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JULIAN HAYNES STEWARD

*1902—1972*

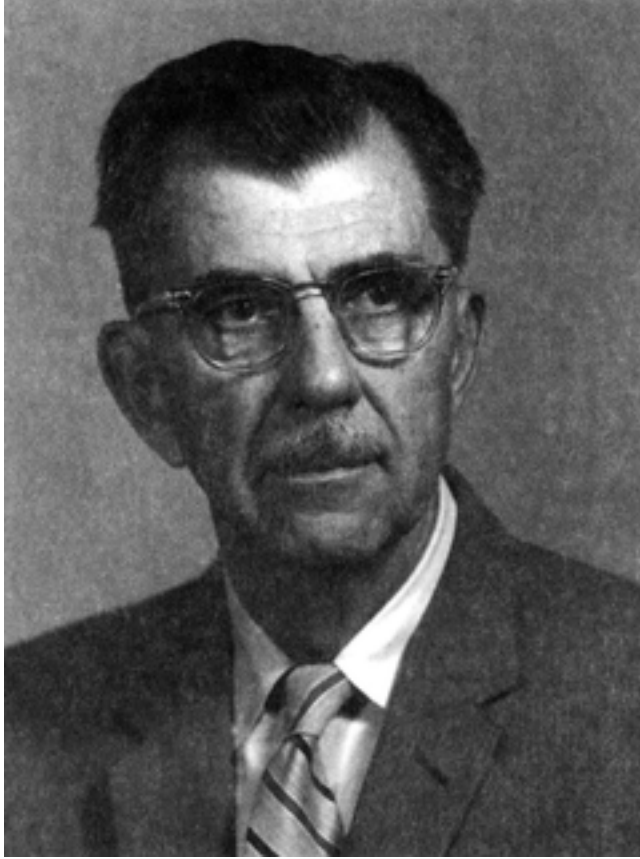
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*A Biographical Memoir by*  
ROBERT A. MANNERS

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*Biographical Memoir*

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*Julian H. Steward*

# JULIAN HAYNES STEWARD

*January 31, 1902–February 6, 1972*

BY ROBERT A. MANNERS

JULIAN HAYNES STEWARD, ANTHROPOLOGIST, was born in Washington, D.C., the son of Thomas G., chief of the Board of Examiners of the U.S. Patent Office, and Grace Garriott, whose brother, Edward Garriott, was chief forecaster of the U.S. Weather Bureau.

In an autobiographical sketch prepared for the National Academy of Sciences, Steward remarked that nothing in his family background or in his early education accounted for his later interest in anthropology. On the other hand, his school and neighborhood in the suburbs of Washington involved him in close association with the children of writers, senators, representatives, doctors, and “generally persons of some distinction” who apparently did contribute to a developing interest in intellectual matters.

When he was sixteen, Steward was admitted to the newly established Deep Springs Preparatory School (now Deep Springs College), a school located near Death Valley and devoted to the development of practical skills and to the promotion “of the highest well-being.” At this time, he said

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somewhat laconically, "I took this purpose seriously but did not know what to do about it." His time at Deep Springs exposed him to the lifeways of the local Paiute and Shoshoni Indians, an experience that lay partly dormant until his freshman year at the University of California, Berkeley, where he discovered academic anthropology in a course given jointly by Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, and Edward Gifford. The following year he transferred to Cornell where, in the absence of an anthropology faculty, he completed his undergraduate training in zoology and geology. Livingston Farrand, then president of Cornell and himself an anthropologist, nurtured Steward's continuing interest in anthropology—temporarily sidetracked by circumstances—and urged him to return to Berkeley and its reigning triumvirate for his doctorate in anthropology.

In 1928 Steward joined the faculty at the University of Michigan, where he gave the first course in anthropology ever given there. In 1930 he went to the University of Utah, where he taught and conducted considerable archeological research in Pueblid cultures until 1933. Accompanied by his wife, the former Jane Cannon, he spent the next year (1934) conducting research in Owens Valley, Death Valley, and northward through Nevada to Idaho and Oregon. In 1935 he left university teaching to take a position as associate anthropologist in the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, remaining there until 1946. During one year of his tenure at the BAE, he was loaned to the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the request of its director, John Collier, and assisted in the creation of programs for the reform of the BIA. The product, a radical transformation in the organization and functioning of the BIA, is usually referred to as a New Deal for American Indians. The experience was valuable, for it was there that Steward had a chance to examine the effectiveness of a fairly well-financed

program in applied anthropology and to observe at firsthand the practical as well as the theoretical significance of the relation between subcultures and the larger society of which they were a part—an issue that occupied a dominant place in his teaching, research, and writing for the remainder of his life and is the central theme of such major works as *Area Research: Theory and Practice*, *The People of Puerto Rico*, and the three-volume *Contemporary Change in Traditional Societies*, as well as a number of shorter pieces dealing with the study of nonisolated, nonself-sufficient cultures or part-cultures.

