Article

Speaking Truth to Power: Toward a Forensic Anthropology of Advocacy and Activism

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Abstract: Over the years, the field of forensic anthropology has become more diverse, bringing unique perspectives to a previously homogeneous field. This diversification has been accompanied by recognizing the need for advocacy and activism in an effort to support the communities we serve: marginalized communities that are often overrepresented in the forensic population. As such, forensic anthropologists see the downstream effects of colonialism, white supremacy, inequitable policies, racism, poverty, homophobia, transphobia, gun violence, and misogyny. Some argue that advocacy and activism have no place in forensic anthropological praxis. The counterarguments for engaging in advocacy and activism uphold white, heterosexual, cisgender, and ableist privilege by arguing that perceived objectivity and unbiased perspectives are more important than personally biasing experiences and positionality that supposedly jeopardize the science and expert testimony. Advocacy and activism, however, are not new to the practice of anthropology. Whether through sociocultural anthropology, archaeology, or other areas of biological anthropology, activism and advocacy play an important role, using both the scientific method and community engagement. Using a North American approach, we detail the scope of the issues, address how advocacy and activism are perceived in the wider discipline of anthropology, and define ways in which advocacy and activism can be utilized more broadly in the areas of casework, research, and education.

Keywords: advocacy; activism; forensic anthropology; Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; Missing and Murdered Indigenous People; Migrant; LGBTQ+; skeletal collections

1. Introduction

As a field of scientific study that is intimately engaged with the criminal justice system, forensic anthropology has long eschewed that which could be viewed as jeopardizing objectivity and aimed to limit potential bias, despite the fact that complete scientific objectivity is a well-documented fallacy [1–4]. Activities such as advocacy and activism have long been held as an anathema, if even considered at all, though recent calls for activism and, more specifically, anti-racist activism have emerged in forensic anthropology [5–7]. Despite

the efforts to integrate advocacy and activism into forensic anthropological praxis that is theoretically informed action, protestations continue through the unrealistic maintenance of forensic science—and more importantly, forensic scientists—as unbiased, neutral, objective, and free of prejudices [8]. However, efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion within forensic anthropology have resulted in an influx of new ideas, perspectives, and theories that are undergirded by social consciousness and justice. Often, these emerging perspectives, accompanied by diverse lived experiences, challenge the white, cisgendered, heteronormative, ableist, and American-centric views that have long gripped the field [9].

It is useful, first, to understand what advocacy and activism are, especially in the context of professional practice and science. What is considered advocacy has been contentious in science. For example, Nielsen [10] views science as the search for what is "right" and advocacy to be the search for being "active". Nielsen [10] and Lackey [11] view the role of scientist and advocate to be a dangerous combination. If an individual chooses to be an advocate for a cause, the knowledge and skill sets they have obtained as a scientist need to be removed from the practice; alternatively, as a scientist, advocacy should only take the form of pushing for appropriate policies based on obtained knowledge. What is clear with this discussion is a focus on advocates in terms of their relationship with policy-making and larger political activism. For example, Cockrell, et al. [12] define advocacy as "arguing for a position that has the support of verifiable facts and may be used to impact decision making or affect policy change". Meanwhile, activism is defined as any effort to achieve social reform and resist the status quo [13]. Conversely, we conceptualize advocacy and activism to be broader, where the role of the professional is to advocate for the equity and inclusion of individuals through practice and policy. This policy may include workplace, local, state, and federal institutions and this practice may include casework, work activity, teaching and mentoring, public engagement, research, and more. While advocacy and activism encompass a myriad of context-specific definitions, forms, and actions, they share the important goals of improving systems that directly impact individuals and bring about positive change. Here, we critically define advocacy as any action that supports, defends, validates, and amplifies the voices, identities, and positions of others. However, activism may be conceived of as specific, directed, and sometimes radical action to fight injustices associated with the social, political, economic, and/or environmental conditions of disenfranchised or marginalized communities. As such, the two operate on a continuum and inherently blend into one another [14]. Often, advocates and activists, regardless of background, are identified through peer perception and action rather than by proclamations of self-identity—one knows an advocate or activist when they see them in action—and advocates and activists may not necessarily view their own efforts as such. More specifically, scholar-activists are academics whose research and scholarship turn to social and political action, in part because their own identities and lived experiences may be marginalized within and/or outside of the academy.

The resistance to advocacy and activism in forensic anthropology can be tied to the relatively short history of the field, the lack of diversity in forensic anthropology practitioners, the applied nature of the field, antiquated definitions of science and the scientific method, and the discipline's integration with the judicial system. While the analysis of the human skeleton to answer medicolegal questions has existed since the late 19th century, the field was formally established in 1972 when the American Academy of Forensic Sciences created the Physical Anthropology Section. Consequently, the discipline was professionalized as an exclusively applied field that focused on establishing methods for identification and the circumstances surrounding death and defining the role(s) of forensic anthropology in a variety of contexts. This productive period of methodization extends to the present day and has resulted in a robust body of scientific literature. However, due to the applied hyperfocus of the field, along with a low priority for self-reflection, forensic anthropology has largely ignored social issues. Since the Supreme Court decision on Daubert in 1993, forensic anthropologists have increasingly focused on research related to methodological validation and quantitative rigor [15,16]. However, this necessary shift in research tra-

jectory has left other aspects of our practice under-examined. In their meta-analysis of anthropological articles in the *Journal of Forensic Science* between January 2000 and July 2018, Bethard and DiGangi [16] found that only 0.8% of published work focused on the category of "Ethics/Theory". Here, we argue that our field has become hyperfocused on "objectivity" and rigor, due to standards like Daubert (see also Lesciotto and Christensen [17]), at the cost of our own reflexivity and engagement with critical social issues within the communities we live. This lack of attention was further enabled by a paucity of forensic anthropology practitioners who identified outside of the white, male, abled, cisgender, and heteronormative identity. Relatedly, the white, cis, and hetero privilege stemming from a demographically older and homogeneous field [18] has propagated the idea that science and scientists should be objective and neutral and that advocacy and activism have no place in the discipline as a whole—this leads to individuals who elect to participate in advocacy and activism being viewed as undermining all forensic anthropology testimony (e.g., Fulginiti [8]). In particular, Marten et al. [18] found that neutrality was one of the most contested qualities that makes a "good" forensic anthropologist, with their older survey respondents indicating neutrality's importance compared to younger respondents.

