

WORKING TOGETHER ON RACE

Roger Echo-Hawk

Editors note: In the dialogue below, Roger Echo-Hawk suggests that academia needs a new discourse on race—one that acknowledges the objective anthropological rejection of the validity of race as a useful explanation of human biological diversity. Asserting that academia has yet to show signs of rethinking the doing of race in any meaningful way, Mr. Echo-Hawk subjectively takes off his shoes and throws them at the racial fundamentals that sustain traditional mainstream archaeological practice as well as the new paradigm of Indigenous archaeology. This raises a question for SAA membership: how should SAA respond to Mr. Echo-Hawk's outrageous behavior?

About the authors: Kennewickman is (or was). S&S was (or is).

So now that I have race, I'm really gonna have some serious fun!

Well, what did you end up with, Kennewickman? Cauca-white-guy-soid? Homo jomon? Some kind of 'nesian? We already know you're not Indian.

That's right. When I asked about what I'd end up with, the Court said that Congress didn't intend for me to be Native American!

Ha-ha-ha! No, really, Kennewickman—who are you if the Court and Congress won't let you be a racial Indian?

Well, over 90 percent of me voted for Obama!

No!

Yes! See, when I first stood up out of the earth, I started listening to Slim Shady. That helped to make me what I am. Because race is culture, isn't it? Not biology.

But he's a white guy! I mean—okay, using a more science-like lingo, Slim Shady is a Cauca-white-guy-soid! At least, that's what they'll say to you if you insist that race is just culture, if you really dare to insist on treating race as anything but an expression of biology.

Ha-ha-ha! They don't mean it, do they! All that hot air about race just being "culture." Race is such a gasgasgas! Because as a matter of cultural practice, they've gotta do race like it's something funny in the blood!

So when they all gathered around your table to give you race, Kennewickman, they put a spike right through your head?! One or two people lifted a finger to stop them, but most of us just wanted to vote on which race you'd end up getting.

Couldn't feel a thing. And now that I have race, I can see the fun in it. Now I know what they mean by "Indigenous" Archaeology! It's the kind of "Indigenous" where saying "indigenous" and "native" doesn't mean being born anywhere in specific. Ha-ha-ha! It means race!

Sure. But Indigenous Archaeology means more than that. See, you weren't there for very long back in the millennium

before this one. Back when archaeologists didn't talk much to Indians. In those days when I was a racial Indian, archaeologists acted like they'd talk to us only when we showed up with lawyers, senators, and new laws in hand. That's when I started my research on oral traditions and ancient American history. I thought they'd want to talk to me. Was I wrong about that! They stuck a spike right through my head!

But you didn't mind doing race then—you stuck that spike right through your own head! Maybe they couldn't help but see it as a matter of loyalty: being loyal to the precepts of racial Indianhood versus being loyal to the precepts of non-Indian scholarship. Maybe they thought it meant setting aside their quest for knowledge to talk to you, back when you were so loyal to racial Indianhood, standing there with your lawyers, senators, court orders, and LB 340s.

I see what you mean, Kennewickman. But I saw myself in a more complicated way. How could I not be an Indian? I didn't think I had a choice. I tried to be a loyal Indian and I tried to be a loyal scholar. I discovered that the archaeologists wouldn't listen to a loyal Indian, and the Indians wouldn't listen to a loyal scholar!

You should ask around a bit. They all still see you as an Indian—but you're not just an Indian—you're a traitor to race! The way they see it... if they were to take a peek inside your blood sometime, they'd still expect to see something running around like mad in there. Race!

Maybe they won't let me let go of race. People might always see me as an Indian as long as they see themselves as racially white, as "non-Indian," as racial Indians, as Indigenous versus non-Indigenous. But I feel encouraged when I hear academic adherents to race saying how they know race is just cultural belief, not biology. Many of them know the truth about race, that it obscures rather than clarifies our humanity.