While at the BAE he set up and was the first director of the Institute of Social Anthropology, a branch of the Smithsonian Institution. During his last years at the BAE, Steward chaired a committee that reorganized the governance of the American Anthropological Association. He was also involved in the planning and establishment of the National Science Foundation and was instrumental in persuading Congress to appropriate funds for the creation of the Committee for the Recovery of Archeological Remains, subsequently the nation's River Basin Archeological Surveys Program, often referred to as the model and stimulus for salvage archeology in the United States.

In partnership with Wendell Bennett, Steward planned and helped to establish the Viru Valley Project in Peru, a research program whose contributions to theory in archeology and especially to the archeology of South America have been of major significance.

On the whole, and despite the wealth of Steward's contributions recorded during his years at the BAE, it is generally agreed that his most concretely impressive achievement during his tenure was the organization, staffing (over 100 scientists were involved), and editorship of the six-volume *Handbook of South American Indians*. Despite its imperfections, it

remains a monument to Steward's sustained efforts to identify links between what he saw as culture types and the evolutionary schema toward which his research had clearly inclined him—an evolutionary design that eschewed the form of unilinear stages emphasized in the earlier work of Lewis Henry Morgan as well as the updated and amended evolutionary design proposed by Leslie White. Steward called his schema multilinear evolution, an approach that paid special attention to the varieties of ecological, technological, and historical circumstances exposed by expanding global research. It is “essentially a methodology based on the assumption that significant regularities in culture change occur, and it is concerned with the determination of cultural laws.”

Although Steward was always identified as a cultural anthropologist, his publications in archeology constituted about half of his output in the period from the 1920s to about 1940. This may help explain, in part, his persistent fascination with evolutionary formulations extending over long periods of time. He maintained that the line between the subdisciplines of archeology and cultural anthropology was largely artificial, referring to the data of archeology as ethnohistory on (or in) the ground. Since he believed that archeology was more than potsherds and monuments, test pits and stratigraphy, he urged Gordon Willey, against Willey's wishes, to deal intensively with settlement patterns in the Viru Valley Project, which Steward helped launch.

He prevailed on Willey by insisting that intensive study of settlement patterns in the valley would show “when and how these patterns changed through time and what the changes implied” (Willey, p. 216). Willey's work set a pattern for archeological research that grew virtually to dominate the field in later years. Steward had himself signaled the importance of such analysis in “Ecological Aspects of

Southwestern Society" (1937), a research thesis that, until publication of Willey's Viru Valley work, largely had been unnoticed.

Throughout his professional life Steward carried on his search for cross-culturally valid regularities. In effect, he saw his anthropological mission as a search for causes. And while he was appropriately cautious about spelling out laws or ineluctable causes, he was not immune from the criticism of those who dismissed the search for cultural regularities, citing diffusion as an argument against Steward's evolutionary propositions. He responded to these objections by drawing attention to the force of cultural ecological factors in determining when, where, how, and if diffusion of cultural items or artifacts could take place, thus making diffusion an aspect of cultural evolution, a dependent rather than an independent variable. Steward pressed on with his search for what may be referred to as middle-range generalizations or, more daringly, analysis and inference with predictive potential.

In short, Steward "minimally hoped that anthropologists would accept the position that culture is an orderly domain in which causality operates, and [its] operation is accessible through scientific method. Given the complexity of our subject matter, this may have been a naive expectation, but to Steward these were the unstated premises which underlay the rest of his theories" (Murphy, p. 10).

In 1946 Steward accepted a professorship at Columbia University, entering at a time when the influence of Boas still dominated the program and when the small department (six full-time and several adjunct staff members) was deluged by an influx of 120 graduate students, overwhelmingly G.I. Bill recipients. Steward remained at Columbia until 1952, when he left to take a position as University Professor at the University of Illinois.

During his years at Columbia, Steward supervised some thirty-five doctoral dissertations and served on the committees of several dozen others. In all, he influenced a large number of students, many of whom later came to occupy senior professorships in universities around the country.