In addition to a diversity of lived experiences and identities, increased inclusion in forensic anthropology has brought about critical perspectives and rejections of the status quo, including the idea of complete scientific objectivity. Scholarship has explored how implicit and cognitive biases, self-identity, and lived experience influence our work in an attempt to mitigate their impacts. As such, cultural and personal experiences play a role in our decision-making and analysis, be that in casework, education, or research. Further, as forensic anthropologists, we work with the remains of individuals and populations who, either by homicide, suicide, accident, or other manners of death, tend to be overrepresented in the forensic population: Persons of Color (POC); Indigenous people (i.e., the missing and murdered Indigenous people); migrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer+ (LGBTQ+) individuals; or those of lower socioeconomic status. That is, groups that society has left behind and oftentimes harmed through inequitable policies, structural violence, racism, misogyny, transphobia, and homophobia. Given the privileged position that forensic anthropologists occupy as recognized experts, along with increasingly decolonial and diverse perspectives, one may ask why we do not challenge policy in society and within the field itself as a means of harm reduction and uplifting the voices of the marginalized and underrepresented.

Thus, we believe that while advocacy and activism are increasingly needed—and already present—in the field of forensic anthropology, many hesitate to answer the call due to a misunderstanding or lack of clarity concerning what this may entail. In a traditional sense, one hears the terms advocacy and activism and thinks of marches, protests, and pressuring policy-makers. Surely, these are a part of the advocacy/activism spectrum, namely vested activism [14], but advocacy and activism are much more. Advocacy can involve actions such as decolonizing and diversifying syllabi, engaging in the positive mentorship of underrepresented scholars, implementing practices in research that incorporate public engagement, using social theory (e.g., queer, Black/feminist, critical race) to critically assess and self-reflect on research, or even altering the way reports are written to include a more activist and inclusive framework that educates investigators, other professionals, and the community. Advocacy and activism entail moving away from a solely methodological/technical and so-called neutral approach to ensuring that holistic anthropology is firmly situated within forensic anthropology. While we understand that not every forensic anthropologist has the ability to undertake overt advocacy and activism (those employed in state and federal laboratories or those in certain jurisdictions may be particularly limited), many of us are in privileged positions to do so. This process will allow for considerably wider engagement with societal issues and help us to better understand the lived experiences of the deceased people with whom we work.

In this paper, we discuss the various challenges faced by many marginalized communities—living and deceased. We then discuss how advocacy and activism are currently practiced

in other subfields of anthropology, including in areas of medical anthropology, sociocultural anthropology, and archaeology. Further, we address the various ways advocacy and activism can be implemented in forensic anthropology, most notably through conceptual and standard activism—forms which, though important, are less radical in their approach [19]. We also advocate for the creation of a living document that grows as newer forms of advocacy are posited and become accepted through trial and error. Lastly, this paper implores forensic anthropologists to challenge the status quo and effect change through engagement in advocacy and activism at any level that is appropriate for specific sociopolitical and employment contexts.

2. Unique Communities—Unique Problems

Before defining ways in which forensic anthropologists can engage in advocacy and activism, it is important to understand why. As a profession, either through casework, research, or education, we engage with a variety of communities who each face similar but unique challenges that increase their chances of mortality. To understand how we can use our positionality as experts, one must first come to understand the scope of the issues within each unique and intersecting community.

2.1. Persons of Color and Missing and Murdered Indigenous People

Despite substantial progress in achieving racial justice in American society over the past half-century, racial disparities, particularly for POC in the criminal justice system, have not only persisted but worsened [20,21]. Moreover, these communities are at greater risk of going missing because they are less likely to be reported missing, less represented in media coverage, and have fewer resources allocated to their cases. POC individuals made up 40% of those missing in the US in 2022 [22]. These issues are further compounded by socioeconomic and health disparities impacting these communities. POC communities are also underrepresented in forensic science-related programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels [22,23] and lack a sense of belonging in the field [24].

The disproportionate disappearances and fatal violence experienced by Indigenous peoples is a humanitarian crisis [25–28]. While working toward understanding intersectional risk factors, developing preventions, and developing culturally informed strategies are in progress, forensic anthropologists also have an imperative to advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP).

In the United States, 84% of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian (AI/AN/NH) women and 82% of AI/AN/NH men reported experiencing violence in their lifetime [27]. In June 2023, AI/AN/NHs represented 3.5% of the missing persons in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and just 1.1% of the overall United States population. State reports reveal that the homicide and assault rates for Indigenous adults and juveniles are 2–10 times higher than their White counterparts, depending on location [29–32], and stay missing longer [33,34]. Compounding this issue is the lack of reporting, both in the NamUs and through state agencies, which is critically underestimating the crisis, often due to misclassification by law enforcement of the missing as "runaways" or another similar status [35]. MMIP are said to go missing several times, first at the hands of the perpetrators but subsequently due to media neglect, insufficient data collection, and the biased justice system [36–39]. Indigenous women, in particular, are pathologized and deprived of agency, downplaying structural and perpetrator accountability [40].

In Canada, the issue of MMIP is increasingly evident. Specifically, the violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ individuals is disproportionate. Although Indigenous women make up only 4% of the Canadian female population, they account for 16% of murdered women in Canada [41]. Indigenous women are also three times as likely to experience violence and twelve times more likely to be missing or murdered compared to non-Indigenous women in Canada [42,43]. In 2016, The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) was launched to examine structural and societal violence against MMIWG in Canada. The National

Inquiry Final Report was completed in 2019 and prompted the National Action Plan, which was co-developed by the Government of Canada and Indigenous representatives [43,44]. This multifaceted plan aims to end the structural and societal violence towards MMIWG; however, Indigenous people continue to be overly represented in the forensic population as some of the systems of oppression largely remain in place [45].

The MMIP movement sprouted from broader Indigenous social justice movements in North America and gained traction through grassroots organizing efforts in the United States [46] and national findings in Canada [47]. This movement, and resulting federal policies, spotlight the disproportionate rates of violence, disappearances, and murders among Indigenous peoples and advocates for improved protocols and resources [48,49]. It has expanded awareness to include women, men, and children, as well as Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ individuals and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR). Activists for MMIP/R organize marches, share information, promote legislative change, and assist impacted communities throughout the United States and Canada.

It is germane for forensic anthropologists to affirm the historical atrocities against Indigenous peoples in North America and their relationship with contemporary victimization to build sensitive and transparent partnerships with Indigenous groups. The MMIP crisis is steeped in centuries of structural violence and racism resulting from colonial oppression, involving kidnapping, assault, massacres, forced removals, boarding schools with assimilatory practices, and laws suppressing cultural and spiritual practices and dismantling traditional values and social roles [50–53]. It is necessary to critically tie these multi-generational traumas to current disparities in housing, healthcare, substance dependence, poverty, food deserts, trafficking, and violence disproportionate to Indigenous demographic representation [27,54,55].

