

# MIGHTY WHITE OF YOU

Racial preferences color America's  
oldest skulls and bones

By Jack Hitt

## I. CHARLEMAGNE'S HEIR

I was seventeen years old when I discovered that I was the great-great (and forty-six more of those) grandson of Charlemagne—king of the Franks and Holy Roman Emperor. Where I grew up, it's not unusual to find out such things. The culture of Charleston, South Carolina, is built around the pride associated with a handful of family histories. Like most of my friends downtown, I spent my youth in an unconscious state of genealogical questing. Might I be the descendant of a signer of the Declaration? Robert E. Lee's messenger? I bugged my mom and aunts and uncles. Who am I really? Might my childhood friends turn out to be third cousins? In Charleston, that one's almost too easy.

My mother grew exhausted with my pestering and sent me to see Mary Pringle, a cousin who was said to spend her days studying the family genealogy. Primed with curiosity, I arrived at Cousin Mary's elegant antebellum home on a hot summer day. After some iced tea and pleasantries, I was presented with a large, unwieldy sheet of paper bearing a set of concentric circles. In the center, Mary wrote my name, and in the next circle, divided in half, she wrote the names of my parents. In the next circle, divided now into fourths, she wrote the names of my four grandparents. We filled it out as far as we could in

every direction, and in that area where her family and mine converged—her life's work—a seemingly unbounded wedge flew backward to Scotland and England, until my ancestors were hobnobbing with William Shakespeare and Mary, Queen of Scots. *This line*, she said, pointing to one of the ancient British earls we could claim, *leads in a direct line all the way to Charlemagne.*

This was almost too much past to absorb and too much pride to possess. I wanted to ask her what the Holy Roman Emperor had left me in the will. But Mary's tone was solemn, nearly religious:

*You are the direct descendant of King Charlemagne.*

The room felt still as the rest of the universe slowly turned on its gyre about me, just as it did on the paper.

I left Mary Pringle's house feeling pretty, well, rooted. It's an important feeling for most people—knowing where they come from. And being heir to Charlemagne would serve me just fine on the gentlemen's party circuit. Over the next few years, I became as cunning at hefting this lumbering chunk of self-esteem into passing conversation as a Harvard grad is at alluding to his alma mater.

Roots are crucial to us—us being all Americans—because they are the source of so much of our national anxiety about not quite



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belonging. Has any passenger manifest been more fretted over than the *Mayflower's*? One of the few Internet uses that seems able to compete with porn is genealogy. The most significant television miniseries—*Roots*—spawned a wave of pride among African Americans (and, arguably, even that compound name) and is partly responsible for the ongoing effort to drain the word “white” of its racist intimations by redefining it as “Irish American,” “Scottish American,” “Italian American,” and the like. For everyone—including Native Americans, who itchy remind the rest of us that they might also be called First Americans—there is a deep anxiety about rootedness and its claims. After Bill Frist was elevated to majority leader of the Senate, he self-published a book. Its title

*Our continent's creation story—the Asian hunter/gatherer crossing the Bering Strait—is only about a century old*

cries out as much with this anxiety as it does with pride: *Good People Beget Good People: A Genealogy of the Frist Family*.

And the truth is, this anxiety can never quite be quelled. About three years after I had tea with Mary Pringle, I was in a college calculus class when the teacher made a point about factoring large numbers. He dramatized it by giving an example from the real world, explaining how redundancy affected genealogy. He noted that if you run your line back to 800 A.D., the number of direct ancestors you would have is preposterously large (today, it would be 281,474,976,710,656, or a quarter quadrillion). Since the total human population for all time is estimated at a sparse 106 billion, the huge number makes no sense unless there is massive redundancy far back in time.

The upshot, the teacher explained, is that nearly everyone currently living anywhere on the planet can claim (and he paused for emphasis) . . . to be the direct descendant of Charlemagne.

The room felt still, as the rest of the universe slowly turned on its gyre about me, laughing.

Not long afterward, I learned from Alex Shoumatoff's book *The Mountain of Names* that this paradox has a name, “pedigree collapse,” which explains how the old practice of cousins marrying creates super-redundancy in the deep past (and why the planet's total population of 268,435,456 in 1300 A.D. roughly equals the number of ancestors you would have had at that time). Awhile back, my Aunt Mary died, but her dream lives as one of Amazon's favorite genealogy books: *The Everything Online Gene-*

*alogy Book: Use the Web to Discover Long-Lost Relations, Trace Your Family Tree Back to Royalty, and Share Your History with Far-Flung Cousins*.

Recognizing the delusional fiction of it all, I swore off distant genealogy forever. That is, until recently, when I learned that new technologies and laboratory breakthroughs have revealed that my great-great (and 638 more of them) grandfather was the first man to set foot on the continent of North America, some 16,000 years ago.

## II. THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

On a cool leafy hillside above a trickling Cross Creek in remote Pennsylvania, the sun creeps through the trees, primordial. Nestled into the slope above, an open rock-shelter seems just the place where any self-respecting *Homo sapiens* might set down his basketry and spear and light a fire.

Today there's a parking lot at the hill's base and a set of sturdy stairs that lead to a wooden enclosure built by James Adovasio. He's the Mercyhurst College archaeologist who's been excavating this controversial site since the mid-1970s. Adovasio is guiding a rare tour for a dozen or so amateurs, myself included. He arrives in full archaeological drag: sleeveless flak jacket, boots, work pants, mystical belt buckle. His broad scowling face gives him the look of Martin Scorsese and George Lucas's love child.

Inside the shelter, there's an office, electricity, good lighting, and a suspended boardwalk so that visitors and workers don't stomp over all the evidence. Enormous squared-out holes plunge down into the dense earth, where tiny round markers dangle like pinned earrings in the stone.

It was here that Adovasio found his controversial evidence, stone tools that carbon-date to 16,000 ± 150 years B.C.

This makes them at least four millennia older than the last ice age, after which the first humans were traditionally believed to have arrived in North America. Adovasio asks us to notice a pencil-thin black line in the stone. No one can really see it. So Adovasio splashes water on it and the line darkens into little more than a pencil swipe across the rock.

“This is a fire pit,” he declares. All of us move closer to the rail to squint and then decide, as with so much of prehistoric archaeology, that we'll just take his word for it. He describes the scene that once occurred here. Folks sat around the fire and cooked deer and squirrel while snacking on hackberries and nuts. Maybe they battered some rocks into spear points or wove some grasses into primitive baskets. In the chilly rock-shelter, it is easy to look around and imagine this ancient gathering. Typically, the prehistoric picture show that plays on the cave wall of our minds

involves bandy-legged men pursuing mastodons with spears. Here we are in the kitchen, where people sat around the fire, eating and talking. Away from the picturesque hunt. Quiet time, culture time, story time.

Now,  $16,000 \pm 150$  years later, we are once again gathered here for story time. But Adovasio is not alone in trying to tell this story. Helping him, sort of, is the fat guy in front of me. He's just one of the crowd, like me, but he has spent much of the tour loudly explaining—allegedly to his long-suffering girlfriend but really to the confederacy of dunces that is the rest of us—just how much he knows about this place. He's wearing a fanny pack the size of a car tire cinched above pastel shorts, robin's-egg-blue socks, and black tennis shoes. His XXL T-shirt declares, KLINGON ASSAULT GROUP.

He has already sneeringly uttered the phrase "politically incorrect" several times to signal that he is not a victim of conventional wisdom but a man of daring opinions. He has let everyone in the place know that he very well intends to ask Adovasio the tough questions. And now the time has come: "Professor Adovasio, does working here in the rock-shelter in western Pennsylvania keep you safe from resentments with Native Americans?" He makes an interrogative honking noise.

"No," Adovasio insists. "Native Americans have an intense interest in this site." Adovasio segues quickly into a shaggy-dog story about a certain Indian who was nothing but supportive. I look at the dozen or so of us, all white folks in their forties and fifties, and none of us seems a bit mystified about why Native Americans might be resentful. Perhaps that is why Adovasio doesn't feel it necessary to address this issue. His work, after all, implies that the Native Americans were latecomers, that before Asians crossed the Bering Strait and began settling North America around the commonly agreed time of 13,000 years ago, there was already somebody here. He also knows that other scientists claim to have fresh evidence suggesting that these earliest people, and hence the true First Americans, were, in the scientific jargon, "Caucasoid." That is, white people who looked just like the Klingon  $\pm 200$  pounds.

