

Prof. Tuija Pulkkinen  
Finnish Meteorological Institute  
P.O. Box 503  
00101 Helsinki  
Finland

Fribourg, 29th of September 2010

Dear Mrs. Pulkkinen,

In 2005, the European Geosciences Union (EGU) - whose President you are - has established the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*": "*in recognition of the scientific achievements of Louis Agassiz*" ([www.egu.eu](http://www.egu.eu)).

Those achievements are listed in the EGU's home-grown Louis-Agassiz-Biography, which suffers not only from minor inaccuracies<sup>1</sup>, but also from very serious omissions. These omissions concern Agassiz's scientific and his moral reputation.

The EGU's biography mentions Agassiz's interest in glaciology, but remains silent about the important fact that he used and understood the Ice-Age-Theory as part of Catastrophism and Creationism, two totally erroneous worldviews. Your biography remains equally silent about Agassiz's defence of polygenesis, another of his fundamental scientific errors. The EGU's biography is also silent of the fact that Agassiz opposed Darwin's *Origin of Species*, from 1859, date of its publication, up to 1873, the year Agassiz died. Almost all his colleagues turned away from him and his pseudo-scientific natural theology.

But the most intolerable omission of the EGU's biography of Louis Agassiz is his extreme racism, his unbelievable disdain and disgust for Afro-Americans and particularly for "*half-breeds*". Today's example for people Agassiz didn't want to see on earth is President Barack Obama.

Louis Agassiz advocated among other measures against "coloured" people: **Apartheid** (the "*negroes*" should settle in certain areas of the Southern States and there - separate from the "*whites*" - live with restricted rights) and **Ban on reproduction** (the "*half breeds*" should - "*by all means*" - be prevented from reproducing).

I presume that the EGU – when it established the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*" – has been totally unaware of Louis Agassiz' staunch racism. I also presume that those scientists who accepted the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*" have been equally unaware of Louis Agassiz's fanatic racism, which the Swiss Government condemned publicly in 2007, saying that Louis Agassiz "[...] *advocated racist views which go far beyond the racial interpretation paradigm that was usual at his time. There is no doubt that today's Federal Council condemns his racist ideology.*"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Your website says about Agassiz: "*In 1832 he was appointed professor of natural history at the University of Neuchâtel.*". The truth is that Louis Agassiz has never been a professor at the University of Neuchâtel. In 1832, there was no university at Neuchâtel, not even an Academy. The University of Neuchâtel was founded in 1909, 36 years after Agassiz passed away.

<sup>2</sup> [www.parlament.ch/cv-geschaefte](http://www.parlament.ch/cv-geschaefte) - auch zu finden unter: <http://www.louverture.ch/AGASSIZ.html>

From 26th of March 2010 till 6th of February 2011, the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, situated in your hometown Helsinki, shows an exhibition ("*It's a Set-Up*"), which showcases i.a. Sasha Huber's installation "*Rentyhorn*". Renty was one of the many slaves daguerreotyped for Louis Agassiz in 1850 and used by Agassiz in public conferences to prove the inferiority of Afro-Americans. Sasha Huber<sup>3</sup> published: *Rentyhorn*. (Helsinki: Kiasma, 2010) which includes my article on "*Louis Agassiz and Adolf Hitler*" (see attachment).

It is against this background that I should like to request, Madam President, the revision of the EGU's flawed Agassiz-Biography. An accurate biography of Louis Agassiz will certainly call into question the legitimacy of the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*": to honour scientists with a Medal named after one of the leading 19th century racists doesn't seem to be a good idea.

I am looking forward to receiving your comments and a positive answer.

Yours sincerely,

Hans Barth

A copy of the present letter and its attachment (Hans Barth: *Louis Agassiz and Adolf Hitler. Documents in racist mania.*) will be sent to Professors Alley, Raymond, Oerlemans, Wolff and Eicken, winners of the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*".

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<sup>3</sup> [www.sashahuber.com](http://www.sashahuber.com)

De : Tuija Pulkkinen <president@egu.eu>

Date : Wed, 20 Oct 2010 13:06:31 +0300

À : Hans Barth <hansbarth@bluewin.ch>

Cc : <charlie@ess.washington.edu>, <hajo.eicken@gi.alaska.edu>, <ewwo@bas.ac.uk>, <J.Oerlemans@uu.nl>, <ralley@essc.psu.edu>

Objet : Re: Agassiz

Dear Mr. Barth,

Thank you for your article about Louis Agassiz and your letter concerning the EGU medal named after Agassiz.

The EGU Council met during the past weekend, and this item was discussed by the Council. It became clear that the committee who established the Agassiz medal was fully aware of the issues that you bring up. However, they based the decision on the scientific contributions, which indeed remain significant.

The naming of medals within the EGU is based on the scientific contributions made by the person after whom the medal is nominated, and their value at the time when they were proposed. Agassiz made major contributions. He was the first to scientifically propose that the Earth had been subject to a past ice age. The Council after discussion felt that the contributions he made are sufficiently significant that there there is no grounds to take actions to rename the medal.

