IS LEWIS HENRY MORGAN OUTDATED?

Dr. Leslie White of the University of Michigan Anthropology Dept. spoke recently on the "Evolutionists and anti-evolutionists in anthropology." By the evolutionists he listed such men as Taylor, Spencer and Henry Morgan, **especially** Morgan. Chief among the anti-evolutionists, according to White, are Lowie, Franz Boas, Henry James, Fr. Schmidt, the contemporary Margaret Mead.

He began by defining the premises of the Evolutionists somewhat as follows: Human culture from the earliest times to the present day has passed through successive steps of development. By objective study, by research it is possible to show that this development proceeds through cause and effect or deterministic relationships. These causal factors can be named and in a sense measured and defined. Thus we associate human stages with such objective and decidedly materialistic elements as stone, bronze, copper, iron implements. When men learned to use and fashion any of these things, they were able to increase their material goods, to improve their standard of living — or at least to improve their surplus over and above what was needed to survive. This surplus provided the basis for a higher culture and so man's social life went up another rung. White called this approach in anthropology "scientific" because it permitted the drawing of generalizations or "laws" facilitating better insight into what happened and also enabling us to make predictions about the future. This, in brief, sums up the case for the evolutionists.

Now for the anti-evolutionists. They deny categorically the validity of generalizations, causal relations, determinism in anthropology or sociology. **They are bitter opponents of the Materialistic Schools.** They seek to refute Morgan et al by the "theory of diffusion," that is, they point out that nowhere does primitive society or higher cultures show development in one straight line through successive steps. Cultural traits are so diffused that the elements which Morgan associates with one stage can be shown to exist in lower and even higher so-called stages. Savages have in their culture some of the things which Morgan says ought to be manifest only among barbarians. Moreover, bronze instruments have been found in use among people who are still in the stage which the evolutionists call the stone age, iron among people who are supposed to be in the copper age. And so forth and so on. It is nonsense to try to discover any systematic cause and effect change to account for social development. Indeed, there is no such thing as development at all, argue the anti-evolutionists. All is hodge podge, confusion, hit or miss. White quoted from Lowie's last chapter to the effect that the more one studies anthropology the more one is impressed with the utter senselessness of trying to draw generalizations. Cultures just happen. Things come into being in a way that defies systematization. Any attempt to apply evolutionary yardsticks only lead to erroneous conclusions. Henry James taught that there is free will in the individual and he thought there is something equivalent in human cultures and that therefore it was pointless to look for determining principles. Instead of drawing principles and generalizing, one can only describe each culture for what it is and what it does. One must treat each culture separately. Hence the multi-lateral instead of the uni-lateral approach on the part of the anti-evolutionists.

This school accused Morgan and the other evolutionists of reading into anthropology principles borrowed from biology. Thus Spencer, according to them, took over the concept of evolution from biology and arbitrarily used it in human social

studies. So did Morgan. Even the concept "progress" is false, said the opponents of Morgan. Progress after all is subjective. There is no objective way of determining whether one culture is "higher" than another. White quoted one of them as saying that the dark ages was just as "high" or as "low" and no more so as our own age. Progress implies preference and who knows but that the primitive Negro in Africa prefers his way of life to ours. Thus the anti-evolutionists.

In dealing with their approach, White was merciless. He pointed out first of all that the school prevails today in almost every university, not only in America, but in Europe and even Japan. In fact — think of it! — the University of Chicago has gone so far in its anti-evolutionism that it now extends it to the biological sciences. Morgan is anathema to the theologians and vested interests, As White put it, if you accept the position of the evolutionists, then you will have to agree that we do not occupy the very apex of the social pyramid. You will have to agree that the place we hold will pass away and be replaced by another pinnacle. Our "American way of life" would not be final and given for all time. Vested interests do not like this. The Catholics and other religionists do not like it. And so they declare unrelenting war against Morgan and company. And they use all the shoddy intellectual methods they can muster. They misrepresent. For instance, Morgan never denied that there was diffusion in culture. How could he? Only an idiot would deny that people migrate and in migrating they both give to and borrow from other cultures. Morgan himself saw the Iriquois use firearms and other implements proper to a much higher stage of culture than their own. White says the anti-evolutionists have not even taken care to study carefully the works of those they would destroy. "Some of them seem not to have read Morgan at all." As for the charge that Spencer and Morgan borrowed the evolutionary concept arbitrarily from Darwin, that is nonsense. As the poetry of Lucretius proves, the idea of social evolution goes away back to ancient times. It was current among the great philosophers in France who flourished 100 years before Darwin.

White then pointed out something else. **Often when they deal with some specific culture concretely** the anti-evolutionists use deterministic criteria. "But they don't let their theoretical hand know what their practical hand is doing," said White. Try as they will to deny determinism and evolutionism, the reactionary (White's term) anthropologists cannot completely escape the consequences of research data. So some of them seek to provide a kind of watered down version of evolution. They call this Neo-evolution in anthropology. "It's supposed to be evolution and yet not evolution," says White. He ridiculed this terminology. "It's like talking about Neo-gravitation or Neo-erosion," he said.

He ended his talk by pointing out how useful the hypothesis of evolution has been in understanding the physical and the biological world. A method so fruitful is too valuable to be discarded. "Besides, the test is, does the concept stand up under verifiable experimentation?" This is the question. "And the accumulated data answer this question in the affirmative."

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BUILD A BETTER MOUSETRAP AND . . .

Rats or not, fifty occupants of a 23 room house in Detroit are not going to vacate as ordered by Judge Watts who condemned the building as unsanitary. The housing shortage does not make these people, all Negroes, anxious to look for another place to rent. "Sure, we have rats here, one mother said, but they aren't bad. If you make a noise, they run away."

Mrs. Susie Singleton, caretaker of the building, denied there were any rats, but admitted there might be a "few field mice." She added, "I have a mousetrap to take care of them."

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