While at Columbia Steward planned and supervised the preparation, fieldwork, and write-up activities of five graduate students in the execution of the discipline's first attempt to study the culture of an entire area. He chose the island of Puerto Rico. The student team prepared for the enterprise with a semester seminar on the history, economy, polity, social structure and dependency constraints, and opportunities in Puerto Rico from just before initial contact with the Spanish conquerors in 1492 through the period of American control and into the late 1940s. The fieldwork was conducted from the end of 1947 to August 1949. It was during this period that Steward completed work on *Area Research: Theory and Practice* (1950). Publication of the team enterprise, *The People of Puerto Rico*, was delayed until 1956. It is still reckoned one of the several significant contributions that mark Steward's eminence among anthropologists in the middle years of the twentieth century.

At the University of Illinois, Steward conceived and executed an even more ambitious research effort to document "the processes of change in peasant agricultural systems that have been exposed to outside markets and wage labor" (Murphy, p. 12). To this end he established a program called "Studies in Cultural Regularities." With a grant from the Ford Foundation, Steward selected eleven field workers who were assigned to test the theories developed in the Cultural Regularities program; one field worker was assigned to Nigeria, one to Mexico, two to Peru, one to Kenya, two to Tanganyika, one each to Burma and Malaya, and two to Japan. The fieldwork was carried out between



1957 and 1959, and the results, *Contemporary Change in Traditional Societies*, were published in three volumes in 1967.

The Puerto Rican project and the work that grew out of the program in Studies in Cultural Regularities were guided by research principles that marked all but the very earliest of Steward's research activities. He combined induction with deduction, moving from hunches stimulated by reading and observation and advanced by certain "logical inferences" to create a hypothesis. He did not see the field as a place where one went to record as carefully as possible a general description of a culture. Rather he was among the earliest anthropologists to go into the field guided by a firm set of problems, a set of deductive hypotheses to be tested by examination of documentary and archival resources and by induction, by the careful collection of data in the field. The cross-cultural comparisons on which his work placed such great emphasis were a calculated test and attachment of the hypothesis/problem-oriented fieldwork for which he and his students had prepared.

Steward's significance in the history of anthropology derives from a number of innovative ideas and practices, many of which helped to determine major developments in research methodology. He will be remembered for his "theory of cultural ecology," a theory that Murphy called his "greatest contribution to anthropology." Other anthropologists had dealt with the shaping force of environmental factors (Kroeber, Wissler, etc.). But it remained for Steward to emphasize the importance of culture and its effects on the environment, in a sense to relegate the natural habitat to the role of dependent variable in determining the lifeways of the group, society, or region. Consequently, Steward was most impatient with those anthropologists who used the terms "environment" and "ecology" interchangeably. The theory and method of cultural ecology goes beyond the

influence of the natural habitat, or it postulates a relationship among the resources of a particular environment, the technology (tools and knowledge) available at a particular time to exploit these resources and the patterns of work designed to bring the technology to bear upon the resources. "The organization of work, in turn, is hypothesized as having a determinative effect upon other social institutions and practices. The key element in the equation is not the environment" (Murphy, p. 22).

Despite his devotion to the search for causes and regularities in processes of culture change, Steward remained generally indifferent to the premises and promises of applied anthropology because he was keenly aware of the differing values, theoretical positions, and conflicting prescriptions for social action that criss-crossed the discipline. And he was acutely sensitive to the gaps in our understanding of process in the genesis and decline of specific sociocultural phenomena. Finally, he was appropriately cynical about the uses of admonition divorced from the exercise of power.

Steward is generally credited with introducing a few conceptual terms *de novo* into the anthropological lexicon—for example, "multilinear evolution" and "levels of sociocultural integration." His name is also associated with the refinement and popularization of other concepts now widely employed in anthropology, such as the "search for regularities," "cultural causality," and the significance of "the larger context," i.e., forces and influences from outside the locus of research that must be reckoned with as significant determinants of local change and/or persistence.

He persuaded most of his colleagues to replace the stultifying "culture area" concept with the concept of "culture type." And he participated in a generally successful revolt against the restrictions of historical particularism and the perversion of cultural relativism from methodological tool

to an immutable principle of identification. He also fought to keep anthropology within the "sciences," for he saw its mission as the search for explanation rather than the hopeless pursuit of immutable truths.

In 1952 Steward was awarded the Viking Fund Medal in General Anthropology, a distinction Alfred Kroeber had predicted a couple of years earlier when he referred to Steward's outstanding contributions to anthropology and added that he believed Steward to be the "finest teacher in our field in the past 20 years." In 1954 he became one of the earliest scholars outside the hard sciences to be elected to the National Academy of Sciences. In 1956-57 Steward went to Japan as director of the Kyoto American Studies Seminar. In 1960-61 he was appointed a fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Palo Alto. And when the University of Illinois established its own Center for Advanced Study, Steward was one of the four initial appointees (and the only social scientist) out of a faculty numbering about 4,000.