### III. AMERICAN GENESIS

Our continent's creation story about the Asian hunter/gatherer crossing the Bering Strait is only about a century old and owes its origin to a black cowboy named George McJunkin. A former slave, McJunkin went out West, taught himself

book learning, and herded cattle while pondering the world around him. He was said to ride a horse fixed with a big rifle holster that toted his telescope.

McJunkin was studied-up enough to know that some old bones he found near Clovis, New Mexico, in 1908 belonged to extinct animals. Twenty-five years later, experts investigating McJunkin's discovery found embedded in some of these ancient bison bones a flat, rounded arrowhead with a bit of fluting at the base to assist its fastening to a spear. It would eventually become known as the Clovis point—the oldest spearhead type ever found on the continent.

What makes the Clovis point so special is that it is found in massive numbers all across the continent and reliably enough at a level where organic material generally carbon-dates to roughly 12,000 years ago. How massive? Take Bell County, Texas. The area north of Austin—known as the Gault site—must have been a well-known pit stop among the Clovis tribes. The place has yielded more than half a million stone artifacts from the Clovis era.



"The whole idea of archaeology is that there must be enough redundancy in the record," said Richard Burger, a professor of anthropology at Yale. Why? Because there is no other way to prove the case in archaeology, no other path to certainty.

"Archaeologists can't do experiments," Burger said. "Unlike lab science, we can't mix carbon and sulfur and conclude that such and such happens. So we have something else approaching that. We take advantage of redundancy, so that the evidence repeats itself in broad patterns. With Clovis, this happens with confidence."

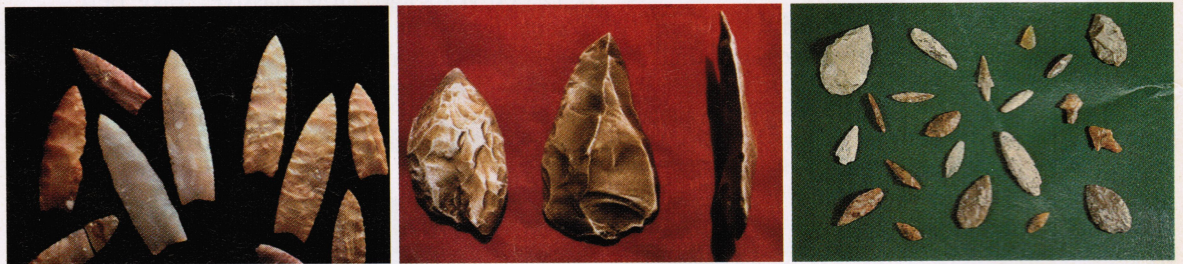
In the last two decades, though, the confident tellers of Clovis Man's tale have been challenged by academic renegades devoted to identifying a new "First American." There are at least four major sites (and some minor ones) in the Amer-

icas that claim to have found man-made objects dating to tens of thousands of years before Clovis time. These theorists argue that although Clovis Man might still have crossed the Bering Strait 13,000 years ago, there is evidence that somebody else was already here. Given their natural caution, academics generally stop right there.

In the meantime, though, other theorists have stepped forward to identify the pre-Clovis somebody. This process has happened not on the front page of the newspapers but in the rumor mill at the edge of archaeology and anthropology and in the pages of popular-science magazines. The new theory holds that Caucasians from Europe settled this continent first and that Native Americans are just another crowd of later visitors, like Leif

the charcoal, he realized that it was merely very old wood turning into coal. All of it was wrong. "You begin to see how easy it is to misinterpret things," Haynes said.

When you look at the evidence and the fights around it, you can understand why. First, arrowheads are cool things. Every little kid who has ever dug one up knows this. To hold in your hand a weapon that is 500, 1,000, 5,000 years old is humbling and, just, neat. Arrowheads are symmetrical and beautiful objects. Their flutes, their chipped edges, their flared tails have all been studied, categorized, and given handsome names, dozens of them. The Madison point dates from 1400 A.D., the Whitlock point from 400 B.C., further back to the Haywood point at 5000 B.C.,



Ericson's Vikings and Christopher Columbus's Spaniards. Most important, the way this theory has seeped out of cautious academia and into the pop culture as slightly naughty fact suggests that America's neurosis about race has taken up a new and potentially toxic location—deep in the heart of our continent's creation myth.

#### IV. SESQUIPEDALIANISMO

For any new story to get told, there has to be an opening, a sudden tectonic jarring of a discipline's conventional wisdom. Thomas Kuhn described this critical moment with the now much weathered phrase "paradigm shift." It's the precise moment of the tilt between an old worldview and a new one. And that's where we are now in the subdiscipline of ancient-American archaeology, poised between those views held (as always) by mossbacked conservative traditionalists on the one side and young agitated revolutionaries on the other.

The voice of skepticism and orthodoxy is best embodied by Professor C. Vance Haynes of the University of Arizona. He comes by his skepticism honestly. He once bought into a claim quite similar to Adovasio's, back in the 1960s, at a site called Tule Springs in Nevada. He, too, thought the Clovis line had been breached. He was convinced by extensive evidence of "hearths" filled with charcoal and animal bones, revealing a human encampment dating back 28,000 years. But later, when Haynes conducted precise tests of

deeper still to the Cascade point at 8000 B.C. (or so), and finally to the oldest, the Clovis point.

With each older style, the artifacts become less *arrowheady*. Instead of having tooled edges, they are clearly flintnapped—i.e., beat at with another stone. A beveled edge might be replaced by a straight blade. Those graceful fishtails disappear, and then you get a simple stone point with a groove banged out at the bottom, the telltale primitivity signifying Clovis time. Beyond that, it is hard to tell whether the evidence is, in fact, man-made. Archaeology has a term for naturally occurring objects that appear to be artifacts: geofacts.

The archaeology establishment believes that the entire array of pre-Clovis evidence is a pile of geofacts. And not all that big a pile either. Whereas all the evidence of Clovis Man would crowd a boxcar, all the good physical evidence of pre-Clovis Man could probably fit in your bureau drawer. And when you look at the individual artifacts themselves, the evidence can be pretty underwhelming. There are no broad patterns, there are no similarities, and there is no redundancy.

The dates are a mixed bag, ranging as far back as 50,000 years ago to more recent 16,000-year dates. And obtaining those dates is a messy business. Rocks cannot be carbon-dated. Only the organic material they are found nested in can be, and that material is easily contaminated by rain, by burrowing animals, by time. And carbon dating may sound precise, but the idea of it—that

Photograph of Clovis spearpoints © Warren Morgan/CORBIS; Photograph of paleolithic scraper and arrowheads © The Granger Collection, N.Y.C.; Photograph of prehistoric tools © Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.C.

carbon 14 molecules throw off electrons at a metronomically consistent geological pace—is more exact than the reality. Almost since the discovery of carbon dating, scientists have been noting phenomena that cause variations with the regularity of carbon’s internal clock—sunspots, stray comets, atomic bombs—such that it requires applying a “correction factor.” Thus, for any ancient evidence to be confirmed, the punk rockers of archaeology have to look for affirmation from their elders, the Lawrence Welk orchestra. Worse, the old fogies, like Vance Haynes and others, are essentially being asked to confirm a theory that overturns their entire life’s work. This combination of murky evidence and professional oedipalism can mean only one thing: Academic food fight.

In prehistoric archaeology there’s a lot of dialogue between the conservative traditionalists and the rebel theorists that, boiled down, typically goes like this:

Upstart Archaeologist: “This is a primitive stone tool that’s 16,000 years old.”

Eminence Grise: “No, it’s not.”

Upstart Archaeologist: “Fuck you.”

Actually, that’s not much of an exaggeration. In Adovasio’s book, *The First Americans*, he quotes a friend who said, “If they don’t believe the evidence, fuck ‘em’—definitely not scientific discourse but not ill considered, either!”

