

## Kim Tallbear, “Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity” (2013)

### Comprehension

1. What is Tallbear’s project/question/problem motivating this paper?
2. There are three sets of understandings of indigeneity attributed and explained in this text: those of **indigenous** peoples themselves, (settler) **colonial** understandings, and **genomic** understandings—each of which is of course diverse and contested. These “articulate” with each other in various ways.

Under each category, identify specific points in the text where Tallbear defines these understandings.

3a. Tallbear points out that “Native American DNA” (the title of her subsequent book) is used in two ways that are both techno-scientifically and politically different. DNA might pick out human populations, including from the ancient past, and it might identify particular genetic relations between individuals. Explain this difference.

3b. Tallbear analyzes how two anthropological narratives inform the “genomic articulation”: “the vanishing indigene,” and “we are all related, we are all African.” What are these narratives, what does Tallbear think is wrong with them, and how does genomic research sometimes reinforce them?

4. What is Tallbear’s conclusion?

### Discussion

1. After the publication of this article in 2013, The Ancient One/Kennewick Man (about 9000 years old) continued to provoke controversy. Anthropological study had revealed that he had a diet of marine animals, and drank glacial melt water, indicating he had died inland from his original habitat; his bone shape was variously described as “Caucasoid,” and later Ainu [a population in present-day Japan], or Polynesian. Some anthropologists contested whether the west coastal people of 9000 years ago were the ancestors of inland plateau peoples of contemporary Washington state.

In 2015, a lab in Denmark found that he was most closely genetically related to contemporary “Native American” people of the west coast. In September 2016 his return to the indigenous peoples of the region was legislated, and on February 18 2017 he was reburied with ceremony by representatives of several tribes of the Columbia Plateau.

We are not archeological anthropologists, so our ability to adjudicate this case is limited. But what does Tallbear say about what it shows? In the end, having “Native American DNA” was the claim that led to The Ancient One being returned to Indigenous people. What does this show about the epistemic power of genetic claims? Do you think this is politically the right decision, and was it made for the right reasons?

2. Several public controversies have erupted in recent years around the Indigenous status of public figures: US politician Elizabeth Warren has claimed to have Cherokee ancestors, and Canadian author Joseph Boyden has claimed diverse First Nations and Metis heritage. Both have had these claims challenged. As Tallbear points out, questions of status and enrollment are also everyday political questions for many Indigenous peoples. What concerns about the use of DNA testing in

contexts of tribal membership does Tallbear raise? Should there be a place for genetic relatedness in these citizenship decisions? Are the cases of public figures any different from cases of ordinary citizens?

3. Both Harder and Tallbear are sceptical about claims to objectivity made by those who want to fall back on genetic relatedness as a foolproof criterion of citizenship. How are they making the same arguments? Do they differ? How do the different political contexts of citizenship rules they discuss—membership in the nation-state or of indigenous peoples—shape their arguments?