By way of commemorating Steward's sixtieth birthday, twenty-six of his colleagues and former students honored him with a Festschrift: *Process and Pattern in Culture* (1964). And in 1969 a group of graduate students from the University of Illinois anthropology department launched a twice-yearly publication, *The Steward Anthropological Society Journal*.

Because Steward was diligent in the use of empirical data in his theoretical formulations, a few critics have labeled his results inductive or empirical generalizations. Although he was uncommonly sensitive at times, he considered these charges vacuous, remarking that it was self-evident that no theory springs fullblown out of a dataless vacuum. Steward used the empirical data derived from his own research and that of others as a catalyst for the imaginative leap that would offer an explanation that went "beyond the facts." In

short, he said he could construct theory in the only way possible—by affirming the inescapable value of facts but not binding the scope of explanation exclusively to those facts.

## NOTES

1. During the war the Office of Naval Research funded a number of projects designated "Studies of Culture at a Distance." These were generally defined as culture and personality studies and did indeed attempt to characterize national cultures by exposing the dominant patterns or the ethos of each country as revealed in the course of interviews with expatriate citizens of these nations then living in the United States. Ruth Benedict, Sula Bennett, Margaret Mead, and others associated with Columbia were participants in these activities, which, unlike Steward's program, did not involve fieldwork.

2. The British anthropologist Max Gluckman used the term "social field" to describe the same phenomenon, notably in a couple of essays, "Malinowski's Sociological Theories," first published in the late 1940s.

## FURTHER READINGS

Steward's papers, including copies of an extensive correspondence (1926-73), are in the University of Illinois Archives. Brief biographical entries may be found in *Who Was Who* (vol. 5), the *International Dictionary of Anthropology* (1991), and the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (vol. 18). A complete bibliography of Steward's work appears as an appendix to his Obituary, Manners, Robert A. and Jane C. Steward, *American Anthropologist* (75:886-903). A substantial but slightly less exhaustive bibliography, since it appeared in 1964, is in *Process and Pattern in Culture: Essays in Honor Of Julian Steward*, ed. Robert A. Manners, pp. 418-24.

Of a number of bibliographical essays honoring Steward, four, in particular, are noteworthy for the personal information they provide along with striking analytical and criti-

cal insights dealing with his work: "Julian Haynes Steward" in *Portraits in American Archeology: Remembrance of Some Distinguished Americans*, Gordon R. Willey, 1988, pp. 218-41; "Julian H. Steward: A Contributor to Fact and Theory in Cultural Anthropology" in *Process and Pattern in Culture: Essays in Honor of Julian H. Steward*, Demitri B. Shimkin, pp. 1-17; "Julian Steward's Writings and the Essays: A *post hoc* Articulation," *ibid.*, pp. 18-25; "Introduction: The Anthropological Theories of Julian H. Steward," by Robert Murphy in *Evolution and Ecology: Essays on Social Transformation; Julian Steward*, ed. Jane C. Steward and Robert T. Murphy, 1977, pp. 1-39. This posthumous publication and Steward's *A Theory of Culture Change* (1955) together contain some of Steward's more noteworthy essays, culled with care by Steward himself in the 1955 publication and with respect and insight in the 1977 book of selections arranged by his wife and one of his most distinguished students.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the several titles referred to in the body of this piece, at least a few more of Steward's many papers demand inclusion in order to document the significance of his contributions to anthropological thought and method. These have been chosen with studied arbitrariness (from a body of more than 200 publications) and are presented in chronological order.

1937

The economic and social basis of primitive bands. In *Essays on Anthropology in Honor of Alfred Louis Kroeber*, ed. R. H. Lowie, pp. 311-50.

1938

Ecological aspects of southwestern society. *Anthropos* 32:87-104.

1941

*Basin Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups*. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 120.

1943

Determinism in primitive society? *Scientific Monthly* 53:491-501.

1947

Acculturation and the Indian problem. *America Indigena* 3:323-28.

1951

American culture history in the light of South America. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 3:85-107.

1956

Level of sociocultural integration: an operational concept. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7:374-90.

1969

Cultural evolution. *Scientific American* 194:69-80.

Limitations of applied anthropology: the case of the American Indian New Deal. *Journal of the Steward Anthropological Society* 1:1-17.

