

"Jennifer Raff is incredibly knowledgeable, eloquent, and thoughtful, with a peerless grasp of both the complicated science of this exciting field and its difficult ethics." —Ed Yong, *New York Times* bestselling author of *I Contain Multitudes: The Microbes Within Us and a Grander View of Life*

Origin

A Genetic History
of the Americas

Jennifer Raff

BOOK REVIEW

Origin

By Jennifer Raff

Hatchet Book Group

12 New York

First Edition February 2022

ISBN 9781538749715 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781538749708 (ebook)

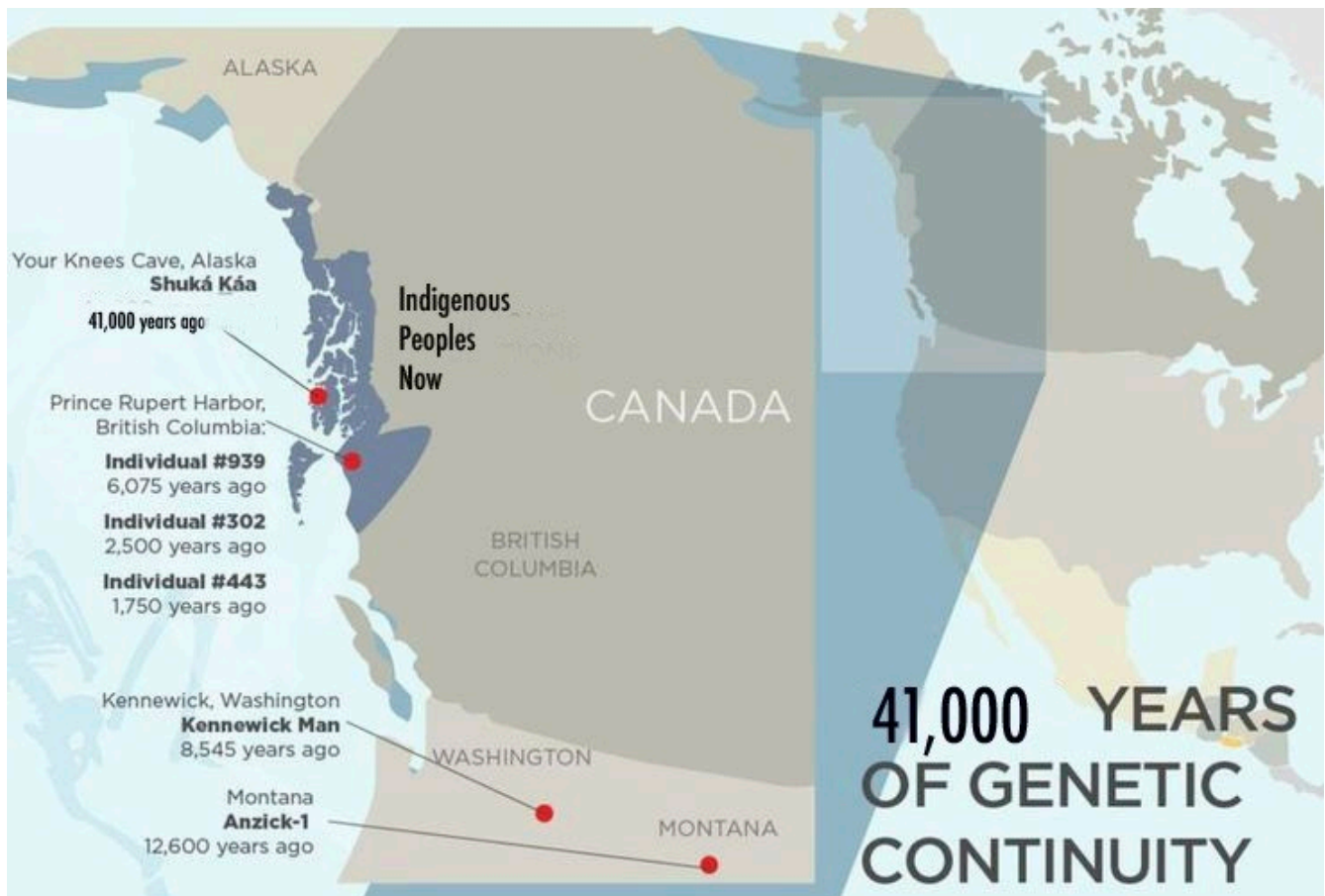
The authors of Spanish conquest histories repeatedly report that the Spanish incursions into Mexico and the American southwest were followed a century later by the Pueblo Revolt. Francisco Vasquez de Coronado entered on horseback leading “conquistadors” in 1540, giving King Philip II of Spain the opening to permit Juan de Onate in 1595 to settle and explore the lands of the Hopi, Zuni, Keres, and Jemez. The search for wealth (gold and other minerals) prompted the Spaniards to establish settlements among the peoples they found. By doing so, their horses became a significant factor in their lives. Horses quickly became influential in social, economic, and strategic relations between the different peoples even as the Spaniards withdrew. By the late 1700s, wild horses and domesticated horses became a critical part of the cultural systems of Shoshone, Cayuse, and the Yakima—nations in territories a few thousand miles to the north of the Pueblos. Indeed, the Cayuse are said to have been the first of the many nations in the northwest of the United States to acquire horses giving them powerful mobility and warrior strength. When reminded that the Cayuse introduced the horse to the Yakima, longhouse traditional leader

