



Leipzig Human Remains Repatriation

In the 1880's, a doctor named Emil Ludwig Schmidt, of Leipzig Germany was given 19 individual's crania by New Orleans doctor Henry D. Schmidt. These "specimens" are enumerated in catalog at the University of Leipzig with racialized/colonialist labels; 17 of 19 individuals' names are listed in this catalog. All were either African American or of mixed African American, European American descent. They are:

Adam Grant, age 50, male
Isaak Bell, age 70, male
Hiram Smith, age 20, male
William Pierson, age 43, male
Henry Williams, age 55, male
John Brown, age 48, male
Hiram Malone, age 21, male
William Roberts, age 23, male
Alice Brown, age 15, female
Prescilla Hatchet, age 19, female
Marie Louise, age 55, female
Mahala, age 70, female
Samuel Prince, age 40, male
John Tolman, age 23, male
Henry Allen, age 17, male
Moses Willis, age 23, male
Henry Anderson, age 23, male

The locations of the rest of the bodies are unknown, however, because research indicates that Dr. Schmidt was associated with the State of Louisiana's Charity Hospital in New Orleans at the time, it is theorized that they may have been interred in the hospital's cemetery at the end of Canal Street. The context of transactions in human remains in the 19th century is horrific. In the 1800s, the medical field became increasingly obsessed with the study of the human cranium (skull), to the exclusion of the rest of the skeletal parts. In what is termed phrenology, some doctors theorized that they could tell personality or whether an individual was virtuous or immoral, intelligent or dull-witted, just by measuring the skull and interpreting the differences in the individual bumps and crevices. Some doctors then used the differences in crania to theorize the superiority of one race over another. Not all doctors agreed with these racist theories but did not object to the study of the skull. Hence, Western museums and research institutions competed

to obtain specimens from around the world. It was easy to get around what little, if any, laws there were concerning the disposition of human remains and large collections were amassed, mostly in Europe and the United States.

In 2023, the City of New Orleans Archaeologist was contacted by the University of Leipzig, Germany to assist in their desire to repatriate a portion of their cranial collection that came from New Orleans during this dark chapter in our history. As the individuals' crania were acquired in a "colonial context and unethically," it is their mission to "contact the countries of origin for possible repatriations."

To help with this process of repatriation, the City Archaeologist reached out to several entities including the Louisiana Department of Justice who handle cases of repatriation, the University of New Orleans Anthropology Department who have expertise in human remains projects and Dillard University, for their expertise in African American history.