From its opening line—“Damn, I said.”—Adovasio’s book quivers with the fury of a scolded teenager. His own site, the Meadowcroft Rockshelter I visited in southwest Pennsylvania, has

cave paintings said to be even older than the images at Lascaux in France or at Altamira in Spain. Some of the Pedra Furada drawings are said to depict hot Pleistocene-era group sex. Brazil’s government developed plans to capitalize on the site as a tourist attraction. Adovasio himself was part of the expert panel that, sorrowfully, declared it all wrong. Adovasio wrote that he saw nothing but “almost surely broken rocks that had fallen into the rockshelter.” He dismissed the find of “ancient fireplaces” as “nothing more than material blown in from nearby forest fires.”

Of course, the language of this brawl is usually academic and Latinate, mostly fought with the manly sesquipedalianisms of science jargon. Here, tree rings are “dendrochronological samples.” A rock is a “lithic,” and a rock that’s clearly been flaked by human hands is “an indubitable lithic artifact.” Bits of stone chipped off to make a tool are “percussion flakes.”

These are the lyrics of the trade, played in the key of high-science formality. And it’s with such swaggering sesquipedalianismo that an entire career of work can be cattily dismissed: “My review has raised doubts about the provenience of virtually every ‘compelling,’ unambiguous artifact...,” wrote the archaeologist Stuart Fiedel in 1999 of the most promising pre-Clovis site ever.

The archaeologist whose work is being trashed here is Tom Dillehay of the University of Kentucky. He had claimed to find—at a Chilean site called Monte Verde—fantastic evidence of a pre-Clovis community: a series of huts, one of which might have been some kind of primitive drugstore,



been roundly dismissed by elders who note the existence of nearby “coal seams” (yet another factor that throws off carbon dating) and groundwater seepage. C. Vance Haynes is among those who have wrinkled their noses at Meadowcroft. In his book, Adovasio dismisses Haynes as the “grinch of North American archeology.” In fact, anyone who has questioned Adovasio’s site at Meadowcroft is generally referred to as a “gnat.”

And no love is lost among the rebels themselves. When a Parisian archaeologist discovered an amazing site called Pedra Furada in Brazil, the initial reports were breathtaking. Besides numerous pieces of pre-Clovis evidence, there were

as it contained traces of pharmaceutical herbs. He found a tent post still staked in the ground with knotted twine from a *Juncus* tree, or, in the jargon, “the indisputably anthropogenic knotted *Juncus*.”

In 1997 a team of specialists, including C. Vance Haynes, visited the site, examined all of Dillehay’s cool evidence, and unanimously approved it. The pre-Clovis line was officially breached. Tom Dillehay was the man, though not for long. Haynes began to waver. Then Fiedel, a private-sector archaeologist, wrote a withering dismissal of every single piece of evidence presented.

In his book, Adovasio (who sided with Dillehay on this one) suggested that Fiedel “reserve

some space in the State Home for the Terminally Bewildered.” Adovasio whacked Fiedel as “a previously little known archaeologist now working for a private salvage archaeology firm” who “has no field experience in Paleo-Indian sites or complex late Pleistocene or Holocene sites” and “has published one rarely used prehistory textbook but otherwise has no apparent credentials.”<sup>1</sup>

Archaeology’s caste system is another facet of the discipline that makes it more amateurish a science than, say, particle physics. How many weekend astrophysicists could write up a report challenging Stephen Hawking that would be widely accepted as truth? When new evidence in, say, particle physics opens up a Kuhnian melee, the folks who rush in to the breach tend to be, well, particle physicists. But in prehistoric archaeology, with its rather elastic sense of membership ranging from well-credentialed academics like Adovasio to salvage archaeologists to slightly bonkers theorists to ranting neo-Nazis, all of them can rush right in. And do.

What underlies the mudslinging use of bloated Latinisms as well as the compulsion to make a show of tidy whisk brooms and Euclidean grids

*When James Chatters examined Kennewick Man’s skull in his rec room, he described what he saw as “Caucasoid-like”*

is the sense, maybe even fear, that archaeology is not a science at all. There’s a lot of play in the carbon dating, all the evidence is in dispute, and, sure, maybe the elders’ caution can easily be dismissed as a Freudian conflict of interest. All of this means that the pre-Clovis evidence requires a lot of interpretation, a fact that makes it very easy for personal desire and anxiety to leach like groundwater into that drawerful of cobbles and lithics. As one defender of Dillehay confessed in his own report, “I wondered if, by being too close to these stones for too long, I was building an interpretive sandcastle.”

But the sandcastle’s been built, and some have begun to tell a new creation story—about just

<sup>1</sup> Professional archaeology is a sort of caste system. The Brahmins are the credentialed, tenured professors at known colleges. They publish in peer-review journals. Beneath them are private-sector archaeologists, also known as salvage archaeologists. They might publish in popular journals such as National Geographic, but their day work is something different altogether. They determine for, say, a mall developer whether there are any “significant” remains on a piece of real estate slated to become a food court. Below the salvagers are the rank amateurs and hobbyists who often spend a weekend out at some site hoping to find a Clovis point or two to sell on eBay or to keep in their special cigar box back home.

who pre-Clovis Man was, where he came from, how he lived and died. The sudden appearance of this yarn explains why prehistoric archaeology really isn’t as much a science as it is a form of tribal narrative. These stories have less to do with what’s obvious from the evidence than with what some deeply long to hear. It’s time to look closely at the story that’s getting told right now about the earliest inhabitants of this continent. I have a little experience in this field. I know how to jury-rig a narrative using only a couple of wayward factoids to make it sound just right. It’s something I was born to do. I am the direct descendant of Charlemagne.

**V. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**KENNEWICK MAN**

For most of the 1990s, the sotto-voce chatter about pre-Clovis Man and his possible identity was little more than politically mischievous buzz out on the edge of archaeology. Insiders talked about spearpoints and some disputed bones, DNA and cordage, but it wasn’t a story so much as it was narrative tinder, very dry, waiting for a spark.

That spark finally flew one hot summer afternoon in 1996, on the banks of the Columbia River. Some college students were trying to sneak into a hydroplane race, and as they stomped through the muck of a bank, one of them saw a few bones and then pieces of a skull.

The find eventually was passed on to a local forensic expert, a salvage archaeologist who worked out of a converted rec room in his house. He would become the rhapsode for these bones. Divinely, his name was James Chatters.

Chatters released the carbon dating that put the bones as far back as 7600 B.C. He also described a Cascade point embedded in the hip. This style of Paleo-Indian arrowhead is a long, thin design that would fit right in with the skeleton’s age. But Chatters also said that he didn’t believe this skeleton belonged to a Paleo-Indian but rather to “a trapper/explorer who’d had difficulties with ‘stone-age’ peoples during his travels.”

In other words, this skeleton represented a crime scene, and the victim was not Paleo-Indian.

Immediately, several Indian tribes, such as the Umatilla, demanded the bones, charging that they had to be of Native-American heritage. Over the next few years, what was at first a strange political dustup grew into an even more bizarre legal battle. The scientists held to simple principles of open inquiry: all we want to do is examine the skeleton more closely. The Native Americans suspected a ruse to get around new laws protecting the burial of ancient bones.

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which sought to

make amends for the graverobbing and bizarre antics of the previous decades. In the nineteenth century, the Smithsonian Institution wanted Indians' skulls to mount on display. So quite often after a battle, Indian corpses were decapitated, the heads packed in boxes and shipped back to Washington to be "studied." The money was good enough that often violence broke out when Indians saw white men—the emissaries of European civilization—loitering around a burial ground, since the suspicion was that they were waiting around in order to dig up grandma and cut off her head. A few centuries' worth of desecration of the Indian body is something mainstream history still avoids. It's hard for non-Native Americans today to understand all the lingering resentment. Try this on: toward the end of the Civil War, in Denver, a group of marauding white men provided theatergoers with a mid-show display of fresh Indian scalps—not merely from heads but from women's vaginas as well. The audience whooped with approval.

Some estimates put the number of Indian skeletons held in museums at 200,000. NAGPRA was an attempt to return those and make sure it didn't happen again. It decreed that all Native-American remains that could be culturally identified were to be returned to the appropriate tribe.

In the past, a number of skeletons that fed the pre-Clovis rumor mill had in fact been seized and reburied. In the back alley of amateur American archaeology, these are notorious: the 10,800-year-old Buhl Woman found in Idaho in 1989, the 7,800-year-old Hourglass Cave skeleton found in Colorado, the 7,800-year-old Pelican Rapids Woman skull and the 8,900-year-old Browns Valley Man, both found in Minnesota—all reburied.

