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Julian Steward and the Politics of Representation: A Critique of Anthropologist Julian Steward's Ethnographic Portrayals of the American Indians of the Great Basin

NED BLACKHAWK

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative.¹

The expansive region of the American Great Basin and its indigenous peoples hardly appear in most renditions of American history. Representing only a tiny fraction of the continent's populace, the histories of the lands and peoples of this vast region remain largely excluded from the broader narratives of North American history. Unlike historians, anthropologists for the past century have maintained considerable interest in the Indians of the Great Basin. This paper examines the representations of Great Basin Indians by Julian Steward—the preeminent anthropologist of the region. Developing theories

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of cultural change that have influenced generations of anthropologists, Steward pioneered both the study of the Great Basin Indians as well as American anthropology with his ethnographic research of the 1930s.

From the time of Franz Boas, virtually all professionally trained American anthropologists have used conceptual and methodological theories developed during fieldwork among Great Basin Indians. Both Robert Lowie and Alfred Louis Kroeber, who helped solidify anthropology as an established academic discipline, based much of their linguistic and cultural theories on ethnographic fieldwork in the region.² Julian Steward, a graduate student of both Lowie and Kroeber at the University of California, Berkeley, expanded their theories of cultural anthropology to include what became a major field of anthropology, cultural ecology. Identifying nearly every indigenous population settlement throughout eastern California, Nevada, and Idaho in the 1930s and visiting a number of them, Steward compiled several major ethnographies of different "Shoshonean" groups.³ Focusing on the relationship between the social organizations of these different societies and the environment of the Great Basin, Steward theorized that the sparse ecological conditions of the region preconditioned the levels of cultural development among these various Indian societies. Succinctly summarizing this view, he wrote in 1940:

The Shoshonean culture was simple in structure and meager in content....Their culture was essentially practical, being orientated toward physical survival in an area of extreme insecurity and frequent starvation. It centered around a set of hunting and gathering devices adapted to the exigencies of the environment.⁴

This ecologically based interpretation of Great Basin cultural organization provided the basis for Steward's emerging theories of cultural change.

Steward did not originate the correlation between environment and sociocultural organization; it was an integral aspect of early anthropological theory prior to his research. Early Marxist social theory also held that structural and environmental conditions influenced social and cultural organization. As Marvin Harris indicates in his massive *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, however, these earlier "anthropological discussions of the influence of environment on culture ... were

carried out within the particularist frame of culture area classifications, and hence did not rise to nomothetic (universal) status."⁵ Although previous anthropologists and ethnographers, including Clark Wissler, had recognized the centrality of environmental factors in the determination of social organization, Steward became the first to systematically theorize and explore such determinations.

Rejecting the cultural relativism and descriptive ethnography of the Boasian tradition, Steward sought more universal and quantifiable standards with which to measure and predict cultural change within particular societies. Steward called this search for recurring, cross-cultural phenomena "multilinear evolution." According to Steward, this methodological approach "assumes that certain basic types of culture may develop in similar ways under similar conditions but that few concrete aspects of culture will appear among all groups of mankind in a regular sequence."⁶ Identifying these "basic types of culture," the environments in which they developed, as well as the causal sequence between them remained Steward's foci throughout his career.

Steward's "multilinear evolution" and search for universal environmental conditions for cultural organization became known as "cultural ecology," and it influenced American anthropology and cultural anthropology for nearly half a century:

Even to give summary treatment to the work carried out by those who have been directly influenced by Steward—Sidney Mintz, Eric Wolf, Morton Fried, Elman Service, René Millon, Andrew Vayda, Robert Manners, F. Lehman—could prove an exhausting task. The list of anthropologists who have benefited indirectly from Steward's treatment...is proportionally larger and includes...many...who take their cultural ecology for granted...(T)he recent prominence of ecological studies (is) a result of Steward's personal influence. Th(is) mounting interest...reflects a broad movement aimed at strengthening the scientific credentials of cultural anthropology within the prestigious and well-funded natural sciences. Cultural ecology...strengthens the association between social science and the "harder" disciplines.⁷

As the unofficial dean of cultural ecology, Steward helped solidify the discipline of anthropology as a "scientific" social science and became one of the world's leading anthropological authorities on indigenous cultures.⁸

Using Steward's anthropological texts to attempt to understand the Shoshonean people of the region presents significant challenges. His theories of cultural ecology and assumptions about Shoshonean culture remain predicated upon numerous flawed conceptions. Presuming that environmental conditions of this region preconditioned the cultural behavior and institutions of the region's indigenous peoples, Steward's works fail to recognize the multiple ways in which different Great Basin peoples understand and give meaning to their own worlds. Steward's privileging of an ecological interpretation of culture and his fundamental inability to see the complex cultural meanings of his many subjects ultimately deny Great Basin societies the human capacities for historical and cultural change.

