

# JUAN NEGRIN

Guadalajara, Jalisco, México  
April 23, 1992

Ms. Karen J. Hanson, Ph. D.  
Chair, Committee on Ethics  
AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY ASSOCIATION  
224 Village Road  
South Orange, New Jersey 07079

Dear Dr. Hanson:

Though not as an anthropologist, I write you as an ethnographer who has spent the last 20 years working with the Huichol tribe(s) of Mexico. I am appealing to you, because I am deeply disturbed by the activities of Peter T. Furst, a Doctor in Anthropology. I believe that Dr. Furst's distortions about my work in his unsolicited letter to Cynthia Parzych Publishing, Inc., were intended to damage my reputation and prevent publication of my book. Because Dr. Furst's conduct appears to violate the American Anthropological Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility, I am requesting that a Preliminary Analysis Subcommittee be convened to review the facts and recommend appropriate action by the Association.

I believe that Dr. Furst's letter of June 16, 1990 (which is enclosed) violates Section III. A. of the Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility. This section stipulates that:

Anthropologists must not behave in ways that jeopardize either their own or others' future research or professional employment. It is their responsibility to act in ways consistent with commitments to honesty, open inquiry...

My first English book, published in 1975, was called *The Huichol Creation of the World*. It was illustrated by the work of two native artists, whose explanations I translated. In this vein, I was very pleased in 1986 to be able to present the work of five master artists at the Museum of Modern Art of Mexico City. At that time, I wrote one of my four Spanish essays published so far, illustrated by fine examples of contemporary Huichol art.

When Dr. Furst writes: "I am also deeply disturbed by Negrin's promotion of one Huichol artist, admittedly one of the best, but by no means the only one."... can you imagine that Furst only wrote about and illustrated the work one yarn painter: Ramón Medina, yet he projects on me what he in fact did? The simplest explanation is defamation. Another is that Dr. Furst is so ignorant of what occurs in the field of his own chosen specialty: the Huichol and their art, that he knows not even about exhibits that I organized with 50 yarn paintings I collected from 5 artists and interpreted. Yet the show went to the Tropenmuseum in Holland, the Ubersee in Bremen, Ethnographic museums of Denmark and Sweden, and to the Mexican Cultural Center in Paris. Catalogues illustrating the 50 pieces

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were published in Swedish and French along with a text which I had originally published in the UNESCO Courier 1979, printed in 20 languages. Not to be exhaustive, I wrote another essay in Spanish, published by the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History (1977). Therein, I illustrate the work of three artists. Assuming Dr. Furst does not know about any of my work, why does he take on the role of the expert, essentially dismissing what he has comfortably stayed away from.

Nonetheless political, ecological and survival oriented fieldwork, on behalf of several Huichol Communities, has been my overwhelming task since early 1979. Since 1984, I have formed and been the President of two non profit organizations. I have worked with the written backing of hundreds of Huichol and their leaders. Important organizations and foundations from Austria, Germany, Holland and the U.S. have contributed funds for my work against deforestation, for improving health and self sufficiency. I doubt that Dr. Furst has ever seen the site of carpentry workshops I helped set up in three Communities, or to the sites of two weaving workshops. Why should they exist for one who does not know the people or the areas in question? But why should he demean them! My efforts to free the Huichol in general from corrupt leadership have even taken me to trial, as the Mexican press can testify in numerous published articles. But, I have so far won the acclaim of Huichol internal assemblies and a few awards from Mexican institutions, once opposed to me.

Then again, I had a direct encounter with Professor Furst in 1980, at Harvard's Gund Hall, where I had given a lengthy lecture. Dr. Richard Evans Schultes took me aside to meet Furst. The latter had attended my lecture and, claiming to have enjoyed it, invited me to pursue my studies under his guidance. I was too busy with social programs, as I let him know, but I never expected him to change his opinion about my work so drastically.

When Dr Furst postponed the publication of my book with his slanders, I responded to Ms. Cynthia Parzych, the publisher, hoping that the projected book would not be blocked by undocumented allegations. However, I never heard from the publisher afterwards. It is a shame, because I, on the other hand, can prove all the statements I am making, with catalogues, books, videotapes, community sealed documents and articles written by others and myself. I also believe that Dr. Furst never did valid fieldwork among the Huichol in any of their five 'Communities', since he makes no mention of their contemporary social, political, religious or economic organization. On the other hand, he lionizes the role and function of one semi-mythical shaman, yet, this 'shaman' has no ties to any ceremonial center, where one would expect an experienced shaman to be required to serve in a number of ways, over the years. The ethnographic context, beyond this shaman's immediate family, is drawn from the texts of anthropologists, who actually worked in the Huichol Communities, well before Furst found his informants.

