

Notes on the Laetolil Find and Prehominid Racialiation

By NATHANIEL WEYL

In October 1975, anthropologist Mary Leakey announced that teeth and mandibles of 11 distinct hominids were found in volcanic ash beds in the East African Rift Valley about 25 miles south of the Olduvai Gorge. These finds have now been dated by stratification from 3.35 to 3.75 million years ago. The inference is that these large-brained, upright carnivores, who presumably ranged the savannas for a minimum time-span of 400,000 years, coexisted during that period with the more primitive *Australopithecus*. The Leakey find not only places the origins of *Homo erectus* almost a billion years further back in time than the 1972 discoveries of Richard Leakey (the son of Mary Leakey), but casts in doubt the theory that more advanced types of *Homo* systematically exterminated their more primitive contemporaries.

The Leakey discovery also sheds light on Carleton S. Coon's hypothesis of prehominid racialiation (that is to say, that human races evolved before the emergence of *Homo sapiens*), one which he cogently expounded in his 1962 volume, *The Origin of Races*, and which had been previously suggested by the late Franz Weidenreich. Coon's conjecture was received with unscholarly abuse and opprobrium by liberal anthropologists who feared that, if true, it would militate against the dominant ideological view that mankind is a single family and that racial differences are insignificant and superficial from an evolutionary standpoint.

It is rather early in the day to do more than offer tentative suggestions concerning the possible bearing of the most recent Leakey discoveries on the theory that mankind separated into distinct races before passing the *erectus* threshold and becoming *sapiens*. Since the Leakey discovery pushes back the origins of *Homo erectus* into even more distant frontiers of time, one might assume *a priori* that this made the Coon hypothesis improbable. However, the prehominid racialiation hypothesis does not concern the date when *Homo erectus* emerged from other *hominid* species, but rather the time when *Homo sapiens* arose from *Homo erectus*. This date is not in any way affected by the Laetolil discoveries.

What does seem most relevant is the inescapable conclusion that primitive and more advanced man-like types lived on the same continent for almost half a billion years. If this is a general rule, then the probability would seem considerable that Cro-Magnon man and Neanderthal man may have similarly coexisted

and interbred. The latter possibility seems reinforced by the discovery in Palestine of a Neanderthal skeleton in proximity to "modern Caucasoids" and other types "intermediate between both extremes."¹ If quantitatively significant interbreeding occurred among different types of prehomínids and *Homo erectus*, this could have resulted in different subspecies of hybrids from which the different races might have descended. Similar interbreeding between *erectus* and *sapiens* types would also provide a possible explanation for raiation.

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¹ Carleton S. Coon, *The Origin of Races*, Knopf, New York, 1962, p. 566.

Man, Ape or Big Foot ?

In the American Press there recently occurred the following news item which has been sent to us by Mrs Sylvia Castleton Weyl. We think it may be of interest to readers in view of papers published in this journal on the question of the Yeti.

(There is an omission in the printing of the item—which appeared in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* on 8th January 1976—which concerns the diet of “Oliver” but we have printed the account as it appears, with the exception of the photography, which shows a far more intelligent creature than an ape.)

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BEAST DEFIES DESCRIPTION

“Oliver has a bald pate even though he’s supposed to be only seven years old, and he has sharp pointed ears like Spock of TV fame.

“He’s hairy all over, but more hairy on his arms and legs than on his body. He stands very erect, and usually wears a grim expression. At least, that’s what Oliver looks like in the picture released here on Wednesday by Manhattan attorney Michael Miller, who claims to have purchased the “very strange creature” for \$8000 from an unidentified animal act in an unidentified upstate New York area.

“I have promised to protect everyone involved,” the 34-year-old Miller said in explaining why he’s so secretive about where Oliver came from.

“Miller says he plans to have Oliver put through various tests to determine whether he is an ape or a man-like creature—or even a young ‘Big Foot’.

“Big Foot is the creature who is America’s answer to the Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas, and his tracks have been reported so often there is now a Big Foot Information and Research Centre out in Oregon.

“Miller says he doesn’t think Oliver is a Big Foot, but that if he should turn out to be, his \$8,000 would turn out to be a pretty good investment.

Miller said after the tests on Oliver are completed, he plans to introduce him to the Press.

“... [line missing] vegetables, cheese and non-fatty meats.

“Oliver never walks on all fours, Miller says, and if he sees people sitting and talking, he may pull up a chair and sit down.

“But he doesn’t join in the conversation, Miller said. He just warbles.”