

Case 8: The Case of the Missing Artifact

For his own aesthetic purposes, Marcus Randolph had collected Pueblo Indian arts and crafts for many years before becoming an anthropologist. Randolph's fieldwork sites for ten years were located in Latin America. However, as a result of personal contacts, he was asked to conduct a brief ethnohistorical study in one of the Rio Grande pueblos. As his study progressed, he learned that an important item had been missing for about 20 years from the collection of paraphernalia used by one of the religious leaders in the community. According to this individual, ceremonies had never been complete since the item had disappeared. Crop failures and other community problems were partially attributed to this loss.

After obtaining a full description from the religious leader and checking this against information about the item with colleagues in local museums and universities, Randolph realized that there was a good chance that the item in question was at least similar to, if not identical to, one he had purchased 15 years previously from a trading post.

Randolph's Dilemma: Should he offer the item in his possession to the religious leader? Should he even show the item to the religious leader? Or, should he simply make a note regarding the missing religious piece and not disclose his personal possession to anyone in the community?