I, the EGU council and the EGU membership do not in any way want to disregard the clearly flawed conclusions he had on the issues of different races. We at EGU do not approve such opinions, and are happy that these opinions lie far in the past, his scientific achievements continue, in contrast, to influence sciences which is very much in the present.

So, again, thank you for making contact with the EGU, and I hope the above clarifies our justification for the decision.

Best regards,

Tuija Pulkkinen  
EGU President  
[president@egu.eu](mailto:president@egu.eu)

Prof. Tuija Pulkkinen  
Finnish Meteorological Institute  
P.O. Box 503  
00101 Helsinki  
Finland

Fribourg, 26th of October 2010

Dear Mrs. Pulkkinen,

In reply to my letter (29 Sept. 2010), you inform me by email (20 Oct. 2010) about the European Geosciences Union (EGU) Committee's standpoint, "*that there is no grounds to take actions to rename the medal*" named after Louis Agassiz, and this in spite of his extreme racism which appears to the EGU Committee as mere "*opinions*" lying "*far in the past*" and which the EGU – nevertheless - does "*not approve*".

The EGU being a Scientific Society is expected to search the truth and to correct its own evaluations immediately if proved to be flawed. It is on the basis of this expectation that I ask the EGU to consider the following facts and arguments.

### **The EGU's level of information.**

You write that in 2005 "*the committee who established the Agassiz medal was fully aware of the issues*" I brought up in my letter to you in 2010. **This seems to be wrong.**

The full extend of Agassiz's racist ideas and activities was unknown in 2005. Neither STANTON<sup>4</sup>, nor LURIE<sup>5</sup>, nor GOULD<sup>6</sup>, nor anybody else had published all that E.C. AGASSIZ<sup>7</sup>, Louis Agassiz second wife and biographer, had censored in 1885.

As I have shown in 2009<sup>8</sup>, Louis Agassiz - in his letters to S. G. Howe ("Freedmen's Inquiry Commission") - urges the US-Government to take **genocidal measures** (such as ban on procreation) against the "half-breeds" and he pushes towards **crimes against humanity** (such as ethnic cleansing, forced deportation and apartheid).

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<sup>4</sup> STANTON, William (1960) : The Leopard's Spots. Scientific attitudes toward race in America 1815-1859. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> LURIE, Edward (1955) : Louis Agassiz and the Races of Man. Publications in the Humanities. Number 12. From the Department of Humanities MIT, 1955. p. 227-242. (Reprinted from: ISIS, September 1954). LURIE, Edward (1960) : Louis Agassiz. A Life in Science. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> GOULD, Stephen Jay (1980) : The Panda's Thumb. More Reflections in Natural History. W.W. Norton & Com. New York, 1980. GOULD, Stephen Jay (1981) : The Mismeasure of Man. W.W. Norton & Com. New York, 1981.

<sup>7</sup> AGASSIZ, Elizabeth CARY, (ed.) (1885) : Louis Agassiz : His Life and Correspondence. Houghton Mifflin. Boston, New York, 1885.

<sup>8</sup> BARTH, Hans (2009) : Ein Rassist als Regierungsberater: Louis Agassiz' Briefe an die US-Regierung und ihre Zensur durch Frau Agassiz. Fribourg, 2009/10.

It was only on 19 Sept. 2007, two years after your Committee established the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*" (2005), that the Swiss Government publicly condemned Louis Agassiz's "*racist views which go far beyond the racial interpretation paradigm that was usual at his time*"<sup>9</sup>.

But let us consider for a second the worst case possible: that you are right and that the EGU Committee had been "*fully aware*" - as you are saying - of Agassiz criminal proposals. In that case, the establishing of an Agassiz medal must be considered a totally unethical step in favour of an extreme racist and propagator of crimes against humanity. Is the EGU Committee ready to take this responsibility?

### **Louis Agassiz's scientific contributions.**

You continue saying that the EGU Committee "*based the decision [to establish an Agassiz medal] on the scientific contributions [made by Agassiz], which indeed remain significant*".

Which contributions? The false theories of Creationism, of Catastrophism, of Polygenism? Agassiz is also known for combating till the end of his life (1873) Darwin's theory of evolution (1859) and this in total contrast to the scientific community of his time. If moral considerations alone are not decisive, how much more scientific humbug is needed for the EGU Committee "*to take actions to rename the medal*"?

You mention a single of Agassiz's contributions: "*He was the first to scientifically propose that the Earth had been subject to a past ice age*". You forgot to indicate that this sentence is a quotation. Understandable, as the source is a very poor one: the Wikipedia article about Louis Agassiz. It says: "*Agassiz was the first to scientifically propose that the Earth had been subject to a past ice age*". But unlike you, Wikipedia mentions its source: E.P. Evans: "*The Authorship of the Glacial Theory*", published in, believe it or not, in 1887. May I suggest a more recent and reliable publication: the excellent doctoral thesis presented by Tobias Krüger<sup>10</sup> in 2008, which shows once again that Louis Agassiz is by far not the creator of the ice-age-theory, only its propagandist. On this point – which seems to be so important for the EGU - Science historians are unanimous. Even Wikipedia, which you may prefer, says so (see article on "Ice Age").

