

CHAPTER 6 — The Kennewick Man, Science Versus Culture

Radiocarbon dating - the determination of the age of old material by means of the content of carbon 14

NAGPRA - passed in 1990 to ensure that any materials found on federal lands associated with Native American culture would be returned to the respective tribes

Artifacts - object of human workmanship

ARPA - passed in 1979 to protect resources and sites located on federal and Indian lands

Populated - inhabited or occupied

Theories - explanations

Multiple - more than one

Migrations - moving from one place to another

In 1996, two boating fans watching a race on the Columbia River found a human skull near the edge of the river bank. This discovery sparked an investigation, during which a nearly complete human skeleton was discovered. The skeleton, found near Kennewick, Washington, was named the Kennewick Man. Radiocarbon dating suggests that he is over 9,000 years old.

Local Indian tribes are claiming rights to the Kennewick Man. They demand that the bones be returned to them for proper burial, which is an important part of Native American culture. Their position is supported by the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The NAGPRA declares that all artifacts found on federal land must be returned to the Indian tribes.

Scientists also are claiming rights to the skeleton. Their position is supported by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). ARPA states that artifacts are to be given to skilled scientists for study. Scientists are eager to study the Kennewick Man because his bones could shed light on the debate over how the Americas were populated. Scientists once thought that people arrived in America by walking from Asia over the Bering Strait. Newer theories suggest multiple migrations from many different places.

Ownership of the Kennewick Man skeleton is not settled. Tribes and scientists will most likely argue over the remains for years to come. Who do you think should have the remains of the Kennewick Man? Explain why.