The Native Americans in Washington State immediately assumed that this talk of Kennewick not being a Paleo-Indian was little more than a scientific tactic to get around the requirements of NAGPRA. Whatever the merits of the case, the issue quickly got caught up in contemporary politics. At the time of the discovery, the Umatilla Indians were working with the Clinton Administration to dispose of some chemical weapons (WMD, as we say nowadays). The federal government desperately wanted tribal support on this difficult matter. By the late 1990s, the Umatilla had a casino, which meant they had political and financial clout and couldn't easily be kicked around. When they screamed for the bones, the

Clinton Administration jumped. Bruce Babbitt, the then secretary of the interior, ordered that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers take control of the bones. Then, to "stabilize" the site where the bones were found, the Army choppered in 500 tons of riprap and buried the bank. The archaeological site was protected by being destroyed.

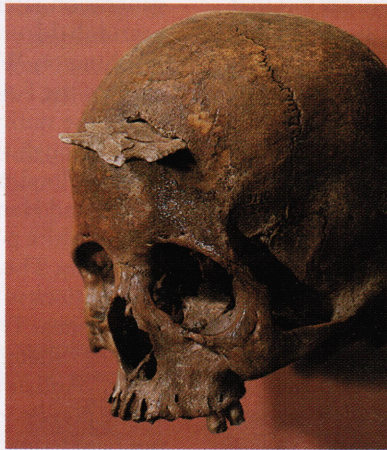
Chatters and the group of scientists who had gathered around him, calling for an open inquiry into the skeleton, were stunned. This wasn't just politics; it was medieval obscurantism. To the scientists, this was the equivalent of locking Galileo in his room and demanding that he recant. And there the story might have ended, but for one word that totally changed the nature of the debate in the pop culture outside the courtroom. When Chatters first examined Kennewick in his rec

room, he looked at the skull and then described what he saw as "Caucasoid-like."

The narrative tinder of decades suddenly exploded in flames, and from the fire, like a phoenix, arose a new and wild story: A Caucasoid man, who was among the First Americans, was murdered by genocidal newcomers, Mongoloid invaders coming across Berengia after the last ice age.<sup>2</sup>

To color the fight with the absurdity peculiar to all truly American events, the Asatru Folk Assembly—a neo-Norse movement that claims to represent the "native European" religion—asserted its rights to Kennewick's bones. The neo-Norsemen argued that they were the nearest tribe related to Kennewick Man and that under NAGPRA they should be given the bones for reburial. The federal courts did not give them Kennewick but did allow them to perform funeral rites over the bones. And so a year after that hydroplane race, big hairy blond men wearing horns and garish furs performed the Norse burial ceremony in Washington State for their mourned errant ancestor.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the theories and quarrels surrounding this prehistory, there is a strange kind of recapitulation going on. Every theory propagated about the European conquest of the Indians after Columbus seems to have its *Doppelgänger* in the pre-Clovis era. Just as American Indians were the victims of genocide in the colonial period, so it seems were the early Caucasoids at the hands of Paleo-Indians. Some theories say that the early Caucasoids were wiped out by germs, a recapitulation of the account of smallpox-infected blankets that has become a near parable in American history. In this way, the Indians' attempt to claim the Kennewick skeleton is simply the evil twin of nineteenth-century graverobbing.



## VI. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAUCASIANS

Does race exist? Of course it does. We see it every day. Guy steals a purse, the cop asks, What did he look like? You say, He was a six-foot-tall black guy, or a five-and-a-half-foot-tall Asian man, or a white guy with long red hair. As a set of broad descriptions of how people look, race exists.

If you were to look at me, you would easily categorize me as Caucasian. I'm the ruddy sort that burns quickly, with reddish hair now shading into white. Most people hazarding a guess might say Scottish, which is what I have always said. Just to be sure, I recently submitted my DNA to see what the incontrovertible scientific evidence might show. The result was surprising (though in some ways not surprising): I carry the DNA marker found in great abundance among the Fulbe tribe of contemporary Nigeria.

Sure, maybe the marker is about as significant as my Charlemagne genes. On the other hand, that very Nigerian coast is the tribal location where many slaves were captured and held in the notorious slave castles until traders' galleys could transport them to American ports. The main harbor that received more slaves than any other on the eastern seaboard was Charleston, South Carolina. My mother's family has lived there nearly 300 years. Maybe I have a Thomas Jefferson problem.

Whenever it was that a black woman<sup>3</sup> entered my bloodline (and my white ancestor entered hers), it's no longer apparent in the way I now look. I am Caucasian as surely as my Fulbe cousins are black, because race is a set of visual cues we all recognize—skin shade, nose shape, eyelid folds, cheekbone prominence, etc. We hold these vague blueprints of race in our heads because, as primates, one of the great tools of consciousness we possess is the ability to observe patterns in nature. It's no surprise that we'd train this talent on ourselves.

Here's another example, a little closer in time. My grandmother was Weinona Strom. Her first cousin was Strom Thurmond, which makes the late senator my first cousin, twice removed. It also makes his half-black daughter, Essie Mae Washington-Williams, my second cousin once removed. This is Essie Mae, recently photographed beside her attractive daughter:



<sup>3</sup> I trust that I don't need to explain why I make this assumption.

For those of us who have had to contend with Strummy-boo<sup>4</sup> all our lives, looking at Essie Mae and seeing the senator's face gazing out from her own is a kind of thrilling shock. But what's far more interesting is Essie Mae's daughter. Because Essie Mae married a man our pattern-seeking brains would recognize as black, the evidence of Strummy's whiteness is practically gone only one generation later. I suspect that among the great grandchildren, Strummy's presence in the Washington-Williams family will be as washed away as the Fulbe tribe is in me.

Yet the notion of race as an unchanging constant through time is as old as the Bible. When Noah's Flood receded, the three boys Japheth, Shem, and Ham went out into the world to engender white people, Semites, and all others, respectively. This doesn't quite shake out into the later notions of white, black, and yellow, but you get the idea. The boys are still with us. The early word "Shemitic" settled down to become "semitic." And among amateur chroniclers writing in the ponderous style of the town historian, it's not hard to find references to the "Hamitic race" as a way of saying "black folks." Japheth never became a common adjective, perhaps because of that thicket of consonants. More likely, though, it's because whites appointed themselves the Adamic task of naming the other races. It was not until the Age of Reason that scientists tried to figure out empirically what race meant and how it came to be. The signal year was 1776, with the publication of a book called *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, by German biologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach.

At the time, Blumenbach's theory had a certain symmetry that made it the very model of good science. These days, his theory seems insane. He argued that Native American Indians were the transitional race that eventually led to Asians. (Don't try to work out the geography of this: it will make your head explode.) And another group—which Blumenbach simply conjured from a far-away people, the "Malayans"—evolved over time to become Africans. (Again, if you're puzzling out the geography, watch your head.)

At the center of all this change was the white race, which was constant. Blumenbach believed darkness was a sign of change from the original. All of mankind had fallen from perfection, but the darker you were, the farther you had fallen. As a result, the best way to locate the original Garden of Eden, according to Blumenbach, was to follow the trail of human . . . *beauty*. The hotter the women, the hunkier the men, the closer you were to what was left of God's first Paradise. Here is Blumenbach explaining the etymology of the new word he hoped to coin:

<sup>4</sup> That's really what we called him.



I have taken the name of this variety from Mount Caucasus, both because its neighborhood, and especially its southern slope, produces the most beautiful race of men, I mean the Georgian . . .

Blumenbach's theory is totally forgotten today by everybody (except maybe Georgian men). All that remains is a single relic, the word he coined for God's most gorgeous creation—"Caucasian."

The word itself is lovely. Say it: Caucasian. The word flows off the tongue like a stream trickling out of Eden. Its soothing and genteel murmur poses quite a patrician contrast to the field-labor grunts of the hard g's in "Negroid" and "Mongoloid." Caucasian. The exotic isolation of those mountains intimates a biblical narrative. You can almost see it when you say it: the early white forebears walking away from paradise to trek to Europe and begin the difficult task of creating Western Civilization.

