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Review

## Life Among the Anthros

By **Clifford Geertz**

*Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon*

by Patrick Tierney

Norton, 417 pp., \$27.95

"This is the Brewer Explorer Survival knife," said Charlie,... "6 1/4-inch stainless steel blade, Rockwell Hardness 56–58; 2 3/4-inch saw extending from the handle towards the point; on the left here a 180-degree clinometer for calculating the height of mountains; on the right instructions for five ground-to-air signals.... [It] converts...into wire cutters.... It can also be made into a harpoon [and holds] six fish hooks,... nylon fishing line, two lead sinkers, one float, an exacto blade, two sewing needles, three matches, a flint stick and a suture needle with suture material attached. It's made by Marto of Toledo and imported into the US by Gutman at \$150. But you and Simon can have one. It's good for skinning alligators. And when the Yanomami have had a go at you you can sew each other up round the arrow holes."

"The Yanomami?"

"Yeah. The most violent people on earth. Some anthropologists think they were the first people to reach South America from the North. They have very fair skins, occasionally green eyes. They are the largest untouched group of Indians left in the rainforest. The other Indians are terrified of them. My friend Napoleon Chagnon called his book on them *The Fierce People*—I'll give you a copy, and Jacques Lizot's too, *Tales of the Yanomami*. It's all perfectly understandable—they grow a few plantains, but basically they're hunter-gatherers and there's not much food in these forests. So when times are bad they kill the newborn girls; so there are never enough women to go round; so they fight over them. Within the tribe, in formalised duels, they hit each other over the head with ten-foot-long clubs. Outside the tribe they raid each

other's settlements for women and kill the enemy men with six-foot-long arrows tipped with curare. And on top of all that they've no concept of natural death, so if anyone dies from a fever it's the result of malign magic worked by an enemy shaman. Each death must be avenged."

I stood there stupidly, holding the enormous Brewer Explorer knife.

"And this still goes on?" I said, shaken.

"They are killing each other," said Charlie, "*right now*."

—Redmond O'Hanlon<sup>[1]</sup>

Anthropologists have left an indelible imprint upon the Yanomami. In fact, the word *anthro* entered the Indians' vocabulary, and it is not a term of endearment. For the Indians, *anthro* has come to signify something like the opposite of its original Greek meaning, "man." The Yanomami consider an *anthro* to be a powerful nonhuman with deeply disturbed tendencies and wild eccentricities—an Olympian in a funk.

—Patrick Tierney<sup>[2]</sup>

Our land, our forest will only die off if the white man destroys it. Then the streams will vanish, the earth will become parched, the trees will dry up, and the rocks of the mountains will split with the heat. The xapiripë spirits who live on the mountains and play in the forest will run away. Their fathers, the shamans, will no longer be able to call them to protect us. The land-forest will become dry and empty. The shamans will no longer be able to deter the smoke-epidemics and the evil beings who make us fall sick. Thus, all will die.

—Davi Kopenawa Yanomami<sup>[3]</sup>

The Yanomami tribe in the [Amazonian] rainforest has always worried about losing its turf. But never has that battle involved a cyberspace incursion. The tribe is fighting a Florida woman who has claimed the name Yanomami.com and is offering to sell rights to it for \$25,000. "The Yanomami name is not up for sale," wrote tribal leader Davi Kopenawa Yanomami in response. In an increasingly common practice known as "cybersquatting," the woman registered the World Wide Web address after hearing of an upcoming Hollywood movie on the tribe.

—*Newsday*<sup>[4]</sup>

## 1.

We are entering, we are told, a weightless, frictionless, speed-of-light age in which we will all be but address nodes in an endless flow of information packets, scurrying message handlers continuously assaulted from all directions. So far as scholarly life is concerned, that is still more specter than reality; promises (or threats) of e-books and downloadable doctoral theses and flooded-over inboxes aside, communication still proceeds at a more or less human pace, in a more or less politic manner. However, to judge from the on-line blizzard of charge and countercharge that has attended the mere rumor of Patrick Tierney's blistering indictment of anthropological practice in the Venezuelan Amazon, *Darkness in El Dorado*, it may not do so very much longer. Such established academic customs as looking into books before reviewing them, editing drafts before publishing them, and couching even polemic in consecutive argument may well be on the way out—runes and relics of a less hurried time. In cyberspace, it is velocity that matters. Velocity and volume.

