

22 October 2005

Dear Dr. Weiss,

Let me introduce myself. Since 1975, I have been conducting anthropological research among the Yanomami of Brazil. Presently, I am Vice-President of the CCPY (Pro-Yanomami Committee) and Research Director of the Research Institute for Development (São Paulo, Paris). More to the point perhaps, I am working with the Deputy Attorney General of Brazil, Maruício Fabretti, to help the Yanomami gain the return of their relatives' blood from your laboratory at Pennsylvania State University.

Thank you for your reply to the student letters which Dr. Borofsky has forwarded me. Let me respond by making three points.

First, you request "documentation of a kind that they [the Brazilian government] would consider legally satisfactory . . . the conditions will have to be made clear by them." Please note that this year Deputy Attorney General of Brazil, Maruício Fabretti, sent a letter to Dean Susan Welch at your university posing certain questions regarding the three thousand Yanomami blood samples you have in your laboratory. This letter remains unanswered (though a similar letter sent to SUNY Binghamton has been positively responded to by its Vice President of Research). Included in the letter to your Dean, and included in this letter as well, is the section of the Brazilian constitution that gives the Attorney General the power to legally represent the Yanomami Indians. Please note Article 129, V. specifies that one of the functions of the Attorney General is to "defend judicially the rights and interests of the Indian populations." Maruício Fabretti, as Deputy Attorney General for the Brazilian state of Roraima where the Toototobi Yanomami live, thus has both the legal responsibility and right to pursue the matter of the return of Yanomami blood samples.

Second, you refer to the personal politics surrounding Dr. Napoleon Chagnon as a critical issue relating to the return of the blood samples stored in your laboratory. Might I suggest a different frame of reference? This is not about academic politics in the United States. This is about the Yanomami of Brazil wanting their relatives blood back.

You indicated in your letter that you have never been to South America. Let me provide some background information regarding the Yanomami of Toototobi. Enclosed is a letter from leaders of the Toototobi area specifically asking for the return of their relatives' blood. Contrary to what you imply in your letter, the Yanomami villages of Toototobi have been sedentary in roughly the same small area since the 1970s. I have histories and genealogies of these villages and villagers from a time well before Neel collected samples. If you would provide us with the village names and/or the individuals listed in your samples, we will be glad to provide you with genealogies linking these individuals to the present Yanomami living in the Toototobi area. While one might be

sympathetic regarding readability problems with the original computer files, might I suggest that professional technicians should be able to address the problem? If you lack the ability or funds at Pennsylvania State, you can send them to us in Brazil where we have both the funds and ability to address the problem.

Third, you refer to questions of representation and note “not everyone agrees about who Davi Kopenawa speaks for, nor does everyone agree on what it means to say that he was ‘elected’ to represent a group.” Perhaps you are unfamiliar with recent events in Brazil. Davi Kopenawa has been formally elected president of the Hutukara Associação Yanomami, a legally registered Yanomami NGO that is the official representative of the eastern Yanomami in Brazil and is recognized as such under Brazilian law. Perhaps you can understand my surprise at your suggestion that you, far from Brazil, have an understanding of Yanomami representation under Brazilian law that contradicts the legally specified laws of Brazil. I would add, in respect to Davi Kopenawa, that his blood was taken during the Neel expedition as was that of his deceased mother, his step-father, and many of his direct relatives. Hopefully, we can agree that he has every right to demand the return of his own blood and that of his close relatives stored in your laboratory. Also, please note that while you are a distinguished professor, Davi Kopenawa is also distinguished, being awarded a Global 500 award by the United Nations. Like yourself, he has achieved much world-wide distinction in his chosen pursuit, in this case helping to represent Yanomami concerns to the wider world.

I would conclude, by asking you to please return the blood samples of the Toototobi Yanomami stored in your laboratory. I have noted the legal justification, under Brazilian law, for this request. I have the genealogies to confirm relationships between the present Yanomami of Toototobi and the samples collected during Neel’s research. And you have the request from the Toototobi Yanomami themselves.

Please do not play abstract academic politics with the Yanomami request – saying this is an American academic conflict and quibbling about details of Yanomami life and representation when you, by your own admission, are unfamiliar with social dynamics among the Yanomami of Toototobi. Please address their concerns with all due haste, given the many years this controversy has carried on. It is not about you; it is not about Chagnon; it is about the Yanomami, their legal representation under Brazilian law, and, more broadly, obeying the laws of Brazil.

Sincerely,

Bruce Albert

June 13, 2002

We Yanomami are very concerned about (the situation of) of our blood and thus are sending you this letter. A long time ago the whites took our blood and this concerns us greatly. This is the reason we are sending this letter to you North American people. Many years ago they stole our blood in Toototobi and took it away. We are still very saddened by this (act). Today, those of use who are left, after hearing what happened, have become very concerned and saddened by (the situation of) our blood. Why do you keep our frozen blood?

Our concern will only end when you North Americans return our blood. You white people drew (took) the blood of people wh had already died and we want to get rid of (bury) the blood of our dead. Which is why we are sending this letter to you North American people.

If you use this blood for research we will really become very upset. We, the children of the people, want the blood returned. Our concern will only cease when we destroy (bury) this blood, which is the reason we are sending this letter to the United States.

Our concern will only end when you return our blood. This is why we have written requesting that our blood be returned. If you do not return our blood our preoccupation will not cease. Thus we ask that you really help us because if you don't our concern will not end.

Why are we concerned? We are concerned because this blood is ours. We were unaware (of the situation of our blood) until recently because no one had said anything before, but today we know and will never forget. This is why we are sending this letter.

This is all we wish to say.

David Kopenawa Yanomami  
Dario Vitorio Yanomami  
Watori ki Demini (Sera do Vento Demini)