]

00:33:07 **Speaker 3**

I know, news flash, old news,

00:33:11 **Chelsi**

[laughter]

00:33:16 **Chelsi**

But it's also really, really interesting and important to note that the richest Viking Age grave that's ever been found, it's really not up for the debate. It's called the Oseberg ship burial and it was found in an area of Norway if you want to learn more about it I did a short 10-12 minute description of that particular find and it can be found either on our website or on the arch 365 on the Archaeology Podcast Network, but suffice it to say richest burial ever found one, contained two women, zero men

and some recent research has been done and they actually found out that one of the women has a genetic haplogroup that is primarily found in the Middle East. So we're looking at the richest Scandinavian Viking age burial ever found that actually contained people not from Scandinavia, but they were important enough in that society that they had this incredibly rich burial that would have taken months to prepare. Not only that, the individuals in that burial and the burial site itself remained important for a very long time. We know from dendochronology and pollen analysis that the ship was buried in 834 AD. We also know that it was broken into around the year 1000 so it's over a hundred and fifty years later and it was during the Christianization period in Norway. There's also some political stuff going on and that mound was important enough 150 years later that the incoming power thought it was important to ritually break-in and desecrate the mound to remove the power of those individuals and what they stood for a hundred fifty years later. So here we have people who were by ancestry not Scandinavian, women, super high status and that status hung around for over a century. So all this idea of aryan purity it's bullshit. Please stop co-opting the thing that I study and saying that, you know, the Norse had ideas of racial or cultural purity. They didn't. They created hybrid identities everywhere they went People who settled in Normandy, people who settled in the British Isles- it can actually be difficult to find Viking age typical Norse archaeology in those areas because they assimilated into those cultures so quickly and so well that it's hard to differentiate them from one another and people who went East may have started using the language of those who were on the steppes or wearing the clothing. That's not to say they ever completely abandoned their Scandinavian identity. Often times they held onto like a nominal idea of a Scandinavian identity often through their name or something because there was a trade benefit, because the Scandinavians were everywhere. So if you've got someone say "oh, yeah, I'm Scandinavian, your Scandinavia and we are everywhere. Let's trade". It's all about that money, money, money

00:36:33 **Emily**

So much more flexibility than you could possibly imagine.

00:36:36 **Chelsi**

And it's super important. But as I'm sitting here ranting about the fact that the the far right has tried to create their own narrative and weaponized it..... This isn't, I happen to love this era, I'm getting a PhD and I'm studying Vikings because I think it's fascinating and your fucking everything that I care about. Stop it. But I think it's important that we also talk about the fact that the weaponization, the co-opting of these historical narratives, it's not about historical accuracy. It's about creating a narrative, creating a story that other people can hear and maybe relate to or say I think similarly or you know something that one can create a group identity around even if that group identity is based on LIES. It is based on LIES. I'm very angry about this

00:37:31 **Emily**

Fair enough. I mean because it's based like you said, it's based on a lie, but it gives it like the facade of enough backing that makes people maybe not think twice about what they're reading or what they're thinking because if you're using enough symbol-, it's like the solutrean hypothesis. If you got enough research, background data, you know scientific sounding verbage. It may sound legitimate and that's horrifying that they could use something like the Greco Roman history, Norse history, anything to try to sound legitimate or at least bring people in enough who may not question otherwise and go. "Oh really? The Vikings were racially pure and they thought X y&z. Interesting. I like Vikings tell me more."

00:38:24 **Chelsi**

People have been doing that forever. Governments have been doing that, like relating yourself to the past, hell the Vikings did it when the Vikings moved to Iceland and you had all this lands that you didn't have centuries worth of oral tradition about a certain family owning a bit of land. They made a point of putting stones up and linking themselves to the founders of Iceland to justify the fact that they had whatever land they had to justify their claim. People like tying themselves to the past to give their ideas legitimacy, even if that past isn't actually real and that's really what we're seeing with the far right is they're trying to create an alternative past to legitimize their viewpoint, their narrative, and as someone who studies the history and the past in archaeology like Hands off. You're pissing me off, stop.