2.2. Migrant Populations

Another group frequently associated with forensic anthropology on a global scale is migrants [56–59]. Migrants are frequently impoverished, susceptible to structural violence, and exposed to structural vulnerabilities that impede the ability of investigators to identify the deceased [60]. Globally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the Missing Migrants Project estimates that from 2014 to 2023 there were about 59,000 deaths [61]. In North America, the IOM Missing Migrants Project estimates almost 4000 migrant deaths from 2014 to 2023 [56]. Though the identification of the dead is but one facet of the concerns regarding migrants, the vilification of migrants and subsequent state-sanctioned violence via immigration policies are causal factors forcing migrants to take more drastic and dangerous measures to enter a country [58].

Of growing concern in the United States and Canada is the rising violence toward the migrant community. Popular press headlines such as "'I don't want them there!' Hyde Park residents heated over migrants moving to Lake Shore Hotel" [62] and "Immigrants Keep Loving America, Even When America Doesn't Love Them Back" [63] underscore the tensions between migrants and non-migrant communities. Such sentiments perpetuate the idea that migrants entering the country, legally or not, are problematic, ultimately making the country inherently worse and destroying the status quo of power. This national rhetoric, in turn, leads governments to implement stricter and often more violent policies for entering the country as a means of reducing overall immigration (see Treene and Holmes [64]). In 1994, the United States Border Policy's aim was shifted as a means of reducing undocumented border crossings through a policy of "Prevention Through Deterrence" (PTD) [60,65]. The policy asserted that by disrupting traditional smuggling and entry points, people would either be deterred from entering or would be forced to take a more hostile and dangerous route [65]. At its inception, the policy document stated that within the remote expanses of land at the border that migrants will be forced to take, they will find themselves in mortal danger [66]. Ultimately these policies are directly correlated with an increase in the number of migrant deaths [60], though the blame is often put on the migrants or smugglers [58].

The use of terminology can further alienate and dehumanize migrant populations. Pima County, AZ, following the border patrol's guidelines, referred to migrants as "undocumented aliens" (UDA) until the early 2000s, when the term was changed to "undocumented border crossers" (UBC) [67]. The use of the term "alien" serves as a function to other migrants by implying they are different from Americans [68,69]. This process continues today in the political discourse through terms such as "illegal immigrants and aliens", making people less likely to empathize with them, the "other", through criminalization [68,69]. Further, the language used often refers to a refugee or migrant crisis, further shining a negative light on the migrants, rather than on the structural systems that motivate migration [70].

A vast majority of migrants entering the United States are leaving economic devastation and political and criminal violence. For many, despite the strict policies and threat of a harsh environment during the crossing, the potential economic gain, as well as personal and familial safety are driving factors [66]. Governmental policies that limit who may enter and for what type of employment drive migrants to seek economic improvement through more dangerous routes [60]. Unfortunately, given these routes, mortality often follows.

2.3. LGBTQ+

Current and historical social oppression against LGBTQ+ communities has led not only to social inequities for the living but also an increase in the chance for violence, leading to their overrepresentation in the forensic population either by homicide or suicide [71–74]. The current sociopolitical climates in the United States and Canada have resulted in a resurgence of discriminatory laws, often accompanied by violent rhetoric espoused by the populace and politicians alike [75–81]. Further, while many pieces of these new legislative measures have been struck down by lower courts, the appellate court, and even the United States Supreme Court, have regressed protections, with some justices on the Supreme Court advocating for eroding protections even further [82,83].

While some of these laws target very specific aspects of the LGBTQ+ community, namely the transgender and gender-diverse communities, others are broader, affecting both members within the community and advocates, allies, and supportive community members [84,85]. Bills related to parental rights and education (primary through secondary) are designed to silence speech and the discussion of a variety of topics, including those related to sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as the promotion of policies that would aid in fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion at educational institutions across the state [86–90]. Since the passage of these laws, many states throughout the United States have adopted or have introduced a number of bills that mirror these policies, and it is becoming a topic of discussion in many Canadian provinces, including New Brunswick, Alberta, and Ontario [91–93].

In addition to stifling speech in educational settings, there have been several bills that specifically target members of the LGBTQ+ community, such as the many laws targeting trans healthcare and anti-drag laws [77,78,80,81]. These laws, coupled with the recent rise in Christian Nationalism, have led to an increase in oppressive rhetoric and violence, which cyclically leads to a rise in political rhetoric, granting greater public license for anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment and violence [94]. While anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric is nothing new to the community, this rise, coupled with legislation, can lead to problems between queer individuals and familial relatives and their geographical communities. This estrangement can lead to many problems within the forensic community in cases in which an LGBTQ+ person may be an unidentified individual, as it often leads LGBTQ+ individuals to eschew their family in the traditional sense in favor of a "chosen family" made up of others within the LGBTQ+ community. A common issue within the criminal justice system is that these chosen families are frequently ignored by investigators, thus leading to a delay in the identification process [95–97].

This estrangement from genetic families and geographic communities tends to have a common precipitatory cause, specifically in the form of bullying (especially of kids and teens, though not limited to them) [98–101]. Often this bullying leads to an increased number of suicides and suicide attempts by LGBTQ+ and especially trans individuals. According to Haas and Lane [71], lesbian and gay individuals reported a lifetime suicide attempt rate (those who have attempted suicide at least once within their lifetime) 4 times higher than their heterosexual counterparts, while trans individuals reported a rate over 8.5 times higher compared to the American average overall (5%). This increase is not limited to the United States—among LGBTQ+ adolescents in Canada, for every one non-LGBTQ+ teen that requires medical attention for a suicide attempt, there are over four LGBTQ+ teens requiring medical intervention [102–104].

While the number of suicide attempts is staggering, data on the number of deaths by suicide in the LGBTQ+ communities are largely lacking because most investigative agencies do not track the sexual orientation or gender identity of decedents. One could, however, presume that the number of deaths by suicides among LGBTQ+ communities would be just as elevated as the recorded number of attempts.

Yet oppression and violence do not necessarily need to be as overt; covert harms are perpetrated through systemic failures that can act as oppressors. A prime example of covert harm is the misidentification of trans and gender-diverse individuals within the criminal justice and medicolegal death investigation systems [90–92,95,96]. At the start of the issues is often investigator and database systems, which either unintentionally or intentionally misgender trans individuals. This problem can be also identified among forensic scientists, specifically forensic anthropologists, who often still rely on osteological binary sex over the use of contextual information to formulate a potential gender identity [105,106]. In addition, the incongruence of antemortem records can cause issues and even revictimize the decedent through forced misgendering in death. Many jurisdictions within the United States and Canada allow trans individuals to change the gender marker on their government records, including driver's licenses, passports, health cards and records, and occasionally birth certificates, though the latter does have some exceptions [107]. However, a growing number of states are increasingly restricting these changes [108,109]. Further, during the process of deploying restrictions, these states are also restricting the sex designation on death certificates. For example, Tennessee recently passed a law restricting the ability of trans people to alter the sex/gender designation on state documents and identification media to that which matches their birth certificate, including their death certificates. The problem arises when a trans person born in Tennessee moves to a state where the sex/gender marker can be amended on state identification. This problem may be further complicated by a forensic anthropologist relying solely on the osteological sex presentation, ignoring gender as prescribed by the Academy Standards Board's Standard on Sex [110]. The end result is a revictimization of one of the most vulnerable populations. Instead, anthropologists should expand their analyses to incorporate the broader spectra of sex and gender (e.g., Adams et al. [95], Bayers et al. [96], and Meloro et al. [97]).

