

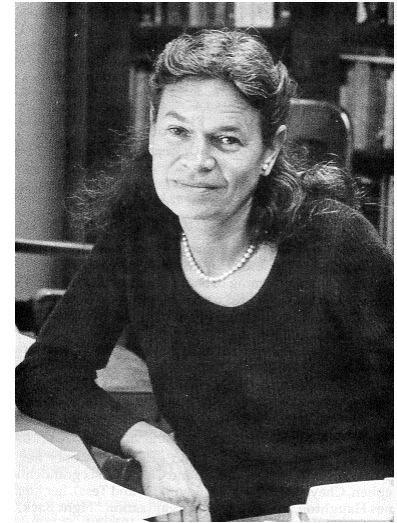
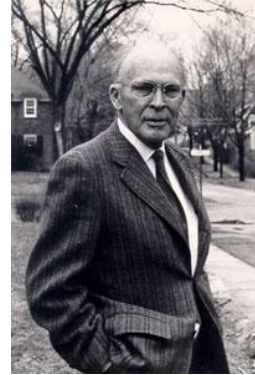
# Neoevolutionism

Leslie White

Julian Steward

# Neoevolutionism

- 20<sup>th</sup> century evolutionists proposed a series of explicit, scientific laws linking cultural change to different spheres of material existence.
- Although clearly drawing upon ideas of Marx and Engels, American anthropologists could not emphasize Marxist ideas due to reactionary politics.
  - Instead they emphasized connections to Tylor and Morgan.

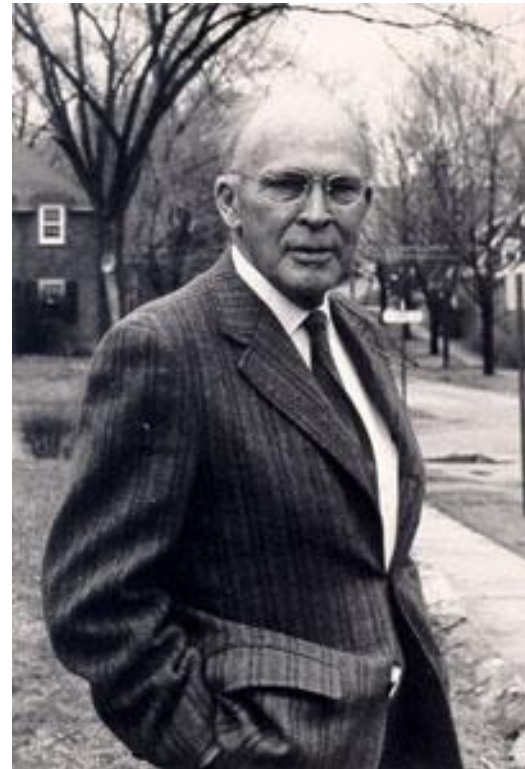


# Neoevolutionism

- Resurgence of evolutionism was much more apparent in U.S. than in Britain.
- Idea of looking for systematic cultural changes through time fit in better with American anthropology because of its inclusion of archaeology.
- Most important contribution was concern with the ***causes of change rather than mere historical reconstructions.***
- Changes in modes of production have consequences for other arenas of culture.
  - Material factors given causal priority

# Leslie White (1900-1975)

- *Personality and Culture* 1925
- *A Problem in Kinship Terminology* 1939
- *The Pueblo of Santa Ana* 1942
- *Energy and the Evolution of Culture* 1943
- *Diffusion Versus Evolution: An Anti-evolutionist Fallacy* 1945
- *The Expansion of the Scope of Science* 1947
- *Evolutionism in Cultural Anthropology: A Rejoinder* 1947
- *The Science of Culture* 1949
- *The Evolution of Culture* 1959
- *The Ethnology and Ethnography of Franz Boas* 1963
- *The Concept of Culture* 1973



# Leslie White

- Ph.D. dissertation in 1927 on Medicine Societies of the Southwest from University of Chicago.
- Taught by Edward Sapir.
- Taught at University of Buffalo & University of Michigan.
- Students included Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service.
- A converted Boasian who went back to Morgan's ideas of evolutionism after reading *League of the Iroquois*.
- Culture is based upon symbols and uniquely human ability to symbolize.
- White calls science of culture "culturology"
  - Claims that "culture grows out of culture"
- For White, culture cannot be explained biologically or psychologically, but only in terms of itself.