Ever since Blumenbach launched this word two and a half centuries ago, the effort to pin down the exact and scientific meaning of race has never ceased. Even today, the U.S. Census is little more than an explosion of ethnic agony that arrives every ten years like constitutional clockwork. The number of races has expanded and contracted wildly between Blumenbach and now, depending on the mood of the culture. The basic three have gone through scores of revisions, growing as high as Ernst Haeckel's thirty-four different races in 1879 or Paul Topinard's nineteen in 1885 or Stanley Garn's nine in 1971. Today, we nervously ask if you're white, African American, Native American, Asian, or of Hawaiian or Pacific Islander descent.

But it wasn't that long ago that the question would have turned upon races only our great-grandfathers would recognize. Let us mourn their passing: the Armenoids, the Assyroids, the Vedoids, the Orientalids, the Australoids, the Dalo-Nordic, the Fälish, the Alpines, the Dinarics, the Fenno-Nordic, the Osteuropids, the Lapponoids, the Osterdals, the Cappadocians, the Danubians, the Ladogans, the Trondelagens, and the Pile Dwellers.

In the meantime, science has made its discoveries. The mystery of race has been solved. For the longest time, scientists were stymied by a contradiction. Surely skin tone had something to do with colder climates creating paler shades, but then why weren't Siberians as pale as Swedes, and why were Eskimos as dark as equatorial islanders? The answer was announced in 2000, but it's so tedious hardly anyone noticed.

Skin pigmentation changed long ago not only to protect skin from different levels of sun exposure—that's obvious—but also in order to regulate the amount of vitamin D<sub>3</sub> manufactured by the sun just under the skin. This is the theory of Pro-

fessor Nina Jablonski, a paleoanthropologist with the California Academy of Sciences. So when the first swarthy inhabitants of modern Scandinavia confronted a lack of ultraviolet light, their kind quickly selected out for paler children whose skin would manufacture enough vitamin D<sub>3</sub> to keep them healthy. Meanwhile, Eskimos arrived in the Arctic dark-skinned. The local cuisine of seal and whale is rich in vitamin D<sub>3</sub>, so the skin was never summoned into action. Evolution has one big rule. If there's no pressure on the system to change, then it doesn't bother. So Eskimos remained dark.

When we look at the different races, according to Jablonski's theory, what we're actually seeing is not "superiority" or "good people" or

*The word itself is lovely. Say it: Caucasian.  
The word flows off the tongue like a  
stream trickling out of Eden*

"race." All that we are seeing, the *only* thing we are seeing when we look at skin color, is a meandering trail of vitamin D<sub>3</sub> adaptation rates.

#### VII. THE MOUNTING EVIDENCE

Science prefers to confirm its newest findings with the newest tools. Just as fingerprinting is no longer the gold standard of guilt or innocence now that DNA testing is the rage, archaeologists have a few new tricks. These cutting-edge techniques come with gleaming names—Optically Stimulated Luminescence, Electron Spin Resonance Dating, and Accelerator Mass Spectrometry—and they are confirming pre-Clovis dates in ways that make carbon dating look like counting tree rings. By the time we figure out how these techniques are flawed, of course, our prejudices will be so well muddled among the tentative facts that they will be as inextricable as ink from milk.

According to the revolutionaries heralding pre-Clovis Man, that hardly matters, since so much other corroborative evidence is appearing. Some lab tests reveal that Native American Indians apparently have a signature strand of DNA known as Haplogroup X. The only other large population on the earth carrying this genetic marker is Europeans. The suggestion is that there must have been intermarriage in North America before Columbus, possibly before the last ice age. Moreover, now that the Iron Curtain has fallen, archaeologists have been able to do more digging in Siberia, where they expected to find Clovis points or something like them. They haven't. This absence, as well as the presence of Haplogroup X, has led some people to theorize that although Clovis

Man might have crossed over to North America 13,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age, he would have encountered people already here—people possessed of the X gene as well as the Clovis tool kit.

Who might these people have been, and where might they have come from? One prominent theorist with an answer is America's chief archaeologist at the Smithsonian. A big, bearded bear of a man, Dennis Stanford could pass for a Norse king in some other time. Stanford has struggled with the mystery of why Clovis points *don't* show up in Siberia. He notes that they resemble the early work of Solutrean culture. The Solutreans were prehistoric people who lived in modern-day France and Spain some 18,000 years ago. They are perhaps most famous for being the possible candidates for painting the horses of Lascaux and their own hands on the walls of the Altamira Cave. Stanford argues that their tool kit, which included stone points, looks like a predecessor to the Clovis style.

"There must be fifty or sixty points of comparison," he has said.

He believes that these proto-Europeans must have been intelligent enough to make watercraft. Hugging the coast of what would have been a

*Kennewick was described with words that launched him millennia ahead of his primitive enemies, the Paleo-Indians*

glacier all around the crescent edge of the northern Atlantic, they sailed away to a new land.

Other scientists are providing even more evidence that seems to support these general ideas. Several anthropologists have daringly revived the argument that examining skull shapes can reveal ethnicity. Douglas Owsley, also now at the Smithsonian, and his partner, Richard Jantz, at the University of Tennessee, have put together collections of measurements, described by *Newsweek* as a database of "2,000 or so profiles that consists of some 90 skull measurements, such as distance between the eyes, that indicate ancestry." They have developed software that allows them to input a bone's measurements and receive "ethnicity" as an output.

Among their fans and followers, there is talk of some of the peculiar skeletons found over the years. A 9,200-year-old body known as Wizards Beach Man, found at Pyramid Lake, Nevada, in 1978, was determined to be possibly of "Norse" extraction and to have "no close resemblance to modern Native Americans." Another skeleton, known as Spirit Cave Man, was found in Nevada in 1940. His bones date to 7450 B.C. When his

skull measurements were run through the software, out spat a finding of "Archaic Caucasoid."

Once again, there's Blumenbach's word. Only this time it's got that "oid" ending. What is the difference between *Caucasoid* and *Caucasian*?

"*Caucasoid* sounds more scientific," University of North Carolina anthropologist Jonathan Marks told me, laughing. Otherwise it has no more meaning or significance than Blumenbach's original. *Caucasoid* is a magnificent piece of pure Star Trekkery, a word meant to sound all clinical and precise, even nerdy. But the word is a rhetorical Trojan horse. Its surface meaning suggests something scientific, respectable, and learned, when in fact what we really hear are the connotations lurking inside, long-suppressed intimations of superiority, exceptionalism, and beauty.

#### VIII. KENNEWICK'S BIOGRAPHY

The court fight over Kennewick Man was resolved this January in favor of the scientists—in part because this is America and who can be against "open inquiry"? Yet the ramifications for Native Americans and for white Americans will be immense. In the popular market of ideas, the decision by the courts affirms a lot more than the noble virtue of open inquiry. It legitimizes the *story*—the story of the Caucasian man who came to this continent as the Authentic First American and whose bones survived the millennia to report the truth.

And the story that has been told these last eight years about this 100-century-old man is marvelous in its perverse beauty. It begins with his name. Does anything sound more European, more positively British, than Kennewick? Native Americans had dubbed him the "Ancient One," but it didn't take. The mass media, which follows the meandering will of the popular mob, could sense where this story was trending, and so they ran with "Kennewick." Isn't that a suburb of Essex, or London's other airport? Perhaps not so ironically, the name is an anglicized version of the Indian word "kin-i-wak," meaning grassy.<sup>5</sup>

In the few years after Sir Kennewick's discovery, his life was described and depicted in all the leading magazines. One writer on the subject, Sasha Nemecek, confessed that when she looks at the evidence "the misty images of primitive explorers evaporate" and now "I suddenly picture a single artisan spending hours, perhaps days, crafting these stone tools" whose "workmanship is exquisite, even to my untrained eye." To accompany her article, an artist rendered images of

<sup>5</sup> Just when Kennewick was discovered, another ancient skeleton was found on Alaska's Prince of Wales Island. This skeleton was quickly declared to be "Prince of Wales Island Man," making it seem like the ancient forebears to the Saxon kings thought of the Pacific Northwest as a dandy vacation spot.

what Kennewick's ilk looked like. You might mistake him for an English professor at Bennington, but in fact he's the First American:



And here is his bride. She has the complex tool kit of her time, not to mention a nice Ann Tayloroid dress and a haircut that presages Jennifer Aniston by nearly ten millennia. She has thoughtfully shaved her legs for the artist, the better to see her lovely Caucasian skin.