2.4. Intersectional Identity

The responsibility that forensic anthropologists have for the support and advocacy of marginalized populations is all the more obvious when we consider our positionality as a bridge between societal intelligence—a cornerstone of anthropology—and our knowledge of the impact that systemic oppression has on the deceased people with whom we work. Moreover, forensic anthropologists play an integral part in re-establishing personhood through the identification process. Marginalized communities often experience both direct and structural violence that overlap with different parts of their identities, whether or not these identities are self-ascribed or attributed to them by their oppressors. This violence can lead to neglect, injury, or death; because of this, marginalized individuals are often overrepresented in the forensic record, and those individuals who have components of their identity in multiple groups are even more so.

Studies of intersectionality emphasize the interconnectedness of marginalization. Issues such as poverty and criminalization disproportionately affect marginalized communities. For example, the United States Census Bureau identified that, in 2022, individuals who identified as Black Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Hispanic Americans, or individuals who self-identify as belonging to two or more races all experienced poverty at a higher rate than White Americans [111]. Criminalization and subsequent imprisonment also occur more often to people of color and individuals from other marginalized communities. In 2021, Black individuals accounted for 1186 of every 100,000 prisoners, followed by American Indians and Alaskan Natives (1004 per 100,000), and Hispanic individuals (619 per 100,000); in contrast, White individuals accounted for 222 of 100,000 of the prison population [112].

In 2019, 22% of LGBTQ+ adults in the United States were living in poverty as compared to the 16% of individuals who identify as cisgender or heterosexual. Within the LGBTQ+ community, race and ethnicity have an additional impact on poverty levels: Latin transgender adults (48%) and Black transgender teenagers (39%) were the most impoverished. According to a survey by The Trevor Project in 2021, 75% of LGBTQ+ youth experienced discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity at least once in their lifetime, while half of the LGBTQ+ youth of color experienced discrimination based on their race/ethnicity or ancestral affiliation at least once during the past year [73]. Findings from this survey also found that 28% of LGBTQ+ youth reported experiencing houselessness or housing instability, with LGBTQ+ youth of color experiencing houselessness at the highest rate [73]. Houselessness among queer youth often occurs due to a lack of family acceptance (14% reported that they were kicked out or abandoned by their caregivers) or running away from their caregivers due to fear of mistreatment (16%; [73]). The houselessness epidemic among queer youth can lead to their overrepresentation in the forensic record, either as unidentified or unclaimed. Queer youth are also at a higher risk of suicide, with 42% of LGBTQ+ youth suffering from suicidal thoughts and ideations; furthermore, suicide attempts are higher in queer youth of color.

Aside from poverty, houselessness, and criminalization, in 2022, race/ethnicity/ancestral affiliation, sexual orientation, and gender identity were three of the top four reasons for the perpetration of hate crimes, accounting for more than 75% of cases [113]. Hate crimes range anywhere from assault (simple and aggravated) to homicide. Targeted or single-biased crimes are also on the rise in the United States as the social and political climate becomes more dangerous for marginalized communities. Hate crimes in the United States increased by nearly 12% between 2020 and 2021 [114]. However, physical violence is not the only risk for individuals from marginalized groups. Individuals of marginalized communities are watching local, state, and national governments propose and pass laws that invalidate, discriminate, or regulate different aspects of their identity and well-being, which in turn normalizes hate and violence against these groups. A study of the effect of California's 2008 Proposition 8, which sought to ban same-sex marriage, found that LGBTQ+ individuals experienced negative emotions due to the political and social climate and discourse (such as negative signs and bumper stickers aimed at the LGBTQ+ community) and had an overall negative effect on their mental health [115].

Marginalized communities have always been the target of hate groups, resulting in the othering and dehumanization of individuals from those communities. Which groups are targeted often changes to fit the current social and political climate. The goal of oppression is to exert power, and when communities push back against hate groups, these hate groups begin to lose their power and turn their attention to a different marginalized community or group of people. The othering of individuals or communities may wax and wane, but the foundation of hate rarely does. As anthropologists, we have an obligation to advocate for and support targeted, othered, and marginalized people, and we must acknowledge our culpability as a field in laying the foundation on which pillars of hate were built.

While not an exhaustive list, common threads appear between marginalized groups. Namely, their vulnerabilities in life often lead to their overrepresentation in early deaths and continued vulnerability and mistreatment after death. As deathcare workers who observe these vulnerabilities, our voices have the ability to shape the social and political landscape to bring about change, challenge the status quo, and help reduce this overrepresentation.

3. Advocacy and Anthropology

In *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, David Graeber characterizes anthropology as a discipline "terrified of its own potential", arguing that while anthropology is in a position to speak about human experience and take a political stand, it often refuses to do so [96,116]. Anthropologists are increasingly realizing that such neutrality in the face of injustice or violence does not imbue research with scientific rigor or merit. Rather, it may suggest a deeper failing of the discipline—a failure to acknowledge and stand in solidarity with those who contribute to our lives and to making our work meaningful. Moreover, in anthropology's quest to understand the lives of humans, rejecting the call to engage with what makes life fragile and, at times, imminently dangerous, leaves us falling short of our disciplinary mission. Activist approaches allow anthropology to occupy a more personal and poignant space while producing research that directly challenges systems of power that generate violence and allow us to mitigate harm to communities. Whereas the field of forensic anthropology is only scratching the surface of activism and advocacy, other anthropological fields provide us with a growing toolkit of methods and theory, allowing us to blaze a new trail.

