

The Tasaday Debate

Eliot Marshall's article about the American Anthropological Association's (AAA's) debate on the Tasaday (News & Comment, 1 Dec., p. 1113) was blatantly one-sided and so superficial it gave readers little understanding of the real issues. The AAA discussion lasted more than 8 hours, with an equal number of formal speakers on both sides of the question; yet seven anthropologists are quoted in the article who deny or doubt the Tasaday's authenticity and have never seen the people or habitat in question, while only one scholar is mentioned who described them as genuine. Five other anthropologists—each of whom has studied the Tasaday in their rain forest home—presented detailed evidence of the Tasaday's authenticity; and several other primary researchers in the audience also spoke in support of the Tasaday. None was mentioned in the article.

Marshall does not report that all five linguists (four of whom were present at the conference) who have studied Tasaday language in the field say it is a distinct speech related to but separate from that of their neighbors. Nor does he mention that the pro-Tasaday speakers included the distinguished ethnobotanist D. E. Yen, a member of the American Academy of Sciences who

has spent more than 6 weeks with the Tasaday and is convinced of their authenticity. Also neglected were the presentation by Amelia Rogel-Rara, who has just completed a year-long study of Tasaday genealogy that included more than 100 interviews in the field, and the paper by Jesus Peralta, curator of anthropology for the National Museum of the Philippines, who visited the Tasaday in 1971 and 1986 and has said he does not doubt the group lived in the forest for generations without agriculture.

Instead of going to the hard data, Marshall quotes Gerald Berreman's softly sarcastic references to "a rain forest Watergate" and to "knee slappers" in the literature and describes Richard Lee's five queries as "unanswered," which is incorrect. Each was covered in the debate and has been answered in publications for years.

Putting it simply, none of the anthropologists who say the Tasaday are not authentic have studied them in the field. Conversely, all 14 anthropologists and their half-dozen assistants who have done primary research acknowledge that much remains unknown, but agree the Tasaday are an authentic and distinct group of people who have dwelt in the rain forest for several generations—and still do. To quote the article about chaos in the same issue of *Science* (Software Reviews,

1 Dec., p. 1172), "there is no substitute for first-hand experience."

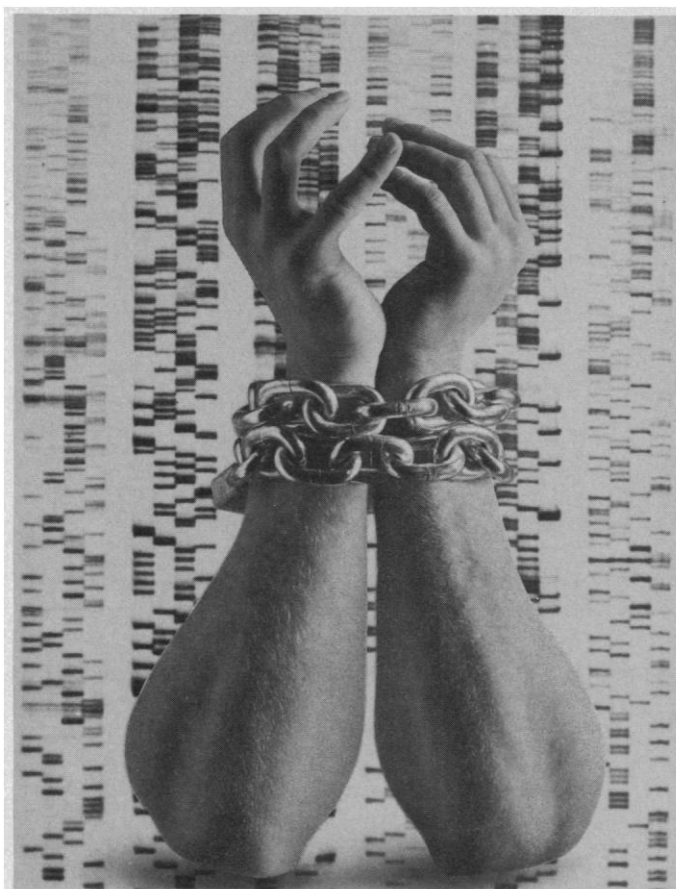
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SSC Magnet Development

My attention has been called to Mark Crawford's article "Lab reports put SSC magnets in limbo" (News & Comment, 25 Aug., p. 809), in which I am cited. Although I did make the statement attributed to me (about the need to gain some operational margin) in the course of a telephone conversation with Crawford, it was preceded and followed by other sentences that explained it and placed it in the context of a strongly positive judgment about the work performed by the Superconducting Super Collider magnet development team.

I object to the general tone of the article, which I found to be unduly negative, and I would like to dissociate myself from it.

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