Where did these pictures appear? *Scientific American*.

Right away, Kennewick was described with words that launched him millennia ahead of his primitive enemies, the Paleo-Indians. He was, as Chatters had said, probably an individual “trapper/explorer”—two words that, together, imply degrees of complex thought far in advance of his time, especially when set up against a mass of “stone age peoples.” An article in the local newspaper, the *Tri-City Herald*, painted beautiful scenes of Kennewick as the “strongest hunter in his band.” Paleo-Indians were still mucking around in “tribes” while Kennewick traveled with his “immediate and extended family members.”

Food was important. “To keep up his strength, he and his band dined on rich, lean roasts and steaks...” Kennewick is, naturally, on the Atkins diet. No Type II diabetes for Kennewick.

Kennewick Man received glamour treatment from all the major media, in which he was laud-

ed for his near modernity. Lesley Stahl's piece on *60 Minutes* introduced Kennewick to television viewers as someone with “a tremendous amount of symmetry to his body” and therefore “handsome.” (Blumenbach's notion of superiority as beauty is never really behind us.) Stahl permitted Chatters to say that Kennewick possessed “a lot of poise.” The *Washington Post Magazine* took note of Kennewick's “ambition.”

In a *New Yorker* article, we learn that “Some nearby sites contain large numbers of fine bone needles, indicating that a lot of delicate sewing was going on.” The needles might have belonged to the Paleo-Indians, or: “Kennewick Man may have worn tailored clothing.”

Swish that word around on your connotative palate. *Tailored*. Feel the force, tugging us in a certain direction.

*Newsweek's* cover story noted that skulls like Kennewick's are so different from what archaeologists expect that they “stand out like pale-skinned, redheaded cousins at a family reunion of olive-skinned brunettes.”<sup>6</sup>

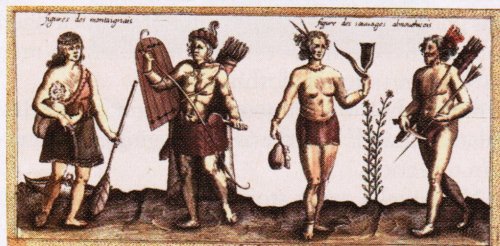
In these stories the Indians are typically ignored or they simply move about as a supernumerary horde brought onstage to throw the Cascade point and bring down the handsome Kennewick with his poise and ambition and all the other adjectives that will eventually lead to the abandonment of nomadism, the invention of agriculture, and on to the foundation of society that would lead us inexorably toward Western Civilization.

Which, in turn, would bring Kennewick's Caucasoid-like descendants back to America to find him and tell his story.

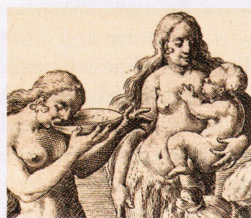
<sup>6</sup> And these are the elegant accounts that struggle to keep the story contained inside the scientists' own cautious terms. From there the implications of Kennewick quickly became insinuated in current fashions of political opinion. John J. Miller of the *National Review* mentions a “growing suspicion among physical anthropologists, archaeologists, and even geneticists that some of the first people who settled in the New World were Europeans.” Note how a tentative resemblance of skull shape, “Caucasoid-like”—always hedged by the scientists—has quickly settled into declarative certainty: “were Europeans.” The politically obvious conclusion is also clear, as the writer continues: “An important part of American Indian identity relies on the belief that, in some fundamental way, they were here first. They are indigenous, they are Native, and they make an important moral claim on the national conscience for this very reason. Yet if some population came before them—perhaps a group their own ancestors wiped out through war and disease, in an eerily reversed foreshadowing of the contact Columbus introduced—then a vital piece of their mythologizing suffers a serious blow.” Once you step away from the magazines and books, the story drifts into the poisonous domain of the Internet, where discussions tend toward a brutalist reduction, like this comment from shmogie1 on the alt.soc.history board: “Kennewick man is older than any known N/A [Native American] remains, and appears to be much more European than N/A, so your people stole the land from my European ancestors who were here first.”

## IX. KENNEWICK'S BACK STORY

The story of an early European presence here in America would be fascinating if it hadn't already been told so many times. The number of theories holding out Native Americans as either late-comers or Europeans in loincloths is endless. Even the earliest depictions of Indians simply used European bodies and faces with a few feathers added. Here is the side sketch from Samuel Champlain's 1612 map of the St. Lawrence seaway:



Here's a later rendering of two squaws and a baby with their cascades of Botticellian tresses, Renaissance breasts, and Rubens-style bellies:



Western Europeans were stunned that the New World had so many people already in it. How could these primitives have gotten there first? They must be . . . us! Theories abounded. Some in England thought the Indians were covert Welsh families who'd slipped over on their rafts. Others wondered whether they weren't the lost people of Atlantis. A whole host of arguments had it that Indians were Jews. During the colonial era, the chief rabbi of Holland, Menashe ben Israel, claimed that all Native Americans were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel, and the theory was confirmed by a 1650 book entitled *Jewes in America, or, Probabilities that the Americans are of that Race*. Mormons continue to believe this account of Native American origin, holding that the sons of Lehi sailed to the Americas around 600 B.C. and lost their traditions and knowledge of the Torah. They reverted to a state of savagery, and their descendants scattered among the plains and throughout the two continents. Thus all Indians are, essentially, Jews Gone Wild.

Most Americans rarely saw images out of books such as the rabbi's. Rather, the most widely available image was to be found on the coins in your

pocket. Here is an Indian, looking European, if not Roman imperial, as imagined in 1869:



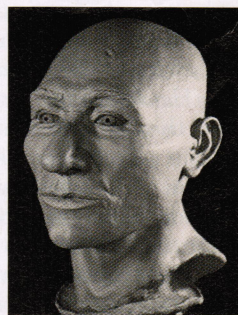
In 1914 it was still possible to see in the face of the Indian the wavy-blond Nordic princess of our dreams:



Practically at the same time, in 1913, an image that registered in our pattern-constructing brains as "Indian" would finally appear on the famous Buffalo nickel:



It's important to know this history and tradition when you consider the image conjured when you consider the image conjured when Chatters when he asked an artist to take the Kennewick skull and reconstruct the face. Well, if only that was precisely what he did. But Chatters didn't just hand the skull to someone and ask him to reconstruct the face. Instead, he had an epiphany, as he explained once, right at home: "I turned on the TV, and there was Patrick Stewart—Captain Picard, of *Star Trek*—and I said, 'My God, there he is! Kennewick Man.'" And so here is Kennewick Man's face, with every Picard-like detail except maybe his phaser:



Forensic reconstruction is a very iffy "science." The problem is that the features we look to for

identification are fleshy ones—ears, nose, and eyes—and those are the most difficult to know from a skull.<sup>7</sup> So reconstruction is more art than science, or, with its stated success rate of roughly 50 percent, about as good a predictor as a coin toss. Consider what Chatters did: by making Kennewick Man perfectly resemble one of the most famous pop-culture Brits of our time, he allows the visual cues to confirm his finding and so avoids even the need to repeat the word “Caucasoid-like.”

Kennewick’s skull is often described as “narrow, with a prominent nose, an upper jaw that juts out slightly, and a long narrow braincase,” or, more properly, dolichocranic and slightly prognathous, marked by a lack of an inferior zygomatic projection. Yet here’s the problem with looking at those vague features and declaring them “Caucasoid.” We don’t really know what people’s skulls looked like 10,000 years ago. We have only a few, like the pre-Clovis points, so it’s reckless to draw any conclusions. Skull shapes, like skin color, can change more quickly than we think, especially if there has been traumatic environmental change.

Franz Boas, the legendary anthropologist from the turn of the last century, debunked a lot of skull science in his time by proving that the skulls of immigrant children from all parts of the world more closely resemble one another than do their parents’. Rapid dietary shifts can cause major structural changes in skeletons—just ask the average Japanese citizen, who has shot up four and a half inches in height since World War II, or the average American man, who has packed on an extra twenty-five pounds since 1960. The truth is that there exists no coherent history of skull shapes back through time, so to say that a 10,000-year-old skull resembles a modern white-guy skull is to compare apples and oranges.