Sociocultural anthropology is a logical point of departure for understanding the application of activism and advocacy to anthropological practice, given that the subfield has been exploring the links among issues of structural violence, health disparity, and identity for decades [117–119]. Leith Mullings' extensive investigations of the intersections of gender, race, and class with regard to health demonstrate the way that critical scholarship and community engagement are non-negotiable in activist anthropology [118]. Mullings has also been recognized as a foundational figure and mentor to many critical medical anthropologists, a crucial aspect of sustained action in advocacy within our field [120]. Others, including Scheper-Hughes, have provided needed transparency in their navigation of the obligation of anthropologists to intervene when face-to-face with real-world harms [121]. Arguing for at least a critical approach to medical anthropology, and at most a militant praxis, Scheper-Hughes demonstrated what anthropological involvement can look like in the face of extreme impoverishment, daily community-level violence, and bodily commodification [119,121–123]. The author began her work in impoverished regions of Brazil as a political organizer in the 1960s [119]. However, when Scheper-Hughes returned to Bom Jesus de Mata in Brazil as an anthropologist, emphasizing that her role had shifted to one of observation and detachment, community members expressed frustration. She was informed that she would only be allowed back as a "companheira" (companion)—someone who accompanied community members in the political struggles they were faced with on a daily basis [119]. In agreeing to these terms and stepping into a new role as an anthropologist–companheira, Scheper-Hughes set herself once again on a trajectory of activism through supporting local union strikes, participating in political election efforts, and fighting for the basic needs of some of the most marginalized within their communities.

Farmer's extensive interventions in regions of Haiti and Rwanda echo the call for action in the face of structural inequality in healthcare [117,124]. Farmer co-founded Zanmi Lasante (Partners in Health) in Haiti at a time when HIV/AIDs and tuberculosis epidemics were ravaging communities [117]. He delivered medicines and medical treatments, food, and financial resources to those who needed them most while establishing community networks to support the chronically ill in Haiti and Rwanda. Numerous researchers have demonstrated crucial ethnographic methods, which speak to the intersection of marginalization and advocacy in anthropology [125–128]. Vogt notes, in her work on the commodification of undocumented migrants at the US–Mexico border, that critical

analysis by anthropologists can illuminate the structures that perpetuate injustice [128]. In this way, anthropologists build data that can be leveraged to affect change on local, regional, and national levels. For example, the Health Equity Alliance of Tallahassee (HEAT), a collaborative project between community members and anthropologists, focuses on research and training that directly addresses and aims to eliminate health inequality within the local community [129]. The ability of anthropologists to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with community members to improve outcomes for their communities is just one demonstration of the power of anthropological advocacy to directly affect change.

Although engagement in activism and advocacy is prevalent in sociocultural anthropology, the subfield is far from alone in this regard. Archaeology also engages in forms of advocacy and activism, often related to concepts of materiality and witnessing, and in community-based participatory research. McGuire [130] argued that political action within the realm of archaeology should be emancipatory in nature, focusing on a praxis that is anchored in relationality and emphasizing multivocality. The fundamental argument, according to the author, is not about whether archaeology should be objective or subjective in nature but rather how the construction of archaeological knowledge can interweave the subjectivities of knowing with the realities of the world around us [125]. Both McGuire [131] and De Léon [132–134] demonstrate how documentation of the materiality of undocumented migration and harmful immigration policies can speak truth to power. De León routinely employs photoethnography and other artistic applications as tools for engaging academics and community members. His pop-up art exhibit, "Hostile Terrain 94", connects labeled toe tags, representing each deceased person recovered along the US–Mexico Border, to a geolocated grid representing the border region [68]. These exhibits include local programming dedicated to activism and advocacy for each city where they appear. However, De León is not alone in calling for direct action within communities. Critical race, feminist, and queer theories are all commonly integrated perspectives in activist approaches to archaeology [135]. However, theory is not purely epistemological. Dunnavant and colleagues [136] have argued for direct action in the form of an African American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and Franklin routinely demonstrates the integration of anti-racist archaeology with community-based research [137,138]. These efforts echo those within Indigenous archaeology to decolonize archaeological methods, theory, and practice to return power and stewardship to community hands [139].

Biological anthropology is perhaps the most recent to the advocacy scene, building on biocultural foundations set by critical medical anthropologists and emphasizing lived experience. Human biology research within Harvard's interdisciplinary Gender Sci Lab has demonstrated how hypotheses based on critical feminist and queer theory can provide new insight into long-standing assumptions about hormones, biological underpinnings (or lack thereof) of binary sex, and susceptibility to disease conditions (see DuBois and Shattuck-Heidorn [140]; and Shattuck-Heidorn, et al. [141]). For example, key studies from the Gender Sci Lab have demonstrated that the intersection of race and sex is more informative of the risk of death from COVID-19 than examining race alone [142]. Similarly, critical evaluations of potential confounding variables from a feminist perspective have led to the recent finding that the risk of adverse drug reactions is higher for females but attenuated substantially (from a median average of 41.5% of females to 15%) when data on sex disparity in the usage of prescribed drugs are taken into account [143]. Bioarchaeology has also built on critical theory to examine lived experience and health [144–148] and to highlight the structural violence inherent to many skeletal collections utilized in bioarchaeology [149–152].

In biological anthropology, no greater embodiment of advocacy can be had than that of William Montague Cobb. Cobb's advocacy efforts were multifaceted, encompassing civil rights, academia, healthcare, and education. His work significantly advanced social justice and promoted a more inclusive understanding of human diversity. He described himself as "marching to the beat of a different drummer" [153].

Cobb was the sole representative of African American perspectives in physical anthropology for many years and an activist for the rights of Black people [154,155]. He was a strong advocate for civil rights during a time when racial segregation and discrimination were pervasive in the United States. He participated in civil rights activities and was involved in organizations that sought to address racial inequalities and promote equal rights for African Americans. His research pushed against the myth that Black people were a biologically inferior race. He became a crusader for better medical care for Black people and equity in medical care [156]. He used his academic position to challenge racist ideologies and contribute to a more accurate understanding of human diversity. For example, Cobb boycotted the 1957 (70th) American Association of Anatomists conference in Baltimore and the 1955 American Association for the Advancement of Sciences conference in Atlanta to combat hotel and restaurant segregation in their host cities [155]. He was often called upon to provide expert testimony in legal cases related to civil rights. His expertise in anthropology and human biology allowed him to challenge discriminatory practices based on pseudoscientific notions of race. His testimonies were instrumental in advancing civil rights causes.

Cobb's scholar-activist practice is further exemplified by his involvement in organizations advocating for African American rights. For example, Cobb was a member of the NAACP, National Urban League, Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, and the president of the National Medical Association, or NMA (1964–1965) [154–156]. As president of the NMA and editor of the first African American medical journal, *Journal of the National Medical Association* (1949-1977), and influenced by his tenure at Howard University, he was instrumental in advocating for African American medical practitioners [155]. His work with the National Urban League, an organization dedicated to addressing economic and social issues facing African Americans, allowed him to contribute to initiatives to improve job opportunities, housing, and education for Black communities [156,157].