00:39:26 **Emily**

And people, white supremacist on their web pages have put Lord of the Rings as like reading for legitimizing their beliefs. It's like, one Tolkein was not a white supremacist, two he just really like medieval history and three It's a fantasy novel.

00:39:48 **Chelsi**

Sorry to burst your bubble.

00:39:49 **Kirsten**

Yeah,

00:39:50 **Chelsi**

not real

00:39:51 **Kirsten**

Well and even like known prominent authors that used the mythologies of the past have spoken out against co-opting them for political purposes, specifically white supremacy. JRR Tolkien was livid

about the use of Viking and Norse heritage in in these narratives and he's like I use it fictionally. He's very much. I love this era. I love these stories I'm using it in my writing but it's FICTON. It's the idea that you're taking it and making it something, it's not for political purposes and trying to convince people that it's real.

00:40:40 **Chelsi**

So as we're moving to the third segment we're going to talk about some of what we can do as historians and archaeologists, as well as concerned citizens and what anyone could do to combat the issues surrounding this because we want to end on a positive note. Instead of me just ranting about Vikings

00:41:02 **Ad**

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00:41:37 **Chelsi**

Hi everyone and welcome back to the Women in Archaeology podcast. So far on today's episode we have been discussing how the alt-right, far-right white supremacy movement has been trying to co-opt and utilize both recent and further back historical events for their own gain, and we've all talked about the fact that they're telling narratives of lies. Their stories don't actually reflect the truth, but we're going to finish this segment out by talking about some of the possible solutions and some of the things that archaeologists, historians, and the general public can do to have a positive impact and hopefully try and stop the spread of these very dangerous ideologies. I can't remember Emily, or Kirsten which one of you, but one of you mentioned at the beginning talking about LARPing?

00:42:34 **Kirsten**

LARPing is fun, Ren Faires are fun.

00:42:36 **Emily**

Yeah. We all love going to those events. We all, I mean, I don't know if everybody does but I think they are a lot of fun. With Renaissance faires you get to go drink some mead and eat a turkey leg and...

00:42:51 **Chelsi**

Beautiful horses doing jousting

00:42:53 **Emily**

exactly!

00:42:54 **Kirsten**

Play with costumes and historical dress and we can totally. Archaeologists and historians alike like to nerd out on whatever they're doing. Just like anyone else.

00:43:06 **Emily**

Exactly. Are they Historically accurate not really.

00:43:09 **Chelsi**

No

00:43:11 **Emily**

But are the fun? yes. And the same goes for LARPing that's live action role-playing if you're not familiar with the term and I mean it's people with like foam swords and shields and what not. The worrying thing about this is like the the folks who had the protest in Charlottesville we're LARPer, or a few of them were LARPer and they were like using shields as battering rams to hit people with. They tried to use techniques they were learning in LARPing to harm other people essentially and it's a unique situation where a lot of these LARPing communities are seeing a rise of white supremacy within those groups and that they are difficult to recognize because they may be using symbols that maybe other white supremacist would recognize but they're older medieval symbols that are now being co-opted as a signal that they are part of this group. And so you may have these groups of people that are using LARPing in a way to try to again legitimize their beliefs and say like look at this cool Medieval world. I am part of it. It's all white and whatnot. And then they are using it also to harm others, but and from one of the articles we are reading it's called "the alt-right is taking over Renaissance Faires" that a lot of people are having difficulty recognizing the symbology until much later, but there are those who may have recognized and said "hey, whatever they'll believe what they believe" and in terms of, you know it's not comfortable confronting people. We all know that, but if you've got a group of people with dangerous beliefs and doing dangerous activities, I would not want them part of my community. And so I think it's important if you are a LARPer and you have groups of white supremacist trying to come in and LARP with you, say no. Don't have them be part of your group. I don't know how easy that would be, but I think it's important to try to learn the symbols that may be on people's shields, swords, what have you so that you can recognize and say no I do not want to be part of that group anymore. Like I said, I don't know how easy that would be but I think a big part of this would just be being able to recognize what we're seeing and saying, "I don't want to be a part of that"

00:45:28 **Kirsten**

And part of the challenge with that and it's a good idea I think to get familiar with the symbols that are being used as sort of call signs for "hey, you know, what's up word? We're doing our white thing or whatever." I don't know.