My strong intimation is that Dr. Furst did not want me to publish a new text in English for fear I might cast serious doubts on some of his purported scholarship. Thus, he brandishes anthropology as a weapon against one who has never claimed to be one. However, I was amazed that my lack of a title should be deemed sufficient to bury my writings out of sight. Certainly that cannot be in the best interest of Anthropology! Or do anthropologists not also draw on the insights of non-anthropologists?!

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For my part, I became well acquainted with Huichol yarn painters between 1970 and 1980. I met them in their natural environment, which was in the ghettos of large cities (Tepic, Guadalajara) and a few agricultural villages not far from the tourist market for ethnic curiosities. That is where I heard of Peter Furst's Ramón Medina, not as some great shaman, but as a very talented yarn-painter. As a fellow craftsman who had been sponsored for a while by some well-heeled Americans. However, he was killed too soon thereafter to enjoy his good fortune. I have always wondered why Peter Furst never described explicitly the environment or social context of the Huichol emigre to which his informant belonged, where he was known and is still remembered by some colleagues.

Dr. Fursts' writings are frequently, as presumptuous as they are false. One good example is the way he claims to have led to the creation of meaningful yarn-paintings. Stating that before then, they were essentially decorative. Yet, consider that their inspiration hails from smaller yarn-paintings, taken as votive offerings, with designs symbolic of the power and history of ancestral deities invoked in sacred spots. However, these spots replete with offerings deposited by hundreds of Huichol every year are never described by an anthropological expert on ... yarn-paintings that have genuine meaning! Furst must also ignore collections of genuine and meaningful yarn-paintings in and out of Mexico, before his research came to light.

I can demonstrate in many ways that Dr. Furst knows sorely little about the Huichol subject. Firstly because he makes it clear, in his film about the peyote pilgrimage ("To Find Our Life") and in his texts, that he does not know the Huichol who live up in their mountain refuges: ie. the vast majority. Having been six times on peyote pilgrimages with the Huichol, I find it astonishing to see a Huichol sitting on a shaman's chair at the climax of an arduous walk. Only under the guise of Hollywood staging can I imagine such a mockery! The Huichol carry large baskets for provisions and the peyote harvest, not chairs! To the Huichol anybody who has made his presence felt, because of a protracted interest in them or their land, becomes an impurity imbedded in their own minds as noteworthy. However, I doubt an anthropologist could find an imprint of Drs. Furst and Meyerhoff (his co-researcher) anywhere in the five Huichol Communities extant today. My research, and later social work, among the Huichol who live in distant mountain Communities have put me in relatively close contact with hundreds of Huichol. Some of their most prominent leaders and famous shamans are openly associated with me, since the mid 70's. They have quite a store of oral history, yet I have never heard any reference among them to remarkable meetings with Pedro Furst and associates, or his yarn-painter/shaman.

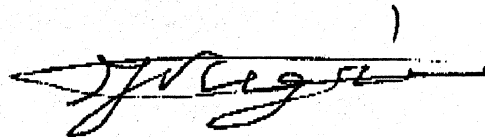
This is not meant to be an expose on Dr. Peter T. Furst, partly because there are full-fledged Anthropologists out there who are better equipped than I am to expose some of the errors which anthropologists should avoid. My Mexican friends involved with natives and anyone who has worked with the Huichol, wonder why some famed American anthropologists flesh up their essays more with fantasy than with facts. We are better off reading directly the late 19th Century books of Carl Lumholtz, who is heavily quoted by Dr. Furst (whenever his shaman's designs or allusions needed solid grounding).

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What would truly shake the undersigned and many scholars would be to see Dr. Furst so intimidate publishers and even writers that he could become an effective censor of studies on the Huichol. One expects intimidation and lies to endanger free expression and research under Communist or Fascist regimes. But I hope the American Anthropological Association's Ethics Committee, which you honorably chair, would object to Dr. Furst's tactics against the undersigned. Likewise, I am shocked that he is using similar tactics of defamation against scholars like Jay C. Fikes, Ph.D in Anthropology, whose work in the field I can vouch for. Many Huichol would undoubtedly attest to this reality, as well.

I trust you may have already read some previous material from Dr. Fikes himself. Please excuse me for taking up your attention, but this is hopefully the proper time to assure you of my willingness to assist you in any way you see fit. As a seeker of the truth, I direct this to the principal spokesperson of a Committee of professional seekers and divulgers of said truths. Let me know if I should address this complaint to some other group or person, if necessary. In any case, I will be grateful if you let me know this letter did reach you.

Sincerely,



JUAN NEGRIN FETTER

Enclosures: Peter T. Furst's denunciation of a book I was hoping to see published.  
An Autobiographical Sketch of Juan Negrin

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