He was on the board of directors for the NAACP from 1949 to 1990 and president from 1976 to 1982 [154]. As a part of this platform, Cobb was concerned about health disparities affecting African Americans, working to address issues such as inadequate healthcare access and the impact of racism on health outcomes. His advocacy extended to improving medical education to better address the health needs of diverse populations, railing against discriminatory patterns of community health services, and leading the Imhotep National Conference for Hospital Integration. He played a crucial role in expanding access to medical care through his active leadership in the National Medical Association, leading to his testimony in front of Congress during the hearings for the passage of the Medicare and Medicaid Act in 1965, where he further sat at the table signing with President Lyndon B. Johnson [154,157]. Cobb's specific contributions highlight his dedication to dismantling racial barriers and advancing the cause of civil rights, both within the academic realm and in broader societal contexts. His legacy includes inspiring future generations of anthropologists and scholars to challenge racial stereotypes and biases in their work.

As each field of anthropology has stepped into a generation of advocacy and activism, realizing that the production of anthropological knowledge has never been solely objective, so too must forensic anthropology. Drawing from the toolkits established across our field at large is the first step to building an ethical, reflexive, and socially just practice. In her paper outlining three propositions for a critically applied medical anthropology, Scheper-Hughes [122] pp189 writes: "Praxis must not be left in the hands of those who would only represent the best interests of biomedical hegemony". We concur and argue that our praxis in forensic anthropology must not solely represent the best interests of the medicolegal hegemony and disregard the communities within which we work, collaborate, and live.

4. Spectrum of Advocacy in Forensic Anthropology

When describing the ways in which forensic anthropologists can implement aspects of advocacy and activism throughout their career, one can recognize that there is a spectrum of actions that can be taken. Here, we borrow from the fields of philosophy and bioethics

to understand how the spectrum of advocacy and activism may look different within the specific sub-roles and responsibilities of a forensic anthropologist, thereby enabling a critical lens when identifying where advocacy and activism are expressed. Indeed, this broad range is much needed within our field as many actions may be reflected as a spectrum based on state/provincial laws that limit the "outward expression" of activism that one might consider to be the "norm" (i.e., Dempsey and Lister [19]). This advocacy and activism spectrum is useful to understand because certain actions may not be appropriate given the specific sub-responsibility of a forensic anthropologist, and they might not be legally able to partake in this outward action. It should be noted, however, that the spectrum of advocacy/activism does not reflect the degree to which advocacy is demonstrated; rather, it identifies that advocacy can be found in many parts of forensic anthropology that may not look like the "normal outward extreme activism or advocacy" [75,88,89,101,158–160]. Identifying what these standards of advocacy/activism may look like promotes equity while avoiding unnecessary risk [14,19]. Moreover, while participation in advocacy/activism may for some be seen as a privilege, individuals from marginalized communities serve as advocates and activists every day through operating in spaces that were not made for their success. In this sense, engaging with advocacy/activism is not a choice but functions as a price of admission for entrance into a majority cis, abled, white, and hetero profession.

Dempsey and Lister [19] divide activist roles into three general categories along the advocacy/activist spectrum: conceptual activism, standard activism, and expert activism. At one end of the spectrum exists conceptual activism, a philosophical framework of arguing for conceptual changes over any direct action [19]. Conceptual action allows for advocacy in forensic anthropology to take place where policies exist that may not favor more extreme outward expressions of activism, such as in government labs, medicolegal institutions, or universities in conservative-leaning regions. Conceptual action can effectively be employed as lecture material that continues to illuminate sensitive situations without promoting fear or unsafe spaces for students by outwardly expressing concern for one situation over another. For example, lectures and class discussions centered around intersectional identity and queer theory can highlight challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals generally while uplifting trans perspectives specifically. Additionally, curbing harmful language or behaviors of colleagues and students can be considered conceptual activism. This practice is particularly resonant in contexts where forensic anthropologists interact with law enforcement or other medicolegal personnel who may disparagingly (intentionally or not) talk about the deceased or aspects of their identity. Further, inclusive citation practices when writing and publishing scholarship can uplift marginalized voices, while excluding those who are known abusers or producers of unethical research.

Standard activism, wherein an individual engages in a form of direct advocacy that does not necessarily result in policy change, is another form of advocacy [19]. Here, the activist engages with colleagues as a means of addressing change while not directly affecting larger policy [14,19]. In forensic anthropology, standard activism could take the form of engaging with colleagues about inequitable practices within professional organizations or employment institutions, with the goal of working with peers to effect change "in house". For POC, LGBTQ+, disabled, and individuals from "hidden" marginalized communities, an important and impactful form of standard activism is being out. This act of visibility allows others to see aspects of themselves represented, which is particularly meaningful for students and more-junior scholars.

Further, extreme or expert activism occurs when the activist assumes the role of policy expert and takes direct action with state/provincial policymakers to effect change [14,19]. An example of expert activism concerns lobbyists directly engaging with legislators and executives to advocate for policies that reduce harm to the many constituent communities. Expert activism can be expressed through outspoken posts on social media; participation in marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and walk-outs; talks and publications that argue for specific structural changes; criticism directed at professional organizations' policies that harm marginalized communities; providing monetary or land reparations to Indigenous

communities; and other outward-facing and public protestations. Importantly, participation in these activities has the potential to garner criticism from within and external to forensic anthropology and may have negative (and positive) repercussions for employment or career advancement.

Draper [14] expands Dempsey and Lister's [19] three categories to create a spectrum with pure philosophy as the conceptual end and extreme vested-interest activism as the other. Here, Draper [14] also isolates the differences between advocacy and activism, with an advocate being a person who publicly supports a policy while an activist undertakes direct action to effect that policy. Using Draper's [14] model, we see many forensic anthropologists already engaging in the advocacy/activist spectrum. At the more philosophical end, these actions can be expressed through mentorship to various students or by lecturing on concepts from an impassioned perspective, particularly concerning areas where policy discourse is relevant. On the other end of the continuum is acting as a lobbyist, working with policymakers to effect positive change that will aid certain constituent communities and reduce harm. Draper [14] also discusses extreme vested-interest activism, rising to the level when the practitioner has a vested interest in the outcome of the policy as they are a member of that community.

4.1. Advocacy in Casework

In forensic anthropology, we already see various unconscious and even some conscious forms of advocacy and activism within the field, though more so outside of North America. Largely, this advocacy is seen in the form of collaborations between institutions and local communities, advocating for policies that would benefit those communities on a lower level, particularly after humanitarian crises. Whether the work of the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team) working with local communities or the work of the recovery and humanitarian relief in Maui, Hawai'i, after the recent wildfires, community collaborations can serve as the basis for local-level advocacy, championing for the affected community and their needs.