And the next thing they plan to do is... racial Indigenous Archaeology for racial Indians! Their plan is to treat Whitefolk

Colonialistic Archaeologists like they need plenty of policing by Indianfolk Indigenous Archaeologists. You take a sharp stick and you clean up the white trash in your neighborhood, and everything will be good.

That's a little harsh, Kennewickman. Maybe some of them say that. Maybe some of them plan to do racial social justice by using Indian racism against white racism. But maybe some things do need policing. There's a lot of awful stuff littering our world—like race! After things get straightened up a bit, some of them will really want to relax about it and let themselves look for meaningful ways to get along, to coexist, and even to create dialogue and partnership and mutual respect. They'll be multicultural racials! I'd guess that they all want to enhance the quest for knowledge, not just police it.

Maybe someday you can do some real race-free scholarship on oral traditions and no one will try to police you! If you think they'll be open-minded like that, tell me this: Think of the online Closet Chicken Coop, S&S. If Chicken Nuggets ever decided to respectfully embrace his indigeneity, to take pride in his many cultural experiences with racial Indianhood, and to embrace the idea of being a cultural Indian, would he be accepted in the Coop as a practitioner of cultural Indianness, or would he just be dismissed as a wannabe Indigene?

I don't know, Kennewickman. Maybe Dr. Nuggets can never be a Native Ph.D.

Now that I have race, I understand. When racial Indigenists do race-based Indigenism, they're enjoying race by bonding as Indians. It feels good to them. Like that one time in the Coop. Remember, S&S, remember when all the Closet Chickens put their heads together to mull over their lists of Native anthropologist Ph.Ds....

I guess you're right, Kennewickman. They didn't put Chicken Nuggets on that list. I predicted how they'd never let him be a cultural Indian, and I turned out to be right about that. Race isn't just cultural for the Coop.

They treat it like something funny in the blood. Whatever they say about race being cultural, when you do race, pseudo-biology still does all the heavy lifting.

You're right. I can see how muscular racial Indians just wouldn't stand for people like Chicken Nuggets doing racial Indianhood as culture.

They'd kick sand in his face instead of nominating him for awards. In that world, in the midst of postcolonial Indigenous Archaeology, it's all about race as biology. And when they say "community-based," they mean "Indian" communities, not white-folk communities!

Hmm. I don't know, Kennewickman. Chicken Nuggets once published a paper about the Kensington Runestone and how he helped to create a dialogue about it—this is an object of great importance to the community of Alexandria, Min-

nesota. Proponents of "community-based" Indigenism could ask themselves if this qualifies as an example of Indigenous Archaeology. To say yes... maybe Indigenous Archaeology can forego race as an ideological basis. Maybe culturally elastic concepts of "community" can work as alternatives to the rigidities of race.

Ha-ha-ha! Under the rules of race, those whitefolk Minnesotans can never be Indigenous, and Chicken Nuggets can never be Indigenous; he'll always be homeless! And under the race-based ideological construction of Indigenous Archaeology, he'll always live invisibly, sleeping in an imported box under a racist bridge to nowhere. That's why I voted mostly for Obama. If anyone had ever asked before they gave me race, maybe I would've said, "Hello, I'm Kennewickman; I wanna be postracial."

That's not what they mean when they say "postracial." No. When they say "postracial," they really mean to say: "Let's not talk about race anymore." They don't ever mean: "Race is a lie that distorts humankind so let's not do it anymore."

Let me tell you, all the archaeologists feel that way. I know. Being postracial is way easier than challenging race, rejecting race, being anti-race. A lot of white academics know they don't really feel very white anymore, but they're all still used to doing race, what with their Paleo "Indians" and their Natives-this and Aborigines-that. I know. Ask SAA what their position is concerning my racial Native Americanness....

So I guess I'd be wasting their time, Kennewickman, if I were to suggest that SAA should do what the other anthros have done. Make a Statement on Race. Say it's a lie; tell the whole world how race is just culture doing something funny with the truth.