00:45:45 **Emily**

Yeah, like I don't want to be part of that

00:45:46 **Kirsten**

Yeah, is that a lot of these communities, so this gets back to the idea of glorifying the past and just the past being a fantastical amazing place, which is not so much the truth and typically people who are involved in those communities are white. That's just because the past is glorified towards that socio-economic group- upper class white. I mean, if you think about what's in the history books, especially looking at Renn groups what you see are people that are dressing up as not peasants, usually. Unless you're in the proper like Ren Faire thing and you have to go through the hierarchy from what I've heard, but you don't have people dressing up to be anything other than royalty. That is the goal, right? And so it can be I think difficult to weed out and one of the reasons why these groups are being iand these hobbies are being co-opted is because it's predominantly white and that's more or less I think by default of just history and the communities that they come out of aren't necessarily white supremacist, but you know, white farming communities in the Midwest and such.

00:47:10 **Chelsi**

But I think it is also important to note that when you get, and one of the reasons, I like recognizing these symbols and also saying like "hey, no, I don't want to be part of this. You're not welcome here" is because when you have white supremacists and people in the far right who can come in and say "oh but like I'm not just a white supremacist. I like doing x y and z" I'm not even gonna like try and pick out any particular hobby, whatever it is. I don't care whether it's LARPing, hugs or skydiving or I don't know that these have any relation I'm picking out random things. I don't care what it is. When you allow them to be something more than a white supremacist, it normalizes them. It adds another dimension to them and I think it's just super important to be like "no like this is antisocial behavior and we don't want to be part of it"

00:48:04 **Emily**

And this is not the place for it. Not that there's any place for it.

00:48:09 **Kirsten**

Yeah, we don't want that here.

00:48:10 Chelsi

It needs to become something that socially unacceptable

00:48:13 Kirsten

Exactly.

00:48:16 Chelsi

Because these laws aren't going to change anything, it might just you know, create a martyr or make someone pissed: "The senior, the man is trying to take away my right to say whatever". You know, you do need like a cultural, a social change and acknowledgement that this is not acceptable

00:48:32 Emily

And in no way are we saying it would be easy because I mean if you

00:48:36 Chelsi

No god no.

00:48:36 Emily

Even scholars are struggling with this and so it's hard to imagine like just a LARPing Community saying, you know what the Middle Ages were multiracial, multi-faith, multicultural. If that's a struggle on its own well medieval scholars are even struggling within their own field to try to combat these issues because there's that fear of well if I start talking about race, if I start talking about politics, well, then I'm not really being part of my field. I'm getting into something that's not part of my field. Even though, as we've said before like archaeology it's political.

00:49:15 Kirsten

Well and it doesn't help that a lot of Academia is white still so that's where people get nervous. I think. Not to excuse it.

00:49:29 Chelsi

It's also worth noting that there's a book. It's called "the extreme gone mainstream" that is talking specifically about how some of these extreme ideas have managed to permeate into more mainstream conversations and ideologies and one of the things that author notes is that trends change quickly right? By the time someone outside of that insular group has figure out what the trends are it's no longer cool and they've probably moved on. So it is a game of catch-up which is, which is unfortunate and you know, it's not necessarily a fun thing to think about or talk about or research so that you know what signs and symbols to look for but it's also really important to do

that. One of the the articles we read for this week. It was called "what to do about Hitler's Berghof? Museum challenges to far-right interest" which is there is a museum called the Dokumentation Obersalzberg. Sorry, I don't speak German which is only about 300 meters from the Berghof site, which is one of the places where Hitler lived during his time in power, but it is about 300 meters from the actual building that no longer exists and over the last several years they've noticed there's been an increase in coach tours. They're showing up, far right people who are the defacing information signs, they're carving swastikas into trees, they're leaving lit candles along a perimeter wall of the site of Hitler's