In time, Chatters tried to calm the storm of his unscientifically absurd remarks. He repeatedly said things like this: Kennewick Man “could also pass for my father-in-law, who happens to be Scandinavian.” Then one day he was suddenly insisting, “Nobody’s talking about white here.”<sup>8</sup>

He insisted that he meant that the skull simply didn’t resemble the classic “Mongoloid” features of Asia. He said that Kennewick could have been

<sup>7</sup> I and every other writer call Kennewick’s head a “skull.” The implication is that it was found whole. In fact, it was found in parts that Chatters pieced together. When government experts put the pieces together, they built a skull whose dimensional differences from Chatters’s version were deemed statistically significant. Again, at every stage of this story, the details get pushed toward the Caucasoid-like conclusion.

<sup>8</sup> His contradictions are maddening. At one point, Chatters said: “I referred to the remains as Caucasoid-like . . . I did not state, nor did I intend to imply, once the skeleton’s age became known, that he was a member of a European group.” But then he told Elaine Dewar, the author of *Bones: Discovering the First Americans*: “I say you can say European. Who can prove you wrong?”

Polynesian or even ancient Japanese. It turns out that those vague Caucasoid features are also found in the Ainu people of prehistoric Japan, as well as in other non-European peoples.

Don’t be confused here. The scientists themselves who fling around words like “Caucasoid” are the very ones who also admit that the “Caucasian” skull is found everywhere. That’s right. This Caucasian skull shape is found all over the planet. For example, another ancient skull always brought up alongside Kennewick’s is a female skull found in Brazil. Nicknamed Luzia, the skull was analyzed in a report that cited the following locations for resemblance: skulls seen among early Australians, bones found in China’s Zhoukoudien Upper Cave, and a set of African remains known as Taforalt 18. So we’ve narrowed it down to Australia, China, and Africa.

Another study of an ancient skeleton known as Spirit Cave Man narrowed down his skull-shape origin to: Asian/Pacific, the Zulu of Africa,

### *The scientists who fling around words like “Caucasoid” are the very ones who admit that the “Caucasian” skull is found everywhere*

the Ainu of Japan, the Norse, or the Zalawar of Hungary.

What conclusion can be drawn from finding Caucasian skulls in Asia? Or finding African skulls in Brazil? Or finding Polynesian skulls at the continental divide? Is it that these “groups” traveled a lot, or that skull shapes change radically and quickly over time? It’s the latter, of course, and plenty of anthropologists have known that for some time. In the early twentieth century, Harvard anthropologist Earnest Hooten documented the wide variety of skull shapes he found among ancient Native Americans.

As Jonathan Marks explained it to me, Hooten “studied Native American skulls from precontact all the way to the eighteenth century, and he sorted them into cranial racial categories. He called them ‘pseudo-Australoid’ and ‘pseudo-Negroid’ and ‘pseudo-Mediterranean’ because they had those features. He was smart enough not to say, ‘Well, I guess these people encountered a stray Australian aborigine on his way to Colorado.’ Clearly he recognized that there was considerably more diversity in early Indian skulls than he was used to seeing.”

What this suggests is not so much that Africans, Mongoloids, and Europeans were storming the American shores 10,000 years ago but rather that in any one group, at any one time, you will find all sorts of anomalies. In David Hurst Thomas’s book on this subject, *Skull Wars*, he cites scholar

Vine Deloria's comparison of Kennewick Man with a famous nineteenth-century painting of Chief Black Hawk and his son:



Then there's this drawing, also from the nineteenth century, of Chief Black Hoof:



Jean Luc Picard anyone?

Jonathan Marks likes to show his classes images of Kennewick Man and then post a slide that reveals how easily the facial reconstruction resembles so many other famous modern men:



Nicely prognathous, and check out that zygomatic projection.

I was in the store with my child the other day, and I turned around and said, "My God, there he is! Kennewick Man."



The Center for the Study of the First Americans, at Texas A&M University, is a clearinghouse for pro-Caucasian theories of early America. The center publishes a manly newsletter, "Mammoth Trumpet," in which one can find a set of arguments that inspire a kind of sorrow and pity. The founder, Dr. Robson Bonnicksen (like so many of these academics: the look of a Norse king with a big bushy beard), was commonly quoted stating things like this: "We're getting some hints from people working with genetic data that these earliest populations might have some shared genetic characteristics with latter-day European populations." Maybe he doesn't know that he's the direct heir to King Charlemagne.

What makes the claim all the more paltry is that once you start reading about the European connection to pre-Clovis Man here in America, you can't help but notice that the same essential story is getting told in other, completely separate fields—such as when the first Europeans evolved or when early ape creatures crossed over the line leading to humans. All of them make claims that have the contours of the same fight—the revolutionaries challenging the traditionalists, all of them finding a way to shoehorn Europeans into a story with hints of superiority and beauty.

The current theory about the beginning of mankind—the Out of Africa theory—states that an early prehuman, *Homo erectus*, evolved into *Homo sapiens*, who then left Africa some 100,000 years ago and eventually evolved into the modern peoples of the world. But there is a small contingent of rebel theorists—the "multi-regionalists"—who hold that it was *Homo erectus* who spread out to various locations where each developed into its own transitional hominid. In Asia: Peking Man. In South Asia: Java Man. And in Europe: Neanderthal Man. Each of these specimens would eventually evolve simultaneously into *Homo sapiens*. According to the rebels, there was some gene mixing at the margins of these separately developing species to keep the general hominid ability to reproduce together. It's a serviceable theory that manages to keep all mankind barely in the same species while creating an intellectual space for racial differences and European uniqueness. It is the "separate but equal" theory of physical anthropology.

As theories go, multiregionalism can be pretty slippery, but then it has to be. New evidence constantly confounds. Not long ago, DNA tests revealed that Neanderthal made no direct genetic contribution to modern man. So multi-regionalists now struggle to keep Neanderthal in the picture at all, arguing that there was some sex among the different humans and that

*Black Hawk and His Son Whirling Thunder*, by John Wesley Jarvis, © Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Okla.; *Ca-Ta-He-Cas-Sa-Black Hoof*, from Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Div. [LC-USZC4-3415]; "Patrick Ewing" © Reuters; "Indian Whistle Pez," courtesy Kurt Seefeld/Popapez.com

the evidence is with us. One of the arguments is that my big nose (as well as those great beaks on Jews and Arabs) is telling evidence of Neanderthal genes. That's the theory of Dr. Colin Groves, a very dolichocranic man who, it should be no surprise by now, sports a big beard.

Remember how Neanderthal Man used to look—the ruthless brute of comic books:



Now that he's a player in the unique European formation of modern-day Caucasians, he's put down his bludgeon and picked up some complex tool industries. He's gotten a haircut, Botoxed the beetling brow, and replaced the murderous scowl with a pensive, more Rodinesque expression:



His son has also had a makeover (let's hope the boy gets that ring to the volcano or it'll spell doom for Middle Earth):



It's interesting, though, that for the publicity shots above, both the man and his son seem to have had their Neander-snouts bobbed.

There are so many theories in which the key moment of development that "makes us human" somehow occurred in Europe that I have begun to collect them, like baseball cards. Those cave paintings in Lascaux and Altamira, for instance, are often held up as the threshold event reveal-

ing "abstract" thought, which made us truly human. My personal favorite, this week, takes us all the way back to the apes. A few years ago, David Begun, a primate specialist in Toronto, announced that he'd found our last common ancestor with the great apes; i.e., the notorious missing link. Where? In Europe. His theory holds that African apes crossed into Europe, picked up those civilizing traits that would eventually lead to humanness, and then slipped back to the dark continent just under the deadline for their Out of Africa journey. Scientists are now finding these apes all over Europe. Just last winter another one was excavated near Barcelona and heralded as further proof of Begun's theory. The researchers remained tight-lipped about what it all meant, but popular outlets found ways to get the point across, such as this sentence in a recent CBS News report: "The researchers sidestepped a controversy raging through the field by not claiming their find moves great-ape evolution—and the emergence of humans—from Africa to Europe."

