

Yanomami Controversy – Tierney’s Accusations and The Key Questions Raised

Against Neel:

1. That Neel made the measles epidemic worse
2. That Neel could have done more to help the Yanomami at the time

Against Chagnon:

1. That Chagnon misrepresented the Yanomami, particularly regarding their bellicosity
2. That Chagnon helped instigate the warfare he observed through his distribution of trade goods
3. That Chagnon staged the films he produced
4. That Chagnon fabricated the data for his 1988 article in Science ‘Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population’ 239 pp982–992
5. That Chagnon acted unethically in collecting the genealogies needed for Chagnon and Neel’s research
6. That Chagnon’s claim to be the first outsider to make contact with some villages is untrue
7. That Chagnon violated Venezuelan law while participating in a plan with two prominent Venezuelans to establish a reserve that would be controlled by the three of them

Additional accusations (post publication of ‘Darkness in El Dorado’)

Against Neel:

1. That Neel did not gain proper informed consent for medical research among the Yanomami
2. That Neel had not informed the Yanomami that collected blood would be kept in US laboratories

Against Chagnon:

1. Why had Chagnon never objected to misuse of his work in the Brazilian press?
2. Was it right for Chagnon to criticise Davi Kopenawa, an indigenous activist involved in lobbying for a Brazilian reserve?

3. Had Chagnon adequately assisted the Yanomamo in light of the \$1 million in royalties he had gained from his best-selling ethnography of them?

And then, in response, against Tierney:

1. Had he selectively and deliberately misrepresented issues under the guise of thorough, footnoted investigation?

Further questions:

1. How has American Anthropology responded to the controversy?
2. Why has it been so hesitant to confront awkward questions about the power inequality between anthropologists and informants, about informed consent, just compensation, and professional integrity?
3. How have anthropologists talked past one another in such controversies?

From Borofsky 2005:11-17