Since his assumptions about Great Basin cultures remain so problematic, formulating alternative uses for Steward's ethnographies is imperative. This paper analyzes Steward's works and influences in two ways. First and foremost, it challenges Steward's ethnographic authority on Great Basin Indian culture. A textual critique of Steward's ethnographies alone, however, fails to convey the broader implications of his portrayals of Great Basin Indians. For Steward's ethnographic representations are not only fundamentally flawed, but also implicated in broader relations of power between Indians and non-Indians in this region. By portraying Great Basin Indian societies in such a timeless and simplistic fashion, Steward's texts implicitly help legitimize the dispossession and impoverishment of the Native peoples in the region. As the last section of this paper shows, Steward's ethnographic authority and conceptions of Great Basin culture gave intellectual justification in the 1930s for attempts to deny federal recognition and treaty rights to different Western Shoshone peoples in Nevada.

The second primary goal of this paper is to develop more constructive use of Steward's ethnographic and empirical information. Although conceptually troubling, Steward's ethnographies provide a wealth of ethnographic, historical, and cultural information. I have found that critically investigating and exposing a few of the numerous inherent contradictions and tensions in Steward's ethnographies demystifies the purported timelessness of his texts as well as offers alternative ways of conceptualizing Great Basin Indian history. These texts contain examples of indigenous cultural adaptation and resiliency which contradict some of his value-laden interpreta-

tions. These contradictions reveal brief moments of contestation which can serve as heuristic guides for illuminating the broader colonial relations that characterize the history of Indian-white relations in the Great Basin. Many more alternative approaches to Steward's work are needed in order to fully reassess his significance and legacy, but unfortunately, without access to Steward's early field notes and journals, this obstacle may prove especially difficult.⁹

Steward first developed an interest in Great Basin Native peoples at the age of sixteen when he attended the Deep Springs Preparatory School in eastern California in 1918.¹⁰ He returned to this region along the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains again in 1927 and 1928 to collect ethnographic information. Having recently completed his dissertation based primarily on secondary ethnographic texts, Steward now conducted the fieldwork for his first ethnography.¹¹ Identifying the themes he shortly thereafter expanded into theories of cultural change, Steward interviewed numerous local informants and classified various aspects of Northern Paiute society between Owens Valley and Lake Mono, California.

"The Owens Valley Paiute," Steward began, "are the southernmost of that widely distributed Shoshonean group, the Northern Paiute, which occupies most of northern Nevada."¹² Collecting a wide array of information about the different Indian groups in Owens Valley, he organized his text around thirty-five operative categories beginning with "Tribal Distributions" and including everything from "Seed Gathering and Preparation" to "Houses," "Domesticated Animals," and "Kinship Usages." Each section offered basic descriptions of various Paiute practices, occasionally including Paiute informants' comments as well as "theoretical aspects" from Steward. Describing the Paiute almost entirely in the past tense, it was very much part of anthropology's earliest attempts to "salvage as much data as possible on the native life of the Indian tribes."¹³ A few examples from the text illustrate these intentions as well as some of their contradictions.

Under the category of "Seasonal Occupations," Steward categorizes the Paiute's "daily activities":

People arose before daybreak. Hunters in bed after sunrise had bad luck. Two meals a day were eaten, one at early morning and one in the afternoon. Women gathered seeds and men hunted, when food could be had, to lay up sup-

plies for future use. Leisure time was spent gambling. Winter evenings were devoted to relating myths. In valley villages, old and young men lived at sweat-houses, smoking, talking, and gambling.¹⁴

All aspects of this summation are most likely substantially correct. They are corroborated by his field research. They are also full of conceptual problems. By presenting a timeless, homogeneous understanding of Paiute society, Steward not only excludes Paiute self-representation of their "daily activities" but in the process defines their lives in a continuous stasis, or unbroken cycle of existence. Repeatedly throughout the text, the Paiute, for Steward, exist outside of time, irrevocably tied to a primeval past.

Even when Steward portrays the Paiute in the present tense, they remain relics of the past. In another illustrative passage, he states:

Present native art products include: the summer willow house, baskets, some rabbitskin blankets, cradles, metates, and mullers. Doctoring by the shaman and use of herbs continues. The remainder of Paiute culture has practically disappeared.¹⁵

With nearly all of their "culture" "disappeared" their existence appears ominously precarious. Steward explicitly assumes that Paiute "culture" is both incompatible with "modern" Euro-American society as well as inflexible and subject to eventual disappearance. In this perspective, definitive ethnographic understandings of their existence must be conducted prior to their impending demise, and Steward clearly viewed himself as the qualified recorder of their vanishing ethnographic characteristics. Although offering a few broader theoretical positions, his first ethnography remains laden with the problematic definitions of "culture" common to early ethnography.

In his attempt to record Paiute characteristics, Steward showed meticulous concern for the spatial dimensions of not only the territorial boundaries of the Paiute but also the internal spatialized mechanisms of Paiute society and culture. These quantified representations were part of his attempts to establish measurable standards not only of the relationship between the environment and cultural organization among the Great Basin Indians, but also of the exact practices of their daily

activities. Detailing a Paiute basketmaker, for instance, he writes:

Strips (of willow) about 1/8 inch wide and 1/16 to 1/32 inch thick were moistened in her mouth or by her fingers dipped in a pan of water as used, then drawn by her left hand across a knife edge against which the right thumb held it pressed. The strip was then passed through successively smaller holes, ranging from 1/4 to 1/32 inch in diameter, punched in a can top with a nail, to shave it down....The coil ran clockwise as seen from the basket bottom, the basket being held open side up, in the left hand