00:51:08 **Kirsten**

Of the site not the museum

00:51:10 **Chelsi**

and one of the Museum's employees has kind of stated that they as a museum can't turn a blind eye and a quote from him is "If you do nothing to an area they can do what they want." If you say here lived Hitler that is a problem. That's not enough. You are allowing them to write their own story, to write their own narrative to decide what it is rather than saying yeah, it's hard to talk about this. It's hard to be here. But it needs to be done and we need to do it right because if we don't somebody else is going to.

00:51:54 **Kirsten**

but it needs to be done.

00:51:56 **Chelsi**

So I think they're actually doing an expansion project which is due to be done it in like 2020 and that's been delayed somewhat because the found some bombs when they started digging at the site and that slows things down understandably but having these difficult conversations is just super, super important because if we don't someone else will.

00:52:18 **Emily**

And shift the narrative into something significantly more dangerous

00:52:23 **Chelsi**

Right. And as much as I'm glad that we're having this conversation here and this is a public platform, it definitely is accessible to anyone which is great and as much as I've heard some folks have debates among themselves at conference, there have been some debates that happen in journals we have to reach beyond academia. Academia, we've talked about is not necessarily the most accessible

location in the world. And again, we've also talked about the far-right doesn't really care about facts, so bunch of historians say this isn't true isn't going to change their mind.

00:53:02 **Kirsten**

No, and I mean that's where it's nice we're going to be linking, as mentioned before, we're going to be linking to a bunch of the stories. So the research that has been done on this and some of them are very well referenced amazingly which is pretty nice for news stories. So those the Smithsonian one in particular is a pretty good article. So there are facts out there if people are curious and want to know but it can be difficult to parse it out and some of its, you know, remembering to look at the source of the information. If it's real. Just because they have a link doesn't mean that it's a thing like you have to follow it, I followed a few and this is somewhat of a tangent but it's an example of how people who aren't versed in research necessarily can easily get pulled off into a white nationalist trail. So my daughter was doing research I don't remember the topic, on something that had sort of a conservative bent to it and because she likes playing devil's advocate, you know as it goes, so she's following this research and she's like, well it's cited and I'm like, okay. Well, let's follow the citation and see what that actually says. It was a real journal article but it was not about what the reference was. So someone had just picked a legitimate article and linked it without actually looking at the topic. So it's like the title sounded vaguely applicable and it was not the same research. So it was a good lesson in following citations and it can be laborious. But if it's something that you're really interested or intrigued about or have questions about it's definitely worth doing additional research. Most researchers, say like librarians are a really good resource to look up legitimate sources for this kind of stuff too and they can help out it's what they're there, for those communities that still have libraries.

00:55:09 **Emily**

I think with a lot of that it's just it's promoting questions promote questioning. One thing I always tell my students question everything, question what I say. Ask me where am I getting my information, it's like really follow the trail because I was looking up articles for today's episode and it went down some interesting wormholes. Where I was like is this a real website, is this going to be what I think it's about and like and I would click on them and it's actually the reverse. It's like this site proves the white supremacy of some kind of culture blah de blah de blah and I'm like, nope. That's not what I was looking for. But I mean it's out there and it looks legitimate and that's deeply concerning

00:55:58 **Chelsi**

It's scary. The other important thing about asking questions is that it's not just how legitimate is this, because that is important but it's encouraging people to have conversations. And as we said having conversations, even if they're difficult conversations is super, super important in terms of controlling the narrative and making sure that people are getting the right information and keeping people from

being, you know, led astray. I mean because these shootings and they talk to their friends and family members and they say "Oh I could never imagine this person would do that and I can't..." and that's why if you're only ever talking about the weather and who won the sports game on Saturday night, you know, you're not going to necessarily figure out or hear about those warning signs.

00:56:52 **Kirsten**

This warning signs.