The first intelligence that Patrick Tierney's *j'accuse* broadside was on the way came in the form of a breathless, six-page, single-spaced e-mail sent to "the President, and the President-elect" of the American Anthropological Association, a couple of weeks before the book was scheduled to appear (and a couple of months before it actually managed to do so), by two well-known Amazonian specialists and human rights activists, Terence Turner, professor of anthropology at Cornell, and Leslie Sponsel, professor of anthropology at the University of Hawaii, Manoa.<sup>[5]</sup>

"We write," they said, "to inform you of an impending scandal that will affect the American Anthropological profession as a whole in the eyes of the public, and arouse intense indignation and calls for action among members of the Association." They had obtained galley copies of a book by "an investigative journalist" describing "the actions of anthropologists and associated scientific researchers...among the Yanomami of Venezuela over the past thirty-five years"—actions "which in [their] scale, ramifications, and sheer criminality and corruption [are] unparalleled in the history of Anthropology." As the AAA, due to assemble in sixty days for its annual meeting, "will be called on by the general media and its own membership to take collective stands on the issues [the book] raises, as well as appropriate redressive actions.... The sooner you [as presidents of the Association] know about the story that is about to break, the better prepared you can be to deal with it."

"The focus of the scandal" the book exposes, they continued, is the long-term project for the study of the Yanomami, sponsored by the Atomic Energy

Commission as part of its post-Hiroshima effort to determine the effects of radiation on human subjects, and organized in the mid-Sixties "by James Neel, the human geneticist, in which Napoleon Chagnon, Timothy Asch, and numerous other anthropologists took part." Tierney "presents convincing evidence" that Neel (who directed the radiation studies in Japan after the war) and Chagnon (probably the most prominent, and certainly the most controversial, student of the Yanomami) "greatly exacerbated, and probably started the epidemic of measles that killed 'hundreds, perhaps thousands'...of Yanomami" in 1968 by inoculating them with an outmoded and "counter-indicated" live-virus vaccine, after which they "refused to provide any medical assistance to the sick and dying Yanomami, on explicit orders from Neel," who, anxious to test his "extreme eugenic theories" in a "natural," and "untouched," human society, "insisted to his colleagues that they were only there to observe and record the epidemic,...not [to] provide medical help."

Further, Chagnon, together with Asch, an ethnographic filmmaker, who worked with him for about ten years before they fell out in bitterness and recrimination, is said to have staged artificial "wars" between villages for documentary purposes, mock fights which often turned into real battles, shedding real blood. Together with Neel, he colluded with "sinister Venezuelan politicians attempting to gain control of Yanomami lands for illegal gold mining concessions." And all by himself he allegedly cooked and recooked his data, much of it in fact as invented as his films, to support his "neo-Hobbesean," sociobiological view of Yanomami life as brutal, violent, and congenitally murderous:

This nightmarish story—a real anthropological heart of darkness beyond the imagining of even a Josef [*sic*] Conrad (though not, perhaps, a Josef Mengele)... This book should shake anthropology to its very foundations.... [It] will be seen (rightly in our view) by the public, as well as most anthropologists, as putting the whole discipline on trial, [and] it should cause the field to understand how the corrupt and depraved protagonists could have spread their poison for so long while they were accorded great respect throughout the Western World and generations of undergraduates received their lies as the introductory substance of anthropology.

And if all that didn't concentrate the presidents' minds sufficiently: "As both an indication and a vector of its public impact, we have learned that *The New Yorker* magazine is planning to publish an extensive excerpt, timed to coincide with the publication of the book on or about October 1st."

**T**hough Turner and Sponsel later claimed, quite implausibly, that their letter had

been a confidential memorandum not meant for general circulation, posting it electronically rendered it immediately available to just about anyone within the range of just about anyone else's "forward" command, and the howl of protest, outrage, glee, and *Schadenfreude* was vast and virtually instantaneous. It rocketed through the media behind screaming headlines: MACHO ANTHROPOLOGY (*Salon*), ANTHROPOLOGY ENTERS THE AGE OF CANNIBALISM (*The New York Times*), MAD DOG ANTHROPOLOGISTS (*The Nation*), THE WAGES OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL INCORRECTNESS (*The National Review*), IS ANTHROPOLOGY EVIL? (*Slate*), YANOMAMI: WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO THEM? (*Time*), "SCIENTIST" KILLED AMAZON INDIANS TO TEST RACE THEORY (*The Guardian*). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Science*, *US News*, *USA Today*, UPI, AP, the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, and Reuters had bylined, and on-lined, features on the matter, as did *Forbes*, "the capitalist tool," which extended its attentions beyond anthropology—"a mind-set aching for activist causes"—to sociology and psychology as well: "People become sociologists because they hate society, and they become psychologists because they hate themselves."

