

## THE WILLIAMS HYPOTHESIS ON THE PROBABLE SPREAD OF RESPECTED TRANSGENDER SHAMAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Source: Unpublished essay and world map, in the possession of Walter L. Williams

The archaeological evidence shows that the species *Homo sapiens* evolved in eastern Africa nearly 300,000 years ago. Humans almost went extinct about 72,000 years ago, during a severe extended drought in Africa. Probably only a few thousand individuals survived, but among these were those who were intelligent enough to leave the drought-ravaged region where they lived. In their search for food, these foragers moved along the coast of East Africa, slowly expanding their range across the coastline of Southern Asia. They remained mostly in the resource-rich zone where land and sea met, until they reached the landmass that is now partly submerged to become the islands of Indonesia. From there, they reached the coastlines of Australia and Melanesia by about 65,000 years ago.

The second major expansion of early humans occurred as some bands expanded into West Africa while others migrated across North Africa, avoiding the lifeless Sahara Desert by moving solely along the fertile Nile River valley to Egypt. Once they reached the Mediterranean coast, they moved into Southwest Asia and eventually into the grasslands around the Caspian Sea. In these grasslands of Central Asia, where grazing animals were plentiful, they perfected their hunting techniques using fire to scare game into a kill zone and then using stone-tipped throwable spears to kill their prey. Humans previously were mostly scavengers, but in Central Asia they became predatory hunters. From 45,000 to 40,000 years ago, as their population expanded, humans spread in all directions westward into Europe and eastward into Siberia, China, and India.

In 1997 I met with a Russian anthropologist who had done extensive ethnographic fieldwork study of the indigenous peoples of Central Asia, around the Caspian Sea. He did not speak English and I did not speak Russian, but both of us spoke German. We were able to communicate enough for me to understand his research findings that the indigenous Central Asians had longstanding traditions of respect for transgender shamans. The way he described those shamans was almost exactly the same characteristics as what I found in my research about indigenous Siberians, Native Alaskans, and American Indians.

This knowledge helped me develop the Williams Hypothesis about the spread of respected transgender shaman traditions and same-sex love, from this core area of early human expansion in Central Asia, into Southern Asia, Eastern Asia, and eventually into the Americas and the islands of the Pacific Ocean. The main branches are:

1. From Siberia across the Bering Land Bridge to Alaska 30,000 to 15,000 years ago, and from Alaska along the Pacific coastline and through the interior of North America and Central America, eventually reaching the Amazon Basin and down the west coast of South America by 12,000 years ago.

2. Migrations from China to Vietnam and to Korea, and eventually to Japan.
3. Seafarers moving by outrigger canoes from the island of Taiwan to the islands of the Philippines 5,000 years ago, and from the Philippines to the islands of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Polynesia between 4,000 to 1,000 years ago.
4. Merchant seafarers from India and Sri Lanka sailing to Sumatra, Java, and Bali by 2,000 years ago, and to the Khmer Empire (Cambodia and Thailand) by 1,500 years ago.

## CONCLUSION

The Williams hypothesis suggests that a core theme of human culture, that originated at least as early as 45,000 years ago (when migrations from Central Asia spread outward), was a high respect for individuals whom today would be called TRANSGENDER, often as religious leaders, healers, therapists, and teachers, and that this ancient tradition of respect is much older than the very recent (within only the last 3,000 years or so) negative attitudes that stigmatize gender and sexual diversity.

Archaeologists know that the grasslands of Central Asia were the core areas from which humans migrated westward to Europe and eastward to Siberia, to China, to India, and from each of those points further on. From India humans spread to Southeast Asia and the islands of Indonesia. From Siberia small bands of hunters spread to Alaska and from there down the west coast of North, Central, and South America. From China humans spread to Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. The Taiwanese perfected sailing boats that could withstand long distance travel across the South China Sea to the Philippines and Indonesia. And from there people of ancient Polynesian cultures spread across the Pacific Ocean to Tahiti, the Hawaiian Islands, and New Zealand.

The Williams Hypothesis suggests that this ancient tradition of respect for transgender people is a core human value, which has been perverted within the last two to three thousand years, but which is now reviving in many nations across the world. A major factor in this multi- cultural revitalization is the fact that indigenous peoples as geographically far removed from each other as traditionalist Native Americans and Polynesians have continued to hold onto those ancient traditions of respect, right up to the present.

This tradition of respect is a major gift from indigenous peoples to the world at the beginning of the upcoming 2000s. The major changes in human history have been the Agricultural Revolution (beginning at the last major era of global climate change, at the end of the Ice Ages, about 12,000 years ago), the Industrial Revolution (beginning about the year 1800 CE), and the Digital Revolution (which we are just now entering). In this context, transgender people can come out of the darkness of repression, cast off the shame that was imposed in earlier centuries, and take a leadership role in constructing a new gender and sexual morality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The proud and respected gender variant generation of young people coming into adulthood today can help humanity adapt to the new realities of a world undergoing a new era of climate change, while singing the

song, “We are an old people, we are a new people, we are a different people, better than before.”