# Leslie White

- Views culture as an organized and integrated system that is further distinguished into subsystems:
  - technological
  - sociological
  - ideological
- These systems are interrelated, but they are not equal in their degree of influence.
- *Primary role is played by the technological system.*
  - It is both primary and basic in importance.
  - All human life and culture rest and depend upon it.

# Leslie White

*“We may view a cultural system as a series of three horizontal strata: the technological layer on the bottom, the philosophical layer on the top, and the sociological stratum in between.*

These positions express their respective roles in the culture process. The technological system is basic and primary. Social systems are functions of technologies; and philosophies express technological forces and reflect social systems. The technological factor is therefore the determinant of the cultural system as a whole”

# Leslie White

- *Technology is key to understanding growth & development of human culture.*
- Culture is means by which humans carry on the life process.
  - It is a mechanism for providing subsistence, protection, offense and defense, social regulation, cosmic adjustment and recreation.
- To serve these needs, energy is required.
- Primary function of culture is to harness and control energy so that it may be put to work in man's service.

# Leslie White

- White's basic Law of Cultural Evolution:
  - *Culture evolves as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is increased or as the efficiency of the instrumental means of putting energy to work is increased.*
- His formula is as follows:
- $E \times T = C$
- C = degree of cultural evolution
- E = amount of energy harnessed per capita per year
- T = quality or efficiency of tools employed in the expenditure of energy.

# Leslie White

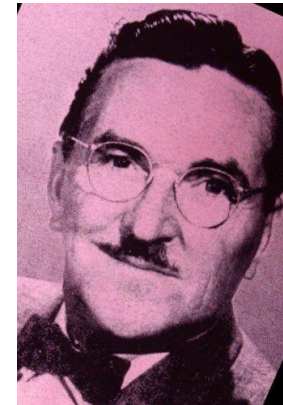
- Culture is primarily a mechanism for harnessing energy & putting it to work in the service of man
  - secondarily channels & regulates behavior not directly concerned with subsistence and offense and defense.
- Therefore, social systems are determined by technological systems.
- Philosophies and arts express experience as it is defined by technology and refracted by social systems.

# Julian Steward (1902 - 1972)

- 1929 *Diffusion & Independent Invention: A Critique of Logic.*
- 1936 *The Economic and Social Basis of Primitive Bands.*
- 1937 *Ecological Aspects of Southwestern Society.*
- 1938 *Basin Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups.*
- 1946-50 *Handbook of South American Indians* (ed).
- 1949 *Cultural Causality and Law: A Trial Formulation of Early Civilizations.*
- 1955 *Theory of Culture Change.*
- 1977 *Evolution and Ecology: Essays on Social Transformation* (Jane Steward and Robert Murphy, eds)



Julian Steward



Howard McNear,  
(Floyd the Barber)

# Julian Steward

- Another Boasian convert trained by Kroeber and Lowie at the University of California, Berkeley.
- Ph.D. dissertation in 1929 on ceremonial buffoon in American Indian cultures.
- Fieldwork in Great Basin among Shoshone and Northern Paiute.
- Heavily steeped in archaeology.
- Taught at Columbia University and University of Illinois.
- Students included Sid Mintz, Eric Wolf, Roy Rappaport, Stanley Diamond, Robert Manners, Morton Fried, & Robert Murphy.

# *Economic & Social Basis of Primitive Bands (1936)*

- 1st real attempt to show how interaction of culture & environment could be studied without reverting to simplistic environmental determinism or without falling back on purely historical or cultural explanations.
- Steward said that "... every cultural phenomenon is the product of some definite cause or causes" and "this is a necessary presupposition if anthropology is to be considered a science."

# *Economic & Social Basis of Primitive Bands (1936)*

- Steward attempts to:
  1. identify a cross culturally valid form of social organization
  2. explain the reasons for its occurrence.
- The form of social organization that Steward was trying to explain was that of the ***band***.
  - A politically autonomous groups of nuclear families that are small in number and which live by hunting and gathering.