Beyond the media, a variety of interested institutions, commentators, and marching societies fired off barrages in one direction or another. The University of Michigan, where Neel had taught for nearly fifty years (he died in February 2000, aged eighty-four, full of just about every honor save, unaccountably, the Nobel Prize), went on line with a twenty-page "investigation," accusing Tierney of pursuing "an anti-science agenda." A team of "evolutionary psychologists" (that is, sociobiologists) from the University of California, Santa Barbara, from which Chagnon had recently retired, posted a seventy-page "preliminary" report, "The Big Lie," calling Tierney's allegations ignorant, malicious, laughable, and "deliberately fraudulent." Bruce Alberts, the president of the National Academy of Sciences, and a longtime friend of Neel's, weighed in with a statement attacking Tierney for doing "a grave disservice to a great scientist and to science itself."

Dr. Samuel Katz, codeveloper of the measles vaccine Neel had used, posted an open e-mail to be displayed "in any place or fashion where...it may be helpful in aborting the posthumous assassination of Jim Neel," saying that the vaccine was not "virulent," could not cause measles, and never had done so in millions of applications. (Terence Turner, who said he had now found the time to consult an expert of his own, as well as, perhaps, to catch his breath, withdrew the "greatly exacerbated and probably started the epidemic" part of the accusation, and apologized to Katz—"now that I have had a chance to research the matter myself, I am in complete agreement with you.") Asch's filmmaker colleagues rushed to deny that he had ever staged anything, in the Amazon or anywhere else. (He, too, had died—in 1994, of cancer—suggesting, toward the end, that his Yanomami films were misleading and should be withdrawn from circulation.)

**W**ith the publication of the "extended excerpt" in *The New Yorker*, a feverish attack upon it and upon the magazine for publishing it, posted on *Slate* by John Tooby, the lead author of the "Big Lie" report, and a sharp response to that by the editors of *The New Yorker*, also on *Slate*, the battle was fairly well joined.<sup>[6]</sup> It remained only for the American Anthropological Association to somehow express itself, and its response came, with wild unclarity and a good deal of ax-grinding, at its meeting in San Francisco in mid-November.

Two plenary sessions, both crowded with hundreds of anthropologists, journalists, visiting scholars, and, this being California, passing agitators, were held on successive evenings. The first consisted of a seven-member panel of experts—an epidemiologist, an immunologist, a specialist in medical ethics, a former student in Neel's lab now a "scientific investigator" in Brazil, the head of Venezuela's Bureau for Indigenous Indian Affairs, herself a Waru Indian, a designated defender of Chagnon (Chagnon himself, holed up in northern Michigan considering options, refused to attend what he called "a feeding frenzy in which I am the bait"), and, down at the end of the table, looking abstract and detached, or perhaps just bemused, through nearly three hours of non-stop attack, Patrick Tierney.

In turn, each of the other panelists, save the Indian woman, who remarked the absence of native voices in the discussion and called for Yanomami participation in any future inquiry, pronounced Tierney's accusations of a vaccine-induced epidemic false and slanderous and his "anti-science approach" threatening to medical assistance programs throughout the world, after which Tierney said mildly that he was against neither vaccination nor science, that he understood that he had written a "wrenching book" that many people would find difficult to come to terms with, and that he hoped that the Santa Barbara and Michigan people would give Chagnon's work as careful a going over as they had given his, and, sensing perhaps that he was a bit outnumbered, he more or less left it there. The next evening's session, at which some thirty people, including Turner and Sponsel (but not Tierney, who was off to the Berkeley-to-Boston interview circuit), spoke for five minutes each, was, since almost no one had read the book which had only that day finally been published, hardly more clarifying. In the end, the president and the president-elect did what such people usually do in such circumstances: they asked a past president to head up a commission to look into the question of whether an official committee of inquiry should be formed.<sup>[7]</sup>

## 2.

Tierney's opus—three parts, eighteen chapters, 398 sources, 1,599 footnotes—

which has to be the only work to have been nominated for a major literary prize (the National Book Award, nonfiction) while its author, having withdrawn the galleys from circulation, was still busily revising it to counter already published attacks, is, whatever else it is, full of production values. A series of loosely linked set pieces—"Savage Encounters," "Outbreak," "Atomic Indians," "The Na-poleonic Wars," "Gardens of Hunger, Dogs of War," "To Murder and to Multiply"—it tells its story, a few statistical excursions and medical discussions aside, largely through setting, character, and dramatic incident.