That said, more can be done to effect positive change and assist the communities that we ultimately serve, particularly when we accept our positionality as subject matter experts and use it to amplify the voices of the underrepresented and marginalized. One of the most significant and subtle areas where we can engage in advocacy is throughout our casework. These advocacy actions could be as simple as the terminology and phrasing within reports. Rather than just explaining the minimum of what is requested, we should go beyond and use active terminology. Words matter, and how things are phrased matters. For example, as a part of the biological profile, anthropologists often report the "sex", with some going too far as to note the "biological sex." Yet these words neglect the concept that sex is composed of numerous factors including chromosomal, hormonal, physiological, anatomical, and even osteological markers. Where traditionally "sex" or "sex estimation" is used, an advocate can instead use "assigned sex at birth", "assigned female at birth", "assigned male at birth", "assigned sex estimation", and/or "skeletal/osteological sex" [105,161,162]. While this language demonstrates that forensic anthropologists estimate how a decedent would have been classified by medical professionals in a binarized system and that sex is mutable, it may be insufficient for intersex individuals. Along the lines of the terminology used, professional engagement within the medicolegal death community is an important part of advocacy within forensic anthropology.

As anthropologists, we have insight into and potential contacts with those who work with a vast array of communities, on both a local and broader level. Take, for example, the Prairie Green Landfill just outside of Winnipeg, Manitoba, where the remains of at least two Indigenous women are located. Provincial leaders and law enforcement have been blocking a search based on cost and health [163]. Forensic anthropologists have traditionally been engaging in activism, encouraging searches by collaborating and listening to the local First Nations regarding specific training and expertise needed. We also do this on a more local level when engaging with individual cases, such as notifying Indigenous elders when

Indigenous remains are first located to ensure that they are a part of the process from the start. Forensic anthropologists can be advocates for Indigenous communities by adhering to their preferred methods of caring for, handling, and documenting their ancestral remains. In Ontario, this type of advocacy can look like avoiding photographs of the remains, only utilizing deer or moose skin to place the remains on, or simply allowing communities to observe the forensic anthropological analysis. Advocacy is explaining to other medicolegal professionals and investigators better approaches to ensure that we continue to be advocates for different communities. Additionally, for advocacy to work, we as anthropologists must go beyond the table and the classroom and engage with and for communities, either as the community of the whole, such as neighborhoods and municipalities and as smaller targeted groups. With these engagements, it is not just top-down lecturing as is done in a class but listening and learning from those communities and finding ways in which to improve our practice and use our privilege to effect positive change in those communities.

4.2. Forensic Anthropology Pedagogy

Another area in which forensic anthropologists can engage in advocacy and activism is through critical pedagogy and diversifying instruction as educators. This practice can include ensuring that diverse authors and methods are being taught, in addition to involving discussions of the theories that developed those methods. In so doing, the voices of different communities are heard, normalized, and given the chance to bring forth important topics within their community that are critical to forensic anthropology. This pedagogical diversification can look like proper protocol to handle, document, and analyze Indigenous remains, taught by Indigenous elders working with the medicolegal system. It can also appear through the inclusion of culturally informed context clues to gender identity and the inclusion of experiential knowledge from stakeholders and rights holders in case interpretation. Further, we should expand not only who we teach but how we teach, engaging in advocacy with our discussions and our style. While not prohibiting contradictory thought (the university is designed for problematizing), a willingness to express personal viewpoints rather than taking a neutral stance—if appropriate given various work contexts—can be particularly impactful for students from underrepresented groups.

Traditional and peer mentorships play a major role in advocacy in academic contexts [164]. More specifically, supporting and encouraging students to conduct positionality-oriented research enables those from marginalized backgrounds to incorporate impactful aspects of their lived experience. Scholarship informed by lived experiences has been historically rare in forensic anthropology; however, recent works by Clemmons [165], Herrera and Tallman [166], Go [167], Tallman, et al. [168], DiGangi and Bethard [169], Adams, et al. [94], Meloro, et al. [96], Haug [104], Go, et al. [170], Blatt, et al. [101] and others demonstrate that positionality can be productively incorporated into lines of inquiry that challenge, complicate, and ultimately advance the field. However, these unique and nuanced perspectives rely on the presence of diverse voices in forensic anthropology. Thus, it is of paramount importance to encourage, mentor, and advocate for those from underrepresented and marginalized communities and interrogate exclusive and gatekeeping practices and policies in academia and professional organizations [171,172]. Diversification of the field will be accompanied by a natural diversification of thought and research questions, which are critical for the societal relevance of the field. Honest, constructive, and truthful mentorship not only provides opportunities for proteges to examine how their identities benefit forensic anthropology, but it also catalyzes frank discussions regarding the issues, inner workings, and interpersonal dynamics of the field.

4.3. Advocacy through Research

In addition to the educational side of forensic anthropology, another area in which small actions can act as strong advocacy is in research, including how that research is conducted. From design to execution, every stage of the research project can serve as a form of advocacy. When designing a research project, we should begin by examining the

needs of the community being served, which is achieved by consulting and including members of that community in the project. For example, if conducting research with the trans community, advocacy involves consulting with the community about the project, as a means of ensuring unintended harm does not occur, nor the act of othering or essentializing. In addition to such a consultation, we should consider having members of the community within the field on the project itself, allowing them to play a substantive and leadership role rather than be a token member of the team.

Similar to critical pedagogy when conducting research, an act of advocacy for different communities is the diversification of citations and lines of inquiry in the theoretical framework. All researchers, regardless of demographic community, bring with them unique life histories and experiences that permeate their research and theoretical ideas. By diversifying citations in research, one can uplift those voices, theories, and scholarship from underrepresented communities, thus making them more visible. To further help these efforts, and as an act of standard activism [19], forensic anthropologists can call for a diversification of editorial boards and grant agencies that oversee research being funded and published. Incorporating underrepresented voices into editorial and decision-making processes will ensure better research with constituent communities by bringing those unique experiences to the table and dismantling othering while also changing the overarching narrative from a white, cisgender, heteronormative framework to one more reflective of society [9].

4.4. Advocacy in Professional Development

Lastly, advocacy can play a role in overall professionalism and interactions that take place between members of the field. This could be standing up for fellow researchers and confronting discrimination or harassment, or even just ensuring that underrepresented voices are heard in professional spaces and mentoring those from such groups. Practitioners can engage in advocating for policy change within professional organizations by challenging the policies that pose barriers to access and inclusion. When organizations hold conferences in locations actively discriminating against select communities (LGBTQ+, migrants, racialized groups, etc.), members of those communities feel unwelcome at organization events, despite the rhetoric of that organization. Further, when organizations select locations in more "high-priced" locations, those events become more exclusive and limiting for those of lower socioeconomic status, students, and scholars and practitioners from the Global South. Advocating for policy changes and challenging the systems within organizations will help ensure the inclusion and equity of all and would encourage those just beginning in this field (i.e., students) to continue their pursuit and further help better the organizations.

