

The Anthropological Niche of Douglas W. Hume: Darkness in El Dorado - Achived Document

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Dialogue Correspondence: Hypocrisy in El Dorado

So many of Patrick Tierney's allegations have been refuted that in a court of law, he simply would be dismissed as an unreliable witness. Most anthropologists are tired of the controversy, while outsiders see it as further evidence that anthropologists eat their own young. Yet Sponsel and Turner (Oct 2001 and Mar 2002 AN) still lobby for Tierney to be taken seriously. Let's consider why.

Sponsel and Turner claimed that they first learned of allegations against Neel and Chagnon by reading Tierney's galleys, then wrote their hyperbolic email out of a sense of duty. However, they left a paper trail suggesting otherwise. The U of Michigan fact-finding team found that Turner had been campaigning against Chagnon for years, including an angry confrontation at the 1994 AAA Annual Meeting. Next, in *The National Review* (Nov 20, 2000), reporter John Miller got Turner to admit that he met regularly with Tierney during the writing of *Darkness in El Dorado*; at those meetings Turner fed Tierney misinformation, such as the notion that Neel believed in a "leadership gene."

The "smoking gun" was an email sent by Sponsel on Wed, Oct 18, 2000, at 4:47 pm to 19 media outlets. In it, Sponsel 1) steers reporters toward sources critical of Chagnon and away from anyone who might refute them; 2) begs not to be revealed as the source of the email; and 3) recommends an article by Hare et al. on "Psychopathic Personality Disorder." Several reporters, put off by this effort to label Chagnon a psychopath, made the email public. This attempt to influence press coverage made it clear that Sponsel and Turner were desperate for *El Dorado* to succeed. To those who consider Chagnon the Prince of Darkness, this book was to be the wooden stake through his heart.

Ironically, it was the doctors and geneticists on the fact-finding team who saw through the hypocrisy. They also rejected the "spin" coming from venerable AAA elders, who wanted us to think that the controversy was only about the treatment of human subjects, and couldn't possibly be tainted by personal animosity, hatred of biological models or jealousy born of laboring for years in Chagnon's shadow. "Such denial!" said one geneticist. "Anthropologists are great at using political correctness as a pretext for fratricide."

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