Didn't those other guys do something like that? I had recently appeared on the scene again....

That's right, Kennewickman. AAA.

But if you think back, when AAA did their Statement, they just hit the pause button on the laff-track and said, Okay, it looks like race isn't real. And then they hurried on past that unpleasant news because they all wanted to keep on doing race.

AAA wanted everyone to see the problem as one of racial whiteness and white people and white colonialism. They urged us to be against white racism, not against race. I'm against white racism, too. But the way I see it, the best way to be against racism is to be against race. Race is the essential ingredient of racism.

But if AAA didn't see it that way, and if they have no problem with the doing of race-that-gives-rise-to-racism, why should SAA feel concerned?

Are you're saying that SAA won't care? Maybe not. But what if they do care about the scholarship on race? About how race twists things... things like the production of knowledge and the stories we tell about ourselves. About being

science-oriented archaeologists who respect what science says about race. After all, SAA is a major anthropological organization and it has so far been completely silent about the problem with race.

What do you suggest they should say?

I'm not sure, Kennewickman. But what if the SAA board got the president of SAA to request that CNAR initiate the process. To formulate a way to come up with a formal Statement on Race. A path.

That won't be enough; a path must go somewhere.

Well, this Statement might begin with racism, saying how it will always be a problem in a world that does race. And the best way to deal with racism is by confronting race itself. That's a good start. And... and as long as you're asking me for my opinion, I think race should be studied in the academy, not perpetuated by the academy.

Hmm... If they listen to you, will they try to take away my new ability to be racial? Doesn't sound like much fun!

Good point, Kennewickman. The academy should stay out of the business of suppressing the free choice of people to engage in faith-based belief systems. And people should choose for themselves whether to adhere to the belief systems of race. I don't like the idea of policing identity. For this reason, the academic community should refrain from proselytizing people into doing race, from forcing race upon people. So here's a balance worth striving for: to balance the truth we have in our minds about race against the truth that people do race with their hearts.

And Indigenous Archaeology? What about the Indigenist race-based mission to decolonize archaeology? What about that?

Well, Kennewickman, what if CNAR saw that doing Indigenous Archaeology could mean addressing the legacy of colonialism by confronting race itself. Race wasn't born in racial Native America. It didn't rise up first from racial Indian theorists. It came from colonialist Europe. Doing race is a colonialist thing to do. What if doing Indigenous Archaeology meant addressing race, all of us together, operating from the scholarly knowledge that race distorts the nature of human biological diversity.... What if Indigenous Archaeology meant changing archaeology, trying to see what humankind looks like through a non-racial lens.... Wouldn't that get us more clarity in the quest for knowledge? What if....

What if all those I'm-completely-loyal-to-race Indigenous Archaeologists just laughed at you and then built a racialist bridge to nowhere, like AAA: a tepid token statement and then a whole lotta sad crazy fun stuff, keeping race alive by changing the subject to those funny white people and their white racism....

That's a cynical expectation, Kennewickman. Even a tepid token statement is better than nothing.

But the racial Indian Indigenists have their own agenda,

S&S. They'll ignore what you say and they'll hope everyone else will do likewise. They'll say, "C'mon SAA, let's keep on Working Together to decolonize the doing of unilateral whiterace archaeology by doing collaborative Indianrace archaeology." Is that such a bad thing?

Maybe SAA and the Indigenists will never want to get beyond the doing of race. And maybe they'll have good reasons for thinking that everyone ought to deal with race by being against racism, by doing some policing, even if it means getting caught up with lawyers and senators and court orders and S.1980s and S.2843s and HR.4027s. It's just that I don't see how we'll ever get past the harm of racism by doing the lie of race. This seems obvious to me.

So you believe SAA will listen thoughtfully to them... or to you? The racialists have taught SAA the art of appearing to listen just enough to avoid the accusation of racism. SAA has yet to find a graceful way to build a consensus between the doing of scholarship and the doing of racial social justice.

