

2005 Referendum Results

Referendum #1: Uncensuring Boas

Passed (Yes–1245; No–73)

WHEREAS The American Anthropological Association regrets the censure motion passed against Dr Franz Boas, third President of the AAA (1907–08), at its eighteenth annual meeting at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, December 30, 1919, President Clark Wissler presiding and

WHEREAS the association publicly distanced itself from the opinion written by Dr Franz Boas on October 16, 1919, and published in *The Nation* on December 20, 1919, and

WHEREAS the majority voted that Boas' claim was "unjustified and does not represent the opinion of the American Anthropological Association" and

WHEREAS in that open letter to the editor, "Scientists as Spies," Boas insisted on the distinction between researchers—scientists whose lives are dedicated to "the service of truth"—and spies under the employment of the US government and

WHEREAS Boas believed that it was immoral for scientists to use their professional identity as a cover for governmental spying activities and

WHEREAS other such incidents of anthropologists as spies have been repudiated by this association,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT The AAA rescinds that censure and entirely repudiates the 1919 motion.

Referendum #2: Policy for Selecting Annual Meeting Locations

Passed (Yes–695; No–624)

AAA staff responsible for negotiating and administering meeting venue contracts shall 'strongly prefer' meeting facilities whose staff are represented by a union.

Referendum #3: Referendum to Rescind the AAA's Acceptance of the Report of the El Dorado Task Force

Passed (Yes–846; No–338)

The Membership of the American Anthropological Association Rescinds the Association's Acceptance of the report of the El Dorado Task Force (2002)

In May of 2002 the executive board of the AAA accepted and widely promulgated the report of its task force, which had investigated allegations against the late James Neel and Napoleon Chagnon in connection with the book *Darkness in El Dorado*.

The investigation, however, was so flawed in its procedures, in the quality of the evidence it gathered, and in the absence of a legal and ethical framework, that it compromised the core values of the association and should be rescinded.¹ The intent of this resolution is not to address the merits of the charges leveled against Neel and Chagnon, but rather the conduct of the association in its investigation.

WHEREAS The AAA's El Dorado investigation and resulting report (AAA 2002a) violated the association's prohibition on ethics investigations, which states: "The American Anthropological Association (AAA) does not adjudicate claims for unethical behavior" (AAA 1998);²

WHEREAS The investigating task force ignored basic principles of fairness and due process, yet found its targets guilty of specific acts of inappropriate conduct including, in Chagnon's case, violating the code of professional ethics;³

WHEREAS The task force was compromised by conflicts of interest and its members published prejudicial statements during the course of the investigation;⁴

WHEREAS The few Yanomami witnesses interviewed by the task force in Venezuela and Brazil were children at the time of the events in question, were closely associated with the accusers, and were, by the task force's own admission, unrepresentative of Yanomami society;⁵

WHEREAS The task force failed to interview witnesses supportive of Chagnon and Neel or take into account the statements by elected representatives of Yanomami communities which denied the accusations and supported Chagnon and Neel;⁶

WHEREAS Other scientific associations, including The National Academy of Sciences, the American Society of Human Genetics, The International Genetic Epidemiology Society and The Society for Visual Anthropology all investigated charges in *Darkness in El Dorado* and found the allegations they examined to be without merit;⁷

WHEREAS The task force compromised its objectivity by merging its investigation with a political agenda, in that its mission in conducting the investigation was intended to challenge "Western elites," and "interrupt regimes of knowledge and power" (AAA 2002a).

WHEREAS The association in the course of its investigation, in its publications, in the venues of its national meetings and its web site, condoned a culture of accusation and allowed serious but unevaluated charges to be posted on its website and expressed in its newsletter and Annual Meetings;⁸

WHEREAS The report has damaged the reputations of its targets, distracted public attention from the real sources of the Yanomami tragedy and misleadingly suggested that anthropologists are responsible for Yanomami suffering;

WHEREAS According to the bylaws of the association "The Members of the association shall constitute the final authority of the association";

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT,

1 The membership of the American Anthropological Association rescinds the acceptance of the report of the El Dorado Task Force, of May 2002, and directs the executive board to take the same action and to immediately implement this resolution.

2 The association will follow its own policies prohibiting ethics adjudications.

3 The President of the association will announce to the national and international media and distribute copies of this Resolution and explain the reasons for rescission as outlined in this resolution. These materials will be published in *AN*, they will be sent to all of the members by email, and they will further be distributed to all institutions and individuals who received the original report, in the translated languages in which the report was transmitted. The officers of the association, in public statements will reflect both the substance and spirit of this resolution.

4 This Resolution will be prominently placed on the association web site for a period of at least one year, and thereafter as long as the task force report remains posted on the web site.

Estimate of costs: Translation costs of this motion into Spanish and Portuguese: \$400. Negligible additional costs beyond the work of current staff in communicating information above.

Notes to Referendum #3

1 Documentation of the assertions made in this motion may be found in "Guilt by Association: The Culture of Accusation and The American Anthropological Association's Investigation of Darkness in El Dorado (Gregor and Gross 2004).

2 When establishing this policy, the association acknowledged its "inability . . . to carry out a fair and legally defensible adjudication" (AAA 1995). In order to distance itself from a prohibited adjudicatory role, the task force called its proceedings an

"inquiry," and denied that it had collected "evidence" of the events it described. Louise Lamphere, the AAA president who initiated the process, acknowledged that the association could not conduct "a formal investigation" due to its ethics code and so had to conduct an "inquiry" (Lamphere 2003: 166). The task force nonetheless made findings of improper conduct, including the claim that Neel and Chagnon had psychologically damaged the Yanomami in their research, that Chagnon had depicted them in a harmful way in his publications, and that he had violated specific provisions of the ethics code. The association and its leaders also misrepresented the task force findings as being concerned with the dire situation of Yanomami health ("The key finding of the

task force that dwarfs all others relates to the devastating health conditions of the Yanomami Indians" [AAA 2002c]) when in fact the topic is barely mentioned in the two volume report, other than in association with the charges.

3 The panel failed to define standards of evidence or provide appropriate representation for Chagnon or Neel (who was deceased). See Gregor and Gross (2004: 688) and below for other examples.

4 Two of the panelists placed statements on the Internet in which they assumed Chagnon and Neel's culpability months before the conclusion of the investigation and in the midst of collecting evidence. For example, "... with the passage of time thoughtful anthropologists and the association itself have come to view [Chagnon and Neel's] actions (including methods of collecting information) as reprehensible and unjustifiable" (AAA 2002, Vol. II: 147). One of the panelists was a friend and the former doctoral student of Terence Turner, whose accusatory memo (coauthored with Leslie Sponsel) sparked the investigation (See Gregor and Gross [2004: 692-3]).

5 See the Report, AA 2002a:68 and Gregor and Gross (2004: 693).

6 See statements of Yanomami and Ye'kwana elected leaders in praise of the life-saving immunization efforts of Chagnon and Neel and their "tenderness" for the villagers (Yanomami and Ye'kwana Statement 2000).

7 The International Genetic Epidemiology Society concluded that the Neel-Chagnon research was conducted with sensitivity to the Yanomami who were beneficiaries of the research, and that the society did "not find any evidence in support of the charge that Neel and his team had abused the then existing ethical guidelines during their conduct of research on the Yanomamö" (IGES 2001:23).

8 Unexamined allegations of serial murder-by-hire and biological experimentation on entire Yanomami villages remain on the AA web site; see also AA2002b, comments by Frechione, Goode, Hagen, Irons, Sponsel and Ward, and also Gregor and Gross (2004: 695-96).

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