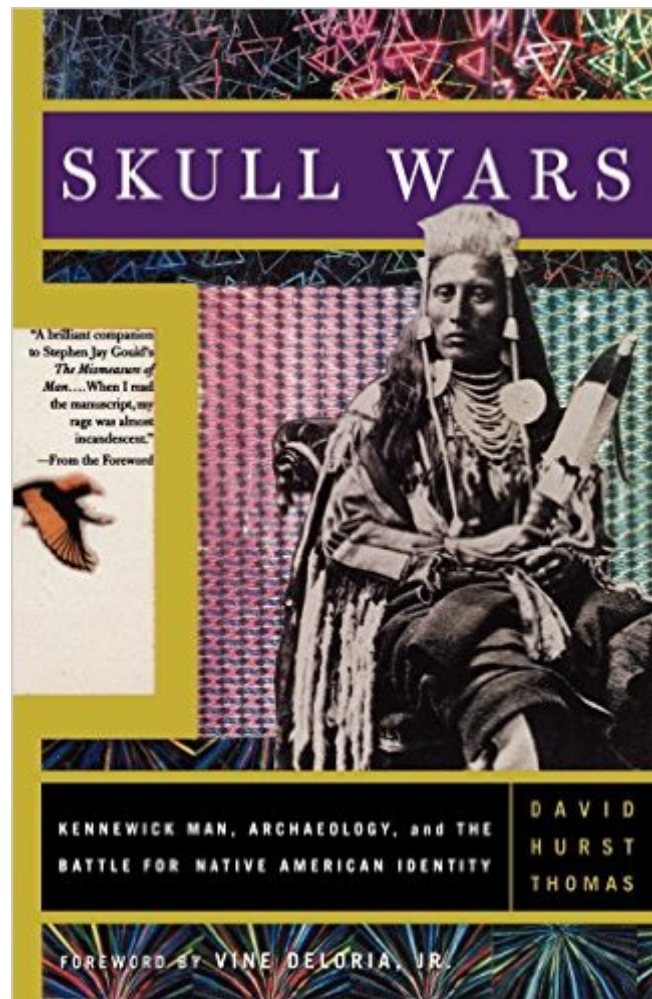


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Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, And The Battle For Native American Identity



Synopsis

The 1996 discovery, near Kennewick, Washington, of a 9,000-year-old Caucasoid skeleton brought more to the surface than bones. The explosive controversy and resulting lawsuit also raised a far more fundamental question: Who owns history? Many Indians see archeologists as desecrators of tribal rites and traditions; archeologists see their livelihoods and science threatened by the 1990 Federal reparation law, which gives tribes control over remains in their traditional territories. In this new work, Thomas charts the riveting story of this lawsuit, the archeologists' deteriorating relations with American Indians, and the rise of scientific archeology. His telling of the tale gains extra credence from his own reputation as a leader in building cooperation between the two sides.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The historical perspective that is the core of David's book makes the positions of the adversaries in the Kennewick Man dispute more understandable. I expected a telling of the controversy surrounding Kennewick Man, and perhaps some suggestions about what the remains mean to theories concerning the peopling of the New World. What I got was a lucid history of the stormy relationship between Native Americans and archaeologists that forms a good part of the background for the Kennewick Man controversy. David goes some distance (maybe too far) to be charitable to all the players in this scientific soap opera. He makes it clear, however, that Native American remains are part of Native American history and identity, not specimens to be mined for cranial measurements and loopy inferences about intellectual capability. I am left with a nagging

question that David doesn't address, but is at the center of this controversy: how do we KNOW the affiliation of human remains? Surely NAGPRA can't ascertain affiliation, although it can apparently assign it. In the absence of some rigorous examination of remains by qualified individuals we are left with the prospect of conflicting claims that characterizes "Kennewick Man: The Soap". If affiliation is determined by legislative fiat or dueling attorneys, we all lose. Classifying remains as Native American because they are found in North America does some violence to common sense - are Toyotas indigenous because we find them here? Vine DeLoria's views notwithstanding, the peopling of the New World remains a story to be told. It is possible that the Americas were peopled more than once by groups from parts of the world that conventional wisdom has long dismissed. David closes his book with the account of a collaborative project in Alaska that offers a real alternative to the disputes surrounding Kennewick Man. Hopefully such cooperation will be a model for archaeological research, and the picture of Native American prehistory that it renders will be more complete because of its inclusiveness. All in all, a superb read that encourages us to examine our motives and to recall the obscenities that have occurred in the past, and almost certainly will occur again, for "Science".

Skull Wars is a superb read - engagingly written and forcefully presented - it has relevance well beyond the anthropological and Native American communities. Thomas' interweaving of history, American socio-political history and the emergence of social sciences as practiced in the US is fascinating. He's packed an amazing amount of research into this volume. I learned much and disagree with little. Coming to terms with the issue of race in this country is still in many ways largely intractable, but made much more complex by issues of class. When compounded with the Native American experience the complexities are even more magnified. The issues confronted in Skull Wars are particularly germane for those Native American groups that have retained some semblance of generational continuity. Thomas accurately touches on the "top down" weaknesses of the implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Thomas clearly articulates that there is not a one-size fits all approach to accommodating and reconciling the concerns of legitimately affected Native Americans and the archaeological community. The positive examples at the end of the book serve as models for much of the country. I hope Skull Wars reaches the wide audience it deserves. I enthusiastically recommend it.

Dr. Thomas' discussion on pages 57-58 of the Army Medical Museum's role in collecting human remains is misleading. The Museum (now the National Museum of Health & Medicine) was

established in 1862, during the American Civil War, to begin the study of military medicine and surgery in wartime. It was not established at the urging of Professor Agassiz. US Army Surgeon General Hammond's orders pertained specifically to collecting the remains of Union and Confederate soldiers, who were overwhelmingly white, to study surgery before the era of x-rays or aseptic surgery. Thousands of specimens were sent into the Museum, including General Daniel Sickles' leg, which he personally had shipped after it was struck by a cannon ball and amputated. The specimens were studied and used to compile the six-volume study, *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*. After the war, the Museum did expand its collecting focus and collected Indian anthropological artifacts and remains. The artifacts were deposited with the Smithsonian Institution, based on an agreement the Smithsonian proposed in 1869. Human remains were transferred to the Medical Museum, where they were kept and studied side by side with those of American soldiers. The Museum continued collecting Native American remains until the late nineteenth century when the role was returned to the Smithsonian Institution, where it remains today. The star rating was insisted on by 's computer - this note only pertains to Dr. Thomas' pages on the Army Medical Museum. Michael Rhode, Archivist National Museum of Health & Medicine

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