

4023 Peppertree Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20906
April 15, 1992

Karen J. Hanson, Ph. D.
Chair, Committee on Ethics
American Anthropological Association
224 Village Road
South Orange, New Jersey 07079

RE: Request for Ethics Inquiry Regarding Actions of
Peter T. Furst, Ph. D.

Dear Dr. Hanson:

Thank you very much for providing me with a copy of the American Anthropological Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility, as amended through October 1990. As set forth in greater detail below, I believe that my professional work and reputation have been and continue to be adversely affected by the conduct of Dr. Peter T. Furst, conduct which I believe to be contrary to the Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility (PPR), as I understand them. I hereby request that an official enquiry be undertaken and that a Preliminary Analysis Subcommittee be convened to review the facts and recommend appropriate action by the Association.

Allow me to begin by stating that I received my Ph. D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan in 1985 and have been a member of the Association since, I believe, at least 1981. My dissertation was entitled Huichol Indian Identity and Adaptation. Since 1985, I have continued my study of Huichol culture, particularly with respect to the validity of the published results of earlier Huichol Indian research conducted by Dr. Peter T. Furst and the late Dr. Barbara Myerhoff. I have recently submitted a manuscript to a publisher which disputes much in Dr. Furst's publications about the Huichol Indians. Suffice it to say that my research calls into question the accuracy of a number of Dr. Furst's statements on this subject.

The purpose of this ethics complaint is not to have the Committee on Ethics decide whether my Huichol research or that of Dr. Furst is accurate. Rather, I believe that Dr. Furst's actions in response to my requests for information regarding his research, as well as his actions following receipt of a copy of my book manuscript, are inconsistent with his obligations under the PPR.

More specifically, I believe that Dr. Furst's actions evidence a violation of PPR Section III. A., which provides in part:

(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 ...

* * *

Anthropologists should, furthermore, refrain from transmitting, and resist the use of, information irrelevant to professional performance in personnel actions.

As the Epilogue to the PPR provides, when an anthropologist, by his or her actions, jeopardizes professional colleagues or otherwise betrays professional commitments, the AAA may legitimately inquire into those actions and take such measures as may be appropriate.

In response to my numerous attempts to obtain information concerning his research among the Huichol, Dr. Furst did not, in my opinion, display a commitment to "open inquiry." Rather, he responded by (a) labeling my work unscholarly and defamatory, without pointing to any specific, substantive problems he found, and (b) impugning my character, ultimately attempting to cause my employer at the time, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), to terminate my position.

In a letter to me dated June 16, 1989 (enclosed herewith), Dr. Furst responded to one of my letters seeking information by (a) threatening me with a lawsuit, (b) stating that he was initiating a formal ethics inquiry with the Association (which I do not believe he ever did), and (c) closing with "I trust you have a good lawyer."

In his letter to me dated August 27, 1990 (enclosed herewith), which shows copies to three other individuals including Mr. Joseph Volk, the executive director of the FCNL (i.e., my employer at the time), Dr. Furst recounted his disgust with my work, stated incorrectly that I had attempted to "force the cancellation of the recent Huichol festival in Santa Fe," and stated that he had "no choice" but to take me before the Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility of the Association (again, I believe this was an attempt at intimidation, a threat that was never carried out). Further, the final paragraph of his August 27, 1990 letter displays an explicit intention to impact adversely my continued employment at FCNL.

Two days later, in his letter of August 29, 1990 to Joseph Volk at FCNL (enclosed herewith), Dr. Furst states directly to my employer that, although he had previously decided to "sit back and see how things worked out..." and not to "cause (me) difficulties" in my new job, he had "reassess (ed) the situation" and, in effect, was now seeking to cause me great difficulty.

Dr. Furst followed his August 29 letter with a telephone

call to Mr. Volk on September 5, 1990. I believe that Dr. Furst stated, incorrectly, that representing FCNL, I had attempted to force the cancellation of the Huichol festival in Santa Fe. Letters from the Director of the Museum of International Folk Art, Charlene Cerny, dated November 9, 1990 and January 7, 1991 (both enclosed herewith) demonstrate the falsity of Dr. Furst's allegations. Unfortunately, this type of accusation, communicated by letter and telephone to my employer, in concert with Dr. Furst's threat of an Association Ethics Committee investigation, was not well received.

My employment with FCNL was terminated in January 1991. Irrespective of whether or not Dr. Furst's complaints about me contributed to that termination, it is clear from his letters to me and to Mr. Volk that Dr. Furst was blatantly attempting to influence adversely my employer's view of my professionalism.

Finally, and most recently, Dr. Furst wrote a letter dated April 1, 1992 (enclosed herewith) to Jennifer Smith, the managing editor of Madison Books, the publisher which has agreed to publish my book, Carlos Castaneda, Academic Opportunism, and the Psychedelic Sixties. Dr. Furst's letter states that he has read the galleys of my book and that he finds it:

... a tissue of undocumented suspicions, allegations, ludicrous "hypotheses," half-truths and misrepresentations of the facts, events and relationships...

...tedious, repetitious, full of internal contradictions and tortured reasoning that frequently lapses into incoherence.

Despite the foregoing, and other than a general claim that nothing contained in the manuscript is true, Dr. Furst offers not a single rebuttal of any statement about his Huichol research contained in my book. He as much admits that the purpose of his letter is not to provide rebuttal, but rather to threaten the publisher with a lawsuit for libel and defamation of character. He states:

There are so many errors of dates and names, misreadings, inventions, and perversions of history and easily verifiable facts that an exhaustive reply would require a document of at least equal length. I am far too busy for that. In any case, this is not the proper forum. Nor is this the principal issue.

The issue, rather, is libel and defamation of character. ...

I leave it up to you whether or not to go ahead with publication. However, you may take this as formal notice that publication will result in a suit for substantial damages for defamation of character, slander and libel, and, in my case, potential economic as well as professional harm.

It is rather ironic that, once again, Dr. Furst asserts that the issue will be "brought before the Ethics Committee and the

Executive Committee of the American Anthropological Association."

I submit that attempting to intimidate a potential scholarly critic of one's own research by threatening lawsuits against the critic and his publisher, by repeatedly threatening the critic with an ethical inquiry by the American Anthropological Association, and by attempting to poison an employer's opinion of the critic, is clearly contrary to the PPR admonitions that anthropologists not jeopardize others' professional employment, that anthropologists act in ways consistent with honesty and open inquiry, and that anthropologists refrain from transmitting information irrelevant to professional performance in personnel actions.

I believe that Dr. Furst's current residence address is 206 Highland Avenue, Devon, PA 19333. I also believe that he is associated with the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia.

I request that this matter be fully investigated. Please contact me if I can provide any further information at this time. I will be happy to appear before the Committee at any time.

Respectfully,

Jay Courtney Fikes

Jay Courtney Fikes, Ph. D.