Beyond professional organizations, practitioners can further advocate for and challenge the systemic barriers that exist within the field itself. Forensic anthropology is a field that is largely for those that come from means. Though not expressly stated, participating in various activities such as field schools, short courses, unpaid internships, conference attendance, and professional membership, while invaluable, are limited to those who can afford to take advantage. That advantage is then further amplified as their career advances over those with lower socioeconomic statuses who could not afford to take time away from employment. Advocating for systemic changes involves finding ways to make sure opportunities are more readily available to all [5]. Challenging the system can also mean developing relationships with students from underrepresented backgrounds and taking them on as graduate students. Additionally, and more specifically within the realm of higher education, it is important to challenge the systemic problems surrounding academics, the value placed on service, and the increased service loads that marginalized people carry [171].

4.5. Skeletal Collections

Beyond casework and education, advocacy and activism can also extend to our research, particularly given the problematic issues of skeletal collections. Collections have

been pivotal in the establishment of forensic anthropology as they are the foundations of our sex, age, stature, and population affinity assessment methods [142]. Human skeletal research and teaching collections have been used in North American institutions for centuries, but the persons comprising the collections remain largely unacknowledged in the scientific literature, and efforts to address the issue have received minimal attention [148,173,174]. In many established university laboratories and classrooms, the norm is the use of osteological specimens with undocumented or unacknowledged provenance [173]. Those with known or suspected provenance are largely from structurally vulnerable living descendant communities' populations such as migrants, people who experienced poverty, POC communities, and those from historically colonized regions. In forensic anthropology's shift to be a more ethical, equitable, and advocacy-driven field, it is important to de-Westernize, humanize, and advocate for the individuals who comprise these collections.

Skeletal remains were extensively acquired in the 19th and early 20th centuries to support scientific research within the racialist paradigm and to legitimize colonial powers' aggression [175–177]. Particularly in the context of Indigenous and Black peoples, craniometrics and phrenology sought to quantitatively establish a racial order and preserve material from a "vanishing" people. Human remains were intentionally taken from known burial sites, supported by the direction of craniologists and the 1868 Surgeon General's order [175,177]. Among those disinterred, over 4000 Indigenous heads were taken from burials, battlefields, and hospitals [178]. The construction of anatomical laboratories in the 20th century reflected a broad trend of remains conscripted from economically marginalized groups, such as migrants, their descendants, and African Americans [148,179]. Biological supply companies also exploit economically disadvantaged communities, particularly the Calcutta bone trade, and engage in the legal yet ethically questionable trade of human remains; each year, the bone trade ships tens of thousands of human remains across the globe [173].

Forensic anthropologists today balance the ethical line between scientific research and respect for the dignity and rights of deceased individuals within skeletal collections; however, challenges persist. For example, the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University retained the skeletal remains of children who were the victims of the 1985 bombing of the Black liberation community MOVE organization's headquarters in Philadelphia [180]. Beyond homicide, the remains were desecrated through their unethical retention and use for teaching and research [180]. Similarly, a recent UC Berkeley controversy centers on allegations that a professor taught a class using suspected Indigenous remains, which could potentially violate the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) [181]. An analysis of federal data suggested that the department has not initiated the repatriation process as required by NAGPRA for the remains in question, highlighting concerns about compliance with federal laws and ethical considerations regarding the treatment of Indigenous remains in academic settings [181]. These two high-profile examples from higher education institutions highlight how skeletal biological knowledge is unethically built on marginalized individuals, and such behavior is likely insidious across universities. Even beyond universities, many of the methods created today are developed from databases constructed from skeletal and anatomical data from those whose next-of-kin did not necessarily consent such as the Forensic Data Bank [182] and New Mexico Decedent Image Database [183]. Using data from non-consenting individuals is often tacitly accepted as the end justifying the means—if we can use our knowledge in osteology to help identify individuals in the future, then learning from non-consenting individuals and homicide victims is worth the cost.

These racist legacies are now an embedded aspect of biological/forensic anthropology as there is no standardized and widely implemented training for ethical research using human remains. This lack of training is despite decades of research and activism from anthropologists—particularly Black, Indigenous, POC, and marginalized scholars detailing how structural violence occurs postmortem (e.g., Goliath, et al. [24], Adams, et al. [97], de la Cova [148], Halcrow, et al. [176], Riding In [177], Cobb [179], Adams and Goliath [184],

Flaherty, et al. [161], Meloche [185], Reineke, et al. [186], and Stantis, et al. [151]). Anthropologists must recognize the presence of oppressive ideologies and the pervasive trauma and civil rights violations resulting from the illegal or unethical acquisition, curation, transfer, and utilization of human remains in the field [176]. As forensic anthropology continues to create space for advocacy, the dead that allow for its research, teaching, and work need to be recognized and treated with dignity.

5. Conclusions

Overall, advocacy/activism can take countless forms, approaches, and goals. Some of the most routine of activities—like slightly changing approaches to research or education—can have a profound impact on marginalized and underrepresented communities, both living and deceased. Yet advocacy does not necessarily have to stop with the examples listed here. Extreme and vested-interest advocacy does have a vital role to play in forensic anthropology and is already occurring within the field. We work with a variety of communities and have [14] privilege in our knowledge and recognized expertise. Though much of what was discussed falls under Dempsey and Lister's [19] level of "standard" or "conceptual advocacy", actions such as direct lobbying and discussions with policymakers on issues that can help or harm those communities are needed by those who can accept more risk. Many of the communities listed above are overrepresented in the forensic population either by homicide or suicide. How can we, as a field, not stand up and advocate for policies that will reduce harm and violence? How can we not engage with the wider community when we know the very real harm rhetoric and policy can have? Advocacy can be as large as testifying before a legislative committee in a professional capacity or as simple as discussing the realities of our science (what it can, and more importantly, cannot do) with a community group at a local library.

Throughout this paper, we have discussed various types of advocacy and activism that forensic anthropologists may take. Advocacy may also take the form of facilitating a space where ideas can be easily shared. Oftentimes, these discussions occur at conferences or behind paywalled publications. Therefore, it is important to expand these conversations beyond traditional venues. We have developed a living document that provides a foundation of possible advocacy actions and resources that forensic anthropologists may engage in. We hope that by sharing this document and providing an opportunity for people to comment and contribute to it, we are able to provide equitable access and opportunity to contribute to the conversation and promote disciplinary improvement. The document, with instructions on how to contribute to the resource, may be accessed here: Forensic Anthropology Advocacy and Activism [187].

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