A Venezuelan political adventurer, environmentalist, and strip miner (and the inventor of that "explorer survival knife") parachutes into the jungle to separate two French anthropologists intent, for some reason, upon killing one another. The mistress of the president of Venezuela, "dressed in white," wearing "enormous boots and an immense white hat," helicopters about Indian country, ferrying US journalists, travel agents, and other celebrities in search of "virgin villages" and "authentic primitives." Chagnon, stripped to his drawers, decorated with feathers, dancing and chanting, and drugged out of his skull on local hallucinogens, breaks arrows over his head as he ritually "kills" a terrified small boy. There are homosexual harems, goldfield massacres, captivity stories, soul-eating shamans, guerrilla invasions, four sorts of missionaries, and the death agony of an Indian woman and her newborn infant impassively filmed by a British television crew. And it is all driven forward by furious authorial voice-overs—oracular, condemnatory, comprehensive, and unforgiving:

In the end, the Yanomami concluded Chagnon was simply out to rip them off. He wanted complete control of the films and the budget and the blood and the budget, and he intended to give them only crumbs from his rich table. The man who had once incorporated the fearsome Vulture Spirits now landed his helicopter in the middle of [Indian villages] in the company of Venezuela's leading [gold miner].

Sadly, [Neel] took both his beliefs and his experiments with him into the rain forest. [He] and his eugenic disciples imbued the impersonal nature of evolution with a personal animus: natural selection became selfish, murderous, cruel, and deceitful. Doctors trained by the AEC gave the Yanomami a radioactive tracer and a vaccine that was potentially fatal for immune-compromised people. Scientists kept on filming and collecting blood in the midst of epidemics. These brave men took a long walk on the dark side, but in the artificial brilliance of ground zero, they could see no shadows.

The attempt [by Chagnon] to portray the Yanomami as archetypes of ferocity would be pathetic were it not for its political consequences—

for the fabulous distortions this myth has perpetrated in biology, anthropology, and popular culture.... Just as [Margaret] Mead's beliefs about sexual freedom and child rearing worked their way into public-policy debates, Chagnon's ferocious Yanomami have become proof to some social scientists that ruthless competition and sexual selection cannot be legislated away by idealistic do-gooders. The Yanomami are the Cold Warriors who never came in from the cold.

Hard charges demand hard evidence, or, failing that, at least an enormous mass of it. Tierney's approach to assembling such a mass, a project he says took eleven years, much of it on site, mapping itineraries, interviewing Indians, and reading mission-station reports, was to trace, relentlessly and with great ingenuity, the obscure and complicated doings of his main suspects, Neel and Chagnon, between 1966, when the former, project in hand, first arrived on the Orinoco, and 1995, when, at long last definitively *non grata* (he had been expelled at least twice before), the latter finally left it. The result is uneven, in many places vague or insubstantial, and in some, it is, as the critics have charged, simply unfair—ideologized second-guessing. But, as the instances accumulate and their implications come home, it all, in some strange way, begins to add up. Whatever caused the measles epidemic (and that issue, it should be said, plays a much less prominent part in the book than it does in the discussion of the book), a case gets made, however clumsily, that something was seriously amiss in the relation between these confident and determined *soi-disant* "scientists" with their cameras, their vials, their syringes, and their notebooks and the beset and puzzled, put-upon "natives" to whom they looked for facts to fill them with—something in their encounter was deeply, and mutually, misconceived.

"Why do [these *anthros*] want to study us so much?" one Indian who had watched them at work for thirty years and remembered running screaming into the forest when they first arrived, and rather wished that he had stayed there, asked plaintively: "[They] have a brain; Yanomami have a brain. [They] have two eyes; Yanomami have two eyes. [They] have five fingers; the Yanomami have five fingers. Why are they so interested in studying us?"