Equally unanimous are Science historians when it comes to evaluate the scientific methodology Agassiz used and which allowed him to get forever trapped in so many fundamental errors. Amongst many, let me quote just one: the renowned Vice-President of the "Comité Français d'Histoire de la Géologie", Prof. Goulven Laurent, who writes about Agassiz: "Today, his approach to Nature is foreign to us and it is, to my understanding, **anti-scientific. As it was already in his time.**"<sup>11</sup> (my emphasis/my translation).

### **Racist "opinions" and "flawed conclusions".**

At the end of your reply you manage to turn Louis Agassiz's racist activism into a kind of academic, intellectual error. Advocating genocide and crimes against humanity is turned by you into "*clearly flawed conclusions he had on the issues of different races*". You don't use

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<sup>9</sup> [www.parlament.ch/cv-geschaefte](http://www.parlament.ch/cv-geschaefte) - See also: <http://www.louverture.ch/AGASSIZ.html>

<sup>10</sup> KRÜGER, Tobias (2008) : Die Entdeckung der Eiszeiten. Internationale Rezeption und Konsequenzen für das Verständnis der Klimageschichte. Schwabe Verlag. Basel, 2008. See also: KRÜGER, Tobias (2006) : Die Entdeckung der Eiszeiten. Internationale Rezeption und Konsequenzen für das Verständnis der Klimageschichte. In: Berner Historische Mitteilungen, 23. Jahrgang, 2006. p. 9-10. See also: MEULI, Kaspar (2006) : Wie der Heiliggeistpfarrer seine Schwäche fürs ewige Eis pflegte. In: UniPress, Das Wissenschaftsmagazin. Universität Bern. Abteilung Kommunikation. 130/2006. p. 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> LAURENT, Goulven (1979) : Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) : Fixisme et Idéologie, ou les raisons de croire au Fixisme quand on en a soi-même ruiné les fondements. In : Travaux du Comité français d'Histoire de la Géologie - Première série - (1979) (<http://www.anales.org/archives/cofrhigeo/agassiz-fixisme.html>)

the word racism, you don't speak about millions of people whom Agassiz denied human dignity, you don't say that your "Agassiz medal" is named after one of the leading racist of his time.

Agassiz's racist activities, which include public conferences on racial inferiority; studies done on slaves kept imprisoned in forced labour camps; ordering of daguerreotypes of male and female slaves who had to undress for him; showing such nude photographs in public lectures on racial inferiority; publishing books inciting people to racial hatred and discrimination; pressuring the US-Government to adopt genocidal measures and to organize crimes against humanity ... appears in your reply as: "*flawed conclusions [...] on the issues of different races*" and as: "*opinions*".

You "*at the EGU*" consider yourself "*happy that these opinions lie far in the past*". Saying that racism, promoted by Louis Agassiz, lies "*far in the past*", is historically wrong and morally irresponsible. What Agassiz advocated became everyday reality in the USA until recently, became murderous reality in South Africa's Apartheid, reappeared word-for-word in Hitler's Mein Kampf and was part of the ideology of those who organized the Holocaust. Millions of people suffer today from ideas and policies propagated by Louis Agassiz. The EGU saying that "*these opinions lie far in the past*" simply shows a total lack of ethics and of historical truthfulness.

It is on the basis of an entirely flawed historical and moral assessment that the EGU Committee decided to establish the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*".

Finally, you say that Louis Agassiz's "*scientific achievements continue, in contrast, to influence sciences which is very much in the present*". Well, there is no contrast at all: Louis Agassiz criminal racism continues to influence our present time, just as his bigoted creationism does. Both calamities are "*very much in the present*".

The EGU's "Louis Agassiz Medal" is a **Medal of Shame**, which honours a man whose moral (and scientific) record should be reason enough for those who accepted the Medal to send it back.

Yours sincerely,

Hans Barth

Attached are:

My first letter (29<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2010) and

My article on: Louis Agassiz and Adolf Hitler. Documents in racist mania. In: Sasha HUBER, Rentyhorn. Kiasma. Helsinki, 2010. pp. 22-32.

In view of the fact that the topic is of general interest, a copy of my first and my present letter and my article on Agassiz and Hitler will be sent to EGU Executive Board (Vice-President Donald Bruce Dingwell, General Secretary Hans Thybo, Treasurer Roland Schlich); Professors Alley, Raymond, Oerlemans, Wolff and Eicken, winners of the "*Louis Agassiz Medal*"; André Schaaf, Président de la Société Géologique de France; Geological Society of Sweden; Andreas Lemark, Danish Geophysical Society; Herbert Fischer, Deutsche Meteorologische Gesellschaft; Japanese Geoscience Union; European Association of Geoscientists & Engineers; World Meteorological Organization; The Geological Society of America; American Geophysical Union.