

**ALICE DREGER’S LATEST DEFENSE OF NAPOLEON CHAGNON:
MORE OBFUSCATION AND INTELLECTUAL IRRESPONSIBILITY?**

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Dreger, Alice, 2015, *Galileo’s Middle Finger: Heretics, Activists, and the Search for Justice and Science*, New York, NY: Penguin Press.

[Endorsed by Jared Diamond, Steven Pinker, Edward O. Wilson, et al.]

“An impassioned defense of intellectual freedom and a clarion call to intellectual responsibility, *Galileo’s Middle Finger* is one American’s eye-opening story of life in the trenches of scientific controversy....”

http://www.amazon.com/Galileos-Middle-Finger-Heretics-Activists/dp/1594206082/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1428954790&sr=1-1&keywords=galileo%27s+middle+finger

The pertinent chapters:

Chapter 5 “The Rot from Within” pp. 136-156.

Chapter 6 “Human Natures” pp. 157-185.

The rest of the book is unrelated to the Darkness in El Dorado controversy.

MY REBUTTAL

Chapters 5-6 discuss the controversy generated by Patrick Tierney’s book *Darkness in El Dorado*. **The basic argument** is that:

(1) Tierney is totally wrong/guilty, while Chagnon is totally right/innocent.

(2) The AAA and its Peacock Commission and Task Force are totally rejected, basically as a wild witch hunt.

(3) Political activism displaces science and evidence, whereas it should be secondary at best.

Surprise!

A number of crucial items are conveniently absent. There is no recognition that a substantial portion of Tierney's book summarizes and elaborates on previous criticisms by numerous and diverse commentators on Chagnon. In the endnotes for these two chapters (pp. 297-304) there is no citation for any of the substantial contrary arguments and evidence. There is nothing substantial on professional ethics and human rights, these, in my opinion, the most important issues in the controversy, after genuine concern for the Yanomami which Dreger does not display either. Surprise!

There are numerous factual errors. Surprise!

For example, Dreger conflates the rejection of research permits by government agencies in Brazil and Venezuela (pp. 159-163). A remarkable error is the assertion that other anthropologists working with the Yanomami have confirmed Chagnon's representation of them as "the fierce people" (p. 144). There is no mention of the contrary critical statement by some 19 anthropologists who have worked with the Yanomami on the website of Survival International (see below). Yet another error is the statement that Chagnon was never invited by the AAA to defend himself (p. 143). Actually he was invited to the panel discussion at the San Francisco annual convention in 2001, but refused the invitation. Tierney had the courage to participate. Dreger characterizes the panel as a "kangaroo jury" (p. 145), even though it was obviously stacked against Tierney and in favor of Chagnon. Also, Chagnon was free to post comments on the *Preliminary Report* of the AAA Task Force on the AAA website, and did post at least once.

In short, Dreger offers yet another one-sided advocacy in defense of Chagnon, in my opinion. Apparently, she actually believes that Chagnon and partisans are the good guys, while his critics are the bad guys (p. 146). It is simply that simple for Dreger, and for any naïve or prejudice readers. Surprise!

At the same time, these two chapters do not duplicate Dreger's article on *Human Nature*, they are well-written and captivating, and there is especially interesting material on Tierney's original but unpublished book (*Last Tribes of El Dorado*), Willard and Brandon Centerwall, James V. Neel's papers in the archives of the American Philosophical Society, Dreger's paper on the biased panel she organized at the AAA convention in 2009, and her paper at the Human Behavior and Evolution Society.

Confirmation bias is a type of selective thinking in which an individual tends to observe and to seek whatever confirms one's beliefs, and to ignore whatever does not. It runs counter to objectivity in scholarship and science.

In conclusion, in my opinion, Dreger's publications on the Darkness in El Dorado controversy obscure rather than illuminate; broadcast misinformation, facilitate misunderstanding, and perpetuate myths; and are irresponsible to ethics, science, history, and anthropology.

After several years I read again my response to Dreger's article in *Human Nature* which was posted in the Douglas Hume archive (see citation below). Many points also apply to points in the Chapters 5-6 in her new book. I sent her a copy of the article by email. Apparently she did not read it, forgot about it, or purposefully ignored relevant points in it. Surprise!

Sponsel, Leslie E., 2011 (April 5), "Alice Dreger Descends into Darkness: Scholarship or More Obfuscation?," Douglas Hume archive http://anthroniche.com/darkness_documents/0617.htm

Survival International, 2013 (February 26),”
<http://assets.survivalinternational.org/documents/920/yano-2013-anthropologists-letter.pdf>

Also, see:

Survival International, 2013, “The Myth of the ‘Brutal Savage’,”
<http://www.survivalinternational.org/articles/3289-brutal-savages#chagnon>