#### X. A CAUCASIAN HOMECOMING

The question of just when we became human gets answered in our popular press all the time. Was it when we assembled the first rudimentary tool kit, or when we grunted out the earliest phonemes of complex language? Was it when we made those paintings in Altamira and Lascaux, or when we left off being knuckle-dragging ape-like critters and stood up? Standing up has been a particularly fertile field for this kind of musing, with theories ranging from cooling off to intimidating other species to freeing the hands. I'd always heard that we abandoned squatting because we wanted to see over the top of the grass on the African savannahs, allegedly our first habitat. One early 1980s theory was that standing evolved for "phallic display directed at females."<sup>9</sup>

Last year a British scholar named Jonathan Kingdon argued in his book, *Lowly Origin*, that our standing up probably had a lot to do with getting food and happened in undramatic stages, first by straightening the back while squatting and later by extending the legs—all of this happening in tiny incremental stages over vast swaths of time.

As theories go, that's not nearly as much fun as "seeing over the grass" or "phallic display," but it has the ring of truth to it, a ring that, let's face it, will never endear such an idea to writers of newsweekly cover lines. Which is also why you've never heard of Jonathan Kingdon.

Scientists like to invoke Occam's razor, the principle that the simplest explanation is often

<sup>9</sup> *Were this the case, every animal in nature, down to the amoeba, would stand.*

the most truthful. These days we have almost the opposite problem: pop thinkers tend to oversimplify in a way meant to attract attention. The first time I ever got a whiff of this was when I was a teenager reading Desmond Morris's book *The Naked Ape*. Morris theorized that the reason human females had big breasts (as opposed to the tiny sagging dugs of other primates) was because we had discovered love. In doing so we switched from copulating doggie style to the more romantic missionary position. But all those eons of looking at the round globes of the female's buttocks from behind had developed into the image stimulus required for the maintenance of erections during intercourse. Therefore, Morris argued, the human male still needed large rounded visual cues and, according to the rules of Darwin, were rewarded with great big hooters.

Even as a kid, I remember thinking, excellent, but really? Morris's simplicity makes monstrous assumptions that just so happen to yield a theory pre-edited for the short punchy demands of modern mass media. A hook, if you will. (Not that it didn't work: thirty years after reading that book, the only detail I can remember is the boob theory.) Morris's theory has little to do with truth and everything to do with selling books. Perhaps it's time to set aside Occam's razor and pick up Morris's razor, which shuns any theory that might excite a cable-television producer and elevates the plodding theory that makes a kind of dull, honest sense.

Apply Morris's razor to Kennewick Man and here's what you might get:

Chances are that Adovasio and his colleagues are right about the basic assertion of an ancient arrival of *Homo sapiens* to this continent. It easily fits in with what else is known. For instance, the archaeological record in Australia is redundant with evidence that aboriginals arrived there at least 50,000 years ago. That journey would have required boating some eighty miles, many believe. So it's perfectly conceivable that there were multiple entries to the American continent, with at least one crew, probably Asians like the Ainu, lugging their Haplogroup X gene and following

the food (not "exploring") by canoe or on foot across the Beringia bridge, possibly just after the penultimate ice age, circa 20,000–30,000 years ago, giving them plenty of time to leave some pre-Clovis fossils.

That's one story, a very Kingdon-like theory, all very probable but not a very good cable special or science-magazine cover story. Morris's razor, though, spares us the rest of the theory, according to which the First American is of an ancient tribe whose members just happen to resemble the very scientists making the claim and whose sad end came about after a genocidal campaign against these superior but outnumbered Caucasoids by hordes of Mongoloid stone age peoples. This epic extrapolation is drawn from one single Cascade spearpoint—a leap about as likely as a Martian anthropologist staring at an Enfield bullet, a scrap of gray wool, and a dinged canteen, and then successfully imagining the states'-rights debate leading up to the nation's Civil War.

The same Martian anthropologist might also quarrel with the pre-Clovisites' view that the Kennewick battle is a latter-day clash between science and religion—the Indians with their mythic stories of origin, and the scientists with their lithics and their scientific dates. Given the scant evidence for either, it's more accurate to see the debate as between two forms of folklore squaring off over control of our continents' creation story. In an editorial last year, the *Seattle Times* captured one side of this fight perfectly. Kennewick, the paper said, had "held onto his secrets for more than 9,000 years and now, finally, scientists will get a chance to be his voice."

Why assume the scientists' narrative in this case is closer to the empirical truth? There have been times in the history of archaeology when one could find more objective, hard factual truth in the local oral narratives than in the scientists' analysis, and this may well be one of those times. Oral legends, we increasingly learn, are often based on real events, and those myths can sometimes be decoded to reveal the nuggets of ancient journalistic truth that originally set them into play.

How do we know that the Vikings made a





landing at L'anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland? Because an obsessed lawyer named Helge Ingstad insisted that the Icelandic sagas, the oral epic poetry of his people, were based on fact. No one disputes that the *Iliad* is based on a real war, Ingstad argued, or that the *Song of Roland* derives from an actual tactical blunder by Charlemagne. This small-town lawyer analyzed the details given in the myths and spent years trying to locate the campsite for "Vinland." In 1961 he found it and overthrew the old European story about who arrived first to this continent.

There are several Indian creation stories about coming out of ice. The Paiute tell one that ends this way:

Ice had formed ahead of them, and it reached all the way to the sky. The people could not cross it. ... A Raven flew up and struck the ice and cracked it. Coyote said, "These small people can't get across the ice." Another Raven flew up again and cracked the ice again. Coyote said, "Try again, try again." Raven flew up again and broke the ice. The people ran across.

Such accounts are myths, yes, but many Native-American origin accounts involve coming out of ice, which certainly fits into all the theories of America's human origins. So why aren't these stories studied the way Ingstad examined his own sagas? Why is the benefit of the doubt given to the scientists' story? It's quite possible that not a single fact in this new pre-Clovis story is true.

Part of the problem of reading either of these stories is that we no longer have a capacity to appreciate the real power of myth. Most of us are reared to think of myth as an anthology of dead stories of some long-ago culture: Edith Hamilton making bedtime stories out of Greek myths; Richard Wagner making art out of Norse myth; fundamentalist Christians making trouble out of Scripture.

When we read ancient stories or founding epics, we forget that the original audience who heard these accounts did not differentiate between mythic and fact-based storytelling. Nor did these stories have authors, as we conceive of them. Stories arose from the collective culture, accrued a kind of truth over time.

Today we've split storytelling into two modes—fiction and non-fiction. And we've split our reading that way as well. The idea of the lone author writing "truth" has completely vanquished the other side of storytelling—the

collectively conjured account. I think we still have these accounts, but we just don't recognize them for what they are. Tiny anxieties show up as urban legends and the like. In the late 1980s, when the queasily mortal idea of organ donation was infiltrating the social mainstream, suddenly one heard an authorless story of a man waking up in a Times Square hotel room after a night of partying to find a stitched wound on his lower back and his kidney missing.

In many ways, the occasional journalistic scandal stems from this tension between the individual as author and the audience as author. The most recent case was *USA Today's* Jack Kelley. His made-up stories are pure collective desire—stories that we, not just he, wanted to hear. He told the story of the little terrorist boy pointing at the Sears Tower and saying, "This one is mine." Perfect story, finely tuned: The corruption of innocence. American icon as target. The anxiety that terrorism has no end.

Enduring myth can be based on fact, as in Ingstad's case. But often the collective account needs no factual basis, just a mild apprehension that the world is not quite what it seems. No one has ever found a razor blade in an apple at Halloween, nor has any doctor treated anyone for gerbiling.

The story of the Ancient European One is this kind of story, toggling back and forth between the world of fiction and (possibly) non-fiction, authored by a few curious facts and the collective anxiety of the majority.

Because we no longer read mythological stories, we no longer appreciate their immense power. We find ourselves stunned at how something so many deeply long to be true will simply assemble itself

into fact right before our eyes. If the majority profoundly longs to believe that men of Caucasoid extraction toured here 16,000 years ago in Savile Row suits, ate gourmet cuisine, and explored the Pacific Northwest with their intact pre-Christianized families until the marauding horde of war-whooping Mongoloid injuns came descending pell-mell from their tribal haunts to drive Cascade points into European hips until they fell, one after another, in the earliest and most pitiful campaign of ethnic cleansing, then that is what science will painstakingly confirm, that is what the high courts will evenhandedly affirm, and that is what in time the majority will happily come to believe. ■