## *Economic & Social Basis of Primitive Bands (1936)*

- After establishing regularity of this form of social organization cross culturally Steward went on to explain it by *low productivity of hunting & gathering techniques in harsh environments* which necessitated *low population densities & relatively small social groups* (less than 1 person/sq mi. and 30-50 persons/band).
- Social groups are necessarily small yet they are larger than nuclear family because of greater efficiency of larger group in subsistence pursuits & as protection in the event of feuds.

# *Economic & Social Basis of Primitive Bands (1936)*

- He then distinguished **two subtypes of bands – the patrilineal and the composite** – and showed how the size and nature of these hunting and gathering bands was related to the resources exploited.
- Marvin Harris notes that:
  - Not only did this formulation surpass crude environmental determinism, which makes no provision for cultural variables, but it also surpassed the form of human geography known as possibilism, in which the recognition of the cultural factor ends in a morass of indeterminacy. Steward was not merely saying that a particular combination of technology and environment made it possible for humans to create a particular type of social organization; the whole weight of his argument was in the direction of insisting that a similar techno-environmental relationship regularly caused a similar effect regardless of whether the people involved were "creatively inclined" or not" (Harris, 1968:667)

# *Basin Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups (1938)*

- Steward showed how even smaller size of social groups among Shoshone Indians was directly related to ecological circumstances in this desert area.
- Plant & animal foods were widely scattered & highly unpredictable
  - made sense for groups to be small & capable of functioning independently.
- Even smaller than 50-60 person patrilineal band.
- Nuclear family was primary unit of Shoshone society for 80-90% of year.
- Occasionally families would coalesce in order to cooperate for communal rabbit or antelope hunts.
- Such occasions also facilitated social activities such as visiting, gambling & dancing that were not possible during most of year.

# Julian Steward

- Steward later formalized his ideas on nature of human adaptation to environment and how this should be studied.
- In "***The Concept and Method of Cultural Ecology***," Steward claimed that

"cultural ecology presents both a problem and a method. The problem is to ascertain whether the adjustments of human societies to their environments require particular modes of behavior or whether they permit latitude for a certain range of possible behavior patterns"

# Julian Steward

- **3 procedures of cultural ecology:**

1. Analyze the **interrelationships of exploitative or productive technology and environment.**

- He says that "...technology includes a considerable part of what is often termed "material culture," but all features may not have been of equal importance" and "relevant environmental features depend upon the culture"

2. Analyze the **behavior patterns involved in the exploitation of a particular area** by means of a particular technology.

- This involves the division of labor in a society: who does what.
- "Some subsistence patterns impose very narrow limits on the general mode of life of the people while others allow considerable latitude" .

3. Ascertain the extent to which the behavior patterns entailed in exploiting the environment affect **other aspects of culture.**

- The extent to which productive activities influence other aspects of culture is always an empirical problem.

# Julian Steward

- “Although technology and environment prescribe that certain things must be done in certain ways if they are to be done at all, the extent to which these activities are functionally tied to other aspects of culture is a purely empirical problem...If it can be established that the productive arrangements permit great latitude in the sociocultural type, then historical influences may explain the particular type found.”

# Julian Steward

- In doing this for *particular* societies Steward hoped to be able to discover whether or not similar adjustments would occur in similar environments.
- Rather than be satisfied with simple correlations between social & cultural forms and the environment in which they are found, **Steward attempted to demonstrate causality by showing what he considered to be functional relationships** between natural resources & things such as population density, technology, settlement patterns, & social organization.

# Julian Steward

- **Multilinear evolution** – deals only with those limited parallels of form, function, and sequence which have empirical validity
  - No *a priori* scheme or laws.
- What is lost in universality is gained in concreteness and specificity.
- Typology must be developed.
- Specify cause and effect relationships.
- Propose hypotheses about a particular social phenomenon and the cause and effect
  - test hypotheses against independent case studies.

# Evolutionary typologies

- Famous example of band, tribe, chiefdom, state.
- Elman Service – *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective* (1962).
  - Band, tribe, chiefdom, state.
- Morton Fried – *The Evolution of Political Society* (1967).
  - Egalitarian, rank, stratified societies.
- Similar except that Fried questions the long term viability of tribes, saying they are an simply intermediate stage between bands and states.