The problem was not just the thousands of blood and urine samples, the mysterious radioactive iodine tracers, or the ill-explained medicines and inoculations, which seemed more accompaniments of disease than cures for it. Nor was it just the visitors' practice of taking reproductive histories which required the revelation of personal names, a matter so deeply tabooed and emotionally disturbing to the Indians that it almost got Chagnon, ruthless in the matter, killed at one point. Nor was it the earnest tabulation of murders, murderers, and victims, the playing off of rival families and competing headmen for movie-making purposes, or the bribing of members of the tribe with steel axes and machetes, occasionally even shotguns



—all profoundly destabilizing interventions in a wood and clay village culture. It was not even just the grandiose plan (fortunately aborted when the president of Venezuela was overthrown and his wondrous mistress fled the country) of Neel, Chagnon, and their gold-rush, tourist-hunting allies "to turn the Yanomami's homeland into the world's largest private reserve," a six-thousand- square-mile research station and "biosphere" administered by themselves. The problem was that the *anthros* (and the *médicos*), reductionist to the core, conceived the object of their study not as a people but as a population. The Yanomami, who indeed had the requisite sorts of brains, eyes, and fingers, were a control group in an inquiry centered elsewhere.

Neel, who actually had the sort of romantic conception of Indians that people who haven't had much to do with them beyond watching them perform commonly have —brave, manly, direct, colorful, and uncorrupted by civilized appetites— went to the Yanomami hypothesis in hand. As the closest thing to an "untouched," "unacculturated," "natural" human community still around, a last living representative of our ancestral condition, the fundamental forces driving human evolution should be, he thought, more readily discernible among them than they are among modern populations, where such dysgenic institutions as the decline in childhood mortality, medical treatments for the elderly, the defective, and the disabled, draft deferments for the privileged and the nonbelligerent, and the disappearance of polygamy mask and distort them, degrading the species. In particular, it should be possible to find "a clear association, at least for males, between 'ability' and reproductive performance, a result of the greater fertility of leaders or headmen."<sup>[8]</sup> It is this program, "the search for the leadership gene," with which Chagnon, then a graduate student in search of a thesis topic, decided to associate himself and his career. Neel wrote:

For these studies, the indispensable cultural anthropologist became Napoleon Chagnon. Nap... sought me out in Ann Arbor... having heard of our developing program. By virtue of the con-tacts I had already made, I could facilitate his entry into the field; he, for his part,...could put together the village pedigrees so basic to our work. [We] went through the same indoctrination concerning the nuances of genetic...pedigrees.... Those familiar with Nap's writings concerning the Yanomama know how well the lessons took.<sup>[9]</sup>

**A**ll too well. It was the attempt to establish Neel's Darwinian conjecture (whether or not one wants to call it "eugenic" rather depends upon definitions) that masculinity, violence, domination, and the appropriation of women are selectively linked in tribal society through the differential fertility of headmen, and thus that

warfare and inequality were driving forces in the separation of *Homo sapiens* from other primates, that got Chagnon, "the indispensable anthropologist," into all the trouble. He spent a quarter of a century, in the field and out, desperately trying to find evidence for Neel's conjecture, counting, measuring, photographing, and perhaps stimulating violence, at the expense of his own more nuanced, immediate, finely detailed, and above all personally observed sense of what the Yanomami—less "the fierce people" than the resilient ones—were all about. The ethnographer, the connoisseur of the human particular, the celebrant of the special, gradually and, it turned out, irrecoverably disappeared into Neel's, and later E.O. Wilson's, totalizing visions. He became, like his namesake, the victim of a hypothesis.

There is a certain pathos in all this. One can sympathize with Chagnon's predicament in trying to be at one and the same time a responsible anthropologist and what one of his enemies has called "Neel's Kelly girl." Or at least one could, had he not, as he went on, become more and more extreme in his views, increasingly rigid, belligerent, and self-celebrating, as critiques arose on all sides. All who questioned him, his work, or his social Darwinism—and they include by now almost all of his Amazonian colleagues—were excoriated as "Marxists," "liars," "cultural anthropologists from the academic Left," "ayatollahs," "politically correct bleeding hearts," "pacifists," "limp-wristed anthropologists afraid to take on the [Church]," and "anti-scientific, post-modern moralizers" advocating "noble savage" conceptions of primitive life. He fell out with many of his students, with Asch, finally even, apparently, with Neel. In the end, he has retreated, taking an early retirement at sixty-two, to his own private northern Michigan St. Helena, dreaming of reconquest, vengeance, and vindication:

His house can't be seen from the road because of all the trees; it's an ideal retreat for someone who wants privacy. But Chagnon has turned a small study by the front door into a war room. Beneath a portrait of Bonaparte, the anthropologist has battled for weeks to rebut Tierney's allegations, going through old notes and organizing support among former students and sympathetic colleagues. E.O. Wilson calls every other day. Richard Dawkins [of the "selfish gene"] and Steven Pinker [of the "language instinct"] have backed him publicly. UC–Santa Barbara and the University of Michigan maintain websites...posting point-by-point refutations of Tierney's arguments. "I'm considering legal action," says Chagnon.<sup>[10]</sup>

### 3.

During the German occupation of France, André Gide published, and was allowed to publish because he was Gide, a series of "*interviews imaginaires*" in the public press commenting, in an oblique, Aesopian way, on various aspects of literature,

politics, and the cultural scene. In one, he takes up the question, then current, of the supposed responsibility of the "intellectuals" for the fall of France, and he ends it with a striking parable. A rowboat, moored at a riverbank, sits low in the water. Into it step in turn (as I remember it), a fat politician, a large general draped in medals, an enormous madam, and a bloated capitalist, the boat sinking deeper and deeper, water to the gunwales, as they board. Finally, a clergyman, thin as a rail, steps in and the boat finally sinks. The others all point at him: "It is he who is the culprit! It is he who has caused the disaster!"

Given all that has happened to the Yanomami over the past half-century, encountering anthropologists, and critics of anthropologists, as difficult as both may have been at times to deal with, surely ranks as historical small change, a very small blip on a very large curve. They have been caught up, these twenty thousand Indians, in the middle of the largest and most rapacious gold rush in history. The forests that shaped and supported them have been assaulted by international timber interests, bringing famine and malnutrition. They have been intensively missionized, they have been ruled by two vigorously Hispanicizing nation-states from which the best they could hope was pity and inattention, and they have become, or anyway are in the midst of becoming, that merest of mere locations, a tourist destination. And they have been plagued by a good deal more than measles which, however grave, are a one-time thing, while the malaria, tuberculosis, and other respiratory diseases they suffer from now are chronic, debilitating, only gradually fatal. Morbidity rates are estimated to be as high as 35 percent, death rates nearly 10 percent a year; birth rates, in some areas, are approaching zero.

In the space of hardly more than a generation, the people (or the population) over whom all these ethnographers, geneticists, sociobiologists, human rights activists, and "advocacy journalists" have been quarreling so furiously have moved from being "untouched" to being "imperiled," from "recently contacted" to "at the edge of destruction." Now that their values as a control group, a (supposedly) "natural," genetically "ancestral population" — "the last major primitive tribe ...*anywhere on earth*,"<sup>[11]</sup> is diminished or disappeared and the experiments upon them have ceased and the experimenters departed, what sort of presence in our minds, what sort of whatness, are they now to have? What sort of place in the world does an "ex-primitive" have?

It is difficult to say; the precedents are hardly encouraging. Perhaps that enterprising lady in Florida is on to something. A movie would certainly seem possible (Sean Penn as Napoleon Chagnon? Jennifer Lopez as the Presidential Mistress?). The exchange of on-line accusations would seem destined to go on for a while, entertaining the principals if no one else, perhaps for years. Whatever happens to the Yanomami in what we used to call the real world — "acculturation," "minoritization," immiseration, migration to shantytowns, or what E.O. Wilson in

an imprimatur to one of Chagnon's books blithely calls "a leisurely and decent accommodation between their world and ours"<sup>[12]</sup>—their place in cyberspace seems assured. Anyone still looking for them will be able to find them with a modem and a search engine. Yanomami.com.

## Notes

[1] *In Trouble Again: A Journey Between the Orinoco and the Amazon* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988), pp. 17–18. Italics in original.

[2] *Darkness in El Dorado*, p. 14.

[3] In Claudia Andujar, *Yanomami* (Curitiba, Brazil, 2000), p. 100. This is a fine book of art photographs of the Yanomami, with a brief ethnographic description of them by the French anthropologist Bruce Albert and personal reflections by Andujar, the photographer, and Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, a leading spokesman for the Yanomami people.

