

Kennewick man

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This research paper investigates the literature on the body of Kennewick man.

It examines the problems associated with the repatriation of these skeletal remains to the Indian tribes as dictated by the National American Graves and Repatriation Act. According to the literature, these problems started earlier, when archeologists launched a series of cases in the court of law seeking to conduct studies that could lead to the determination of the race of the skull. In order to address this complex legal issue, the literature proposes to conduct DNA tests on the skeletal materials to eliminate the doubts that confound legal battles. Kennewick man is a name that has been given to the skeletal remains of a pre-historical man found along the banks of the river Columbia in Washington. These remains were found during a boat race on the Columbia River in July 28, 1996.

Two fans incidentally pulled ashore to get a better view of the race and found a human skull and, thereafter, took it to the County Coroners. From the County Coroners, an archeologist known as James Chatter used the skull to retrieve a nearly complete human skull with a long narrow face. This was of European descent. However, a controversy began to arise earlier, when the skull was found being over 9,000 years old and resting earlier speculations that it could be 40 to 50 years old (Luca Cavalli-Sforza, 1997). From that moment on, the stretch of the Columbia River has been maintained by the U. S.

Army Corps of Engineers, being considered a part of the traditional homeland of the Umatilla tribe. This kind of arrangement was drawn from the

Native American Graves and Repatriation Act signed by President George H. W. Bush in 1990. This act dictates that if human remains are found on federal lands and their cultural affiliation properly determines that bones must be returned to that particular tribe for reburial.

The Umatilla tribe made a claim for the bones and the claim was granted thereby necessitating the commencement of the process of repatriation. (Lee, December 26, 1999). The process of repatriation immediately began. Eight archeologists sued for the right to study the skull before it could be reburied. And in September 1998, the high court judges ordered that the skull was to be sent for study.

However, a protracted battle took shape again. The political battles were framed mostly by people, which wanted to know about the actual race of Kennewick man. Finally, the study commenced in SeattleMuseum in 2005 and results started trickling later in 2006. Till this day, the actual race of Kennewick man has not been determined as it fits neither the Indian nor the European Races. (Tano Mervyn, Kimberly TallBear, and Huia Pacey, 2000).

The politics of Kennewick man has become complex within time. In January, 2000, there was a moment of relief that the issue had been solved. That was when Franck McManamon, the Chief Archeologist of the National Park Service, announced that the finding of the skeletal remains indicated the age of about 9, 000 and, therefore, rendered the skeleton case according to the National American Graves and Repatriation Act of the Department of Interior (September 25, 2000). However, this was not to last. In a quick rejoinder,

the court indicated that there was still an issue concerning the real meaning of the word “ Native America” as defined in the Act.

According to it, the inclusion of the word “ indigenous” in the definition implied that the law could not apply to the tribes that descended from immigrants, which had come to America from other continents (Liloqula, Summer 1996). However, the problem could easily be solved, if political and legal arguments were kept at bay. It is quite visible that the Congress did not intend to limit the term “ Native American”. The National American Graves and Repatriation Act was meant to be all inclusive for the tribes and cultures that resided in the lands comprising the United States of America prior to the historically documented European exploration of these American lands. In fact, on the basis of all available scientific information, every single individual in America is a descendant from immigrants, which came from other continents. In light of this, the legislation of the Congress could not give any other meaning (Luca Cavalli-Sforza, 1997).