You're right about that, Kennewickman. SAA prefers a balancing act when it comes to Indians. According to this logic, one does NAGPRA whole-heartedly on behalf of racial social justice and Indian religion and racial Indianhood, or one does NAGPRA half-heartedly on behalf of scholarship and science and the advancement of knowledge. SAA aims at a forever segregationist "balance," not at forever seeking integrative reconciliation. They seem to think reconciliation is impossible. They'll balance one expression of social power against another, and they'll hope this is enough. This means that racial Indians can't ever really do scholarship—they'll just be ignored. And those Indians who do scholarship can't ever really do racial Indianhood – they'll be race traitors. It's ugly, this kind of balancing!

And seeing things in the worst light, SAA and the racial Indigenists could very well go on with this balancing act by convincing each other to go on doing race. And as long as SAA is pro-race – with a little bit of CNAR, an annual racial Indian scholarship grant, and a big impressive racial bridge to nowhere – the SAA racial "non-Indigenes" won't have to ever worry about getting accused of being racist and anti-Indian. They'll be anti-racists-who-do-the-racialism-that-creates-racism!

Race is full of practical jokes like that, Kennewickman. But even so, Indigenous Archaeology and NAGPRA don't have to be just about empowering the doing of ever more race in the world. I think Indigenous Archaeology has something to say even if it stays loyal to the production of racial ideology. And in the hands of some people, laws like NAGPRA can truly be about dialogue, mutual respect, social justice, partnership, and expanding knowledge about humankind.

You know more about that than me. My experience in that whole area is not so good.

Sorry, Kennewickman! In the end, if Indigenous Archaeology does anything in the world, it would be nice if it stood for something more than loyalty to the precepts of racial Indianhood—it should stand for a bridge that unites us all, and it should stand for the end of SAA's balancing act. I think it can begin to do that if it starts with the truth about race.

Oh, but the racialisists among them don't much like your version of the truth, S&S. They have their own truths to pursue.

Their truths will lock them into SAA's eternally ugly balancing act, and move everyone down the polarizing racial bridge to nowhere.

Maybe race will win in the end. Maybe it'll be a forever kind of thing.

Maybe. But maybe we can at least aim at really redefining race as culture, at discarding the biological basis of it, at encouraging Chicken Nuggets to take pride in his cultural Indianness! Can't we do that?

No. Because under the rules of race, we don't have a choice—

the racial colonialistic truth is an imposed truth, not optional. Colonialistic race is way too much sad crazy fun!

Are you okay with the thought of keeping your new racial identity forever?

Sure! It's a gasgasgas! A whole lotta buncha jumpin' jack flash!

Kennewickman... what are you doing with that spike?

Come here, S&S! I'll make you lafflafflaff at my new funfun-funnybones!

No!

Yes! Here it comes, S&S! Race is dead! Long live race!

No! ...ha!

Yes!

n... n... ha-ha! ...Yes! Race is... LONG LIVE RACE!

That's right! Now, come here, SAA!

Get 'em right in the forehead, Kennewickman! Ha-ha-ha!

I'll police that balancing act for you, SAA!

Yes! We'll police them all! Race is such a scream!

C'mon everyone, scream! scream! scream!

YELLOWHORN, from page 15 ↩

longer term I see a need to train cultural mediators to be expert witnesses to aid in litigation over land claims or challenges over cultural patrimony. Moreover, there are demographic changes taking place in our multicultural society that will alter loyalty to the historical narrative of the Indian and the White man. We are reaching a time when Aboriginal people are a growing population, while the majority is shrinking. Within the next few decades, minorities will be the majority. Fewer people will find their historical roots in the clash of cultures chronicled by historians of colonial America. When no dominant culture holds the power to structure the message, and as more voices contribute to public discourse, the need for Aboriginal people to rely on their own experts might become more crucial.

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