Kiaux (English name Russell Jim) exploded in laughter! “No!” Kiaux corrected. “It is true that the Cayuse brought us horses from the South just a few centuries ago, but we had horses thousands of years before.” Indeed, the horse did originate in North America for at least 60,000 million years when about ten or eleven thousand years ago, the horse came to an end. Kiaux’s partner relied on the contemporary sense of time while Kiaux relied on the oral histories of his people. These stories of the “now and then” connect the history of memory as **Jennifer Raff** quotes Pawnee historian Roger Echo-Hawk in her wonderful, just-released book, **Origins, The Genetic History of the Americas**.

Kiaux and Raff, it turns out, agree with each other though from different sources of information. Raff recounts how she learned peoples have lived in the western hemisphere for at least 41,000 years instead 12,000 to 25,000 years usually claimed. Raff’s documented push back in time gives Kiaux’s ancestors ample opportunity to visit the horses. According to Raff, the early presence of peoples in the western hemisphere extends deeper into western hemispheric human history. Raff also calls into

question the single focus story that peoples from Asia entered North America through the Bering Land Bridge about 10,000 years ago. That was the beginning of the end of the “ice age,” as conventional researchers have

claimed, and yet Raff’s research now confirms evidence shows the early relatives of the Tlingit and Haida were living in the area of the Shuká Káa Cave (located on the south-eastern coast of Alaska).



Raff recounts in the early chapters of her book the discoveries made by amateur naturalist and formerly enslaved person George McJunkin in 1908 near Folsom, New Mexico, digging up the bones of extinct bison. While McJunkin made a remarkable discovery because of his ancestry, no one would help him or pay attention to what he had discovered. Carl Schwachheim and Fred Howarth were two naturalists McJunkin had earlier consulted about his find. Still, it wasn't

until after he died that Schwachheim and his friend decided in 1920 to investigate the ancient bison bones. As Raff narrates the story, she reveals that what had been discovered was a site containing not only the bones of an extinct bison, but an arrowhead lodged in the bones suggesting that human beings had lived at the time of the bison. This find was only discovered after a formal excavation of the site took place in 1926. Archaeologists and other researchers began to

offer their guesses as to the time humans arrived in North America, and some immediately offered 5,000 years. Yet another, Jesse Figgins, thought that 200,000 years could be considered. Not until the 1950s, Raff explains, did radiocarbon dating come into being were researchers able to approximate the date range for the earliest human entry into the hemisphere.

The common wisdom for 50 years was that at best 12,500 years was considered the earliest time of human entry into the hemisphere. Still, scholars wrestled over that number since increasingly discovered archaeological evidence strongly questioned the year. Attempts at settling on a realistic “origin number” continued until Raff’s genetics-based work was published, where she points to that the appropriate evolutionary framework for human populations is “a biological one, connected to the broader dispersal of anatomically modern Homo Sapiens out of Africa.” Based on that perspective, Raff argues that “genetic evidence” is the most advanced and appropriate method for investigating and testing evidence—genetic materials from bones and teeth.

Emphasizing the biological and the cultural aspects of human evolution, Raff turned to Tlingit and Haida and other tribes to hear their stories their histories for further details about migrations and adaptations made by their ancestors. She enthusiastically charts

the relationship between peoples in Africa and Asia and then into the Americas—all the while remaining true to her reliance on biological and cultural evidence. Raff caps her analysis by stating that the genetic characteristics of the earliest arrivals in the Americas render them most closely related to modern American Indian descendants.

Her discussion also discloses how she understood the importance that modern descendants of ancient family members must be accorded ceremonial honors due to all members who have passed into the Spirit World. Furthermore, Raff demonstrates that close collaboration with American Indian nations is a valuable element of her research, and she points to how mutual benefits result. Sometimes the results of her research were possible only after years of consultations with communities, elders in those communities, and collaborating tribal leaders.

Paleogenomics is the label Raff gives to her work and demonstrates how new pathways exist for researchers, and American Indian peoples can improve the accuracy of knowledge for conventional sciences and native sciences. Her book shows the benefits of hearing the Yakima Longhouse leader Kiaux and the indigenous peoples descendant from the “ancient ones” for the deep and profound knowledge they hold that can render our knowledge more accurate.

This article may be cited as:

Book Review. (2022). Origin. *Fourth World Journal*. Vol. 20, N2. pp. 178-181.