00:56:54 **Emily**

Yeah, and then in academia too I think there just needs to be a push to not be afraid to talk about these things because I mean as we saw at the Society for American Archaeology conference. Nobody wanted to talk, really actually talk about our issues of sexual harassment in the field.

00:57:10 **Chelsi**

No, no, no. No one in power wanted to talk.

00:57:13 **Emily**

that's a very good point

00:57:14 **Chelsi**

Lots of other people wanted to talk.

00:57:16 **Kirsten**

Yeah, everyone else wanted to.

00:57:17 **Emily**

Okay. Thank you for correcting that, yes the people in power and I think this is true for a lot of conferences. It's the issue and other medieval conferences if there's like a fear to really confront these issues, well, how can we expect people outside of the field to confront these issues?

00:57:37 **Kirsten**

Well, and there's this mindset too that if you talk about it, you're legitimizing it and I've heard that argument on a number of levels between the Ancient Aliens to white supremacy, but ignoring it is not going to make it better. It's not gonna go away. You're disengaging and that gets back to what Chelsi was quoting from the article, if you don't do something there you're just letting someone else make the that narrative

00:58:16 **Chelsi**

Doing nothing is siding with the oppressor.

00:58:18 **Kirsten**

Yes. There we go doing nothing is siding with the oppressor. So this doesn't, I think as people who have an interest but also are knowledgeable about these things it's part of our responsibility to kind of step up and help inform and guide the public when they have questions and when they don't have questions.

00:58:41 **Emily**

Although to note we're not saying this isn't hard because the scholar who talked about how ancient sculpture had color received death threats from the alt-right because you know, it's promoting something that they did not want put out there, that you know sculptures were not white they had color and so in no way shape or form we saying it's easy, but it is important

00:59:13 **Chelsi**

There was a woman that a piece. I think it was for Time that I'll see if I can find the title but, you know death threats, threats of rape because she called out what white nationalists were doing and why it was problematic. So yeah, it's not easy. It can be scary and I encourage everyone to please, you know, be safe and take care of yourself as well. That's important. But if you have the ability say hey, no, you should. No one wants to live in 1940 again.

00:59:52 **Emily**

No God. No. No, I don't know why anybody would I mean it's one of those funny things again, like looking back in the past. It's like no really enjoyed my phone. No, I

01:00:01 **Emily**

enjoy having a microwave. God. No, Why

01:00:09 **Kirsten**

so some things that people can do if they feel like reaching out or doing public outreach, public education, or writing articles on the interwebs and aren't wanting that sort of negative feedback, some things that everyone can do would be to see what kind of narratives are occurring in your local historical societies and your where the funding is going for your heritage programs in your state and local communities and contacting those representatives because they are always there to hear from you and if the only people they're hearing from are the people within alt-right agenda, that's what they're going to play to because that's what they think are their constituents that are speaking out to them. So you have a voice and again we've mentioned on so many episodes at this point like reaching out to your representatives of state, local, and national representation is important. It does

have an impact. So every little voice helps so I encourage people to, especially if you feel like it may be unsafe in your community to speak out publicly, doing something like this can be a good way to have a good impact without feeling like you're putting yourself in an unsafe position.

01:01:37 **Chelsi**

Yeah, the the great point Kirsten

01:01:40 **Emily**

That's a good call to action

01:01:42 **Chelsi**

And I think on that we are approaching, or actually past the end of our last segment. So unless anyone has any desperate last thoughts they want to get off their chests.

01:01:55 **Emily**

No but I had a good rant. This was cathartic. Thank you for listening.

01:02:04 **Kirsten**

Yes Rant over. Yay.

01:02:09 **Chelsi**

As always thank you for listening. We do this to hang out and talk with each other but we also do this for our listeners

01:02:15 **Emily**

Oh, other people are listening.

01:02:25 **Chelsi**

You can always find on on twitter @womenarchys or email us at womaninarchaeology@gmail.com and until next time Have a good day and thanks for being on.

01:02:37 **Emily**

Thank you for having us.

01:02:38 **Kirsten**

Yes. Thank you.