[4] October 15, 2000.

[5] Turner headed an earlier American Anthropological Association Special Commission to Investigate the Situation of the Brazilian Yanomami, in 1990–1991; Sponsel was chair of the Association's Committee for Human Rights from 1992 to 1996. There are, as yet, no accepted conventions for the citation of Internet communications, which often have long and roundabout, not always recoverable, transmission routes, hyperlink upon hyperlink, before they arrive on one's screen. (Precise source-referencing may be another elderly tradition on the way out.) I have not attempted to provide the relevant addresses for my on-line quotations: they tend to be long and cryptic, as well as, often enough, fugitive, disappearing like electronic wraiths when you look back for them. I have kept a list of them, which I can post on the Net (!) if there turns out to be a demand. An extensive, but given the volume of traffic necessarily incomplete, index of "over 300 links" (the true number is probably closer to a thousand or two by now) relevant to the debate can be found at [www.anth.uconn.edu/gradstudents/dhume/index4.htm](http://www.anth.uconn.edu/gradstudents/dhume/index4.htm).

[6] See Patrick Tierney, "The Fierce Anthropologist," *The New Yorker*, October 9, 2000, pp. 50–61; John Tooby, "Jungle Fever," *Slate*, October 24, 2000, 4:00 PM PT; "The New Yorker Replies," *Slate*, October 27, 2000, 4:45 PM PT. In a separate release, "The Muddied Waters of Amazon Anthropology," the *New Yorker* editors say that Chagnon originally agreed to be interviewed in connection with Tierney's piece, and then backed out, threatening suit. For all this, see *Inside Media*, another on-line magazine, October 3, 2000, 6:54 PM.

[7] And the beat goes on: Tierney, having perhaps caught his breath as well, has

recently (December 3, 2000) issued, via his publishers, W.W. Norton, a response to the critiques of John Tooby and Bruce Alberts. Tooby, he says "is not a neutral observer," but president of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society, of which Chagnon was president before him, and "co-director of the University of California at Santa Barbara's Anthropology Department," which has funded some of the Yanomami work. Tierney says that Tooby ("who has been trying to block the publication and fair reviewing of [my] book") conflates his work with the Sponsel-Turner e-mail, where the accusations against Neel and Chagnon are different, and less careful, than his own, and he lists ten examples of "errors" and "misrepresentations" in Tooby's piece for *Slate*.

Against Alberts (whose press release seems, in fact, to have been more a personal response than an officially deliberated Academy statement), he admits a few minor errors, but again denies that he accused Neel of purposefully starting the measles epidemic; he merely criticized his activities once the outbreak occurred. He also charges Alberts with distorting a number of his arguments, and remarks, "The republication assault [on *Darkness in Eldorado*] has been nothing short of extraordinary, but not surprising given the stakes in the controversy...[which] has been spun to make [the book] seem a book only about a measles vaccine and...epidemic in the Amazon...[when it is actually] a work with a broad and encompassing theme."

The text of the American Anthropological Association's Executive Board decision following the November meetings, which promises some sort of a decision in February, can now be found on the Association's Web site, [www.ameranthassn.org/press/eldorado.htm](http://www.ameranthassn.org/press/eldorado.htm).

[8] James V. Neel, *Physician to the Gene Pool: Genetic Lessons and Other Stories* (John Wiley, 1994), p. 302. This is a combination autobiography and homiletical treatise in "genetic medicine." Neel goes on to say, "One of the major disappointments of our fieldwork was that, despite much brainstorming, we could never devise a field test of Yanomama 'smarts'—and if we had devised one, the Yanomama would have no motivation to take it seriously." To Tierney, he confessed, in a 1997 phone interview, that his failure to isolate the alleles for his "Index of Innate Ability," and thus pin down his big man/big smarts/big reproducer theory directly, "was the greatest disappointment of my life."

[9] Neel, *Physician to the Gene Pool*, p. 134.

[10] John J. Miller, "The Fierce People," *National Review Online*, November 20, 2000.

[11] Napoleon A. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Last Days of Eden* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. xiii. Italics in original.

[12] Chagnon, *Yanamamö: The Last Days of Eden*, p. xi.

## Letters

April 26, 2001: Terence S. Turner, '[LIFE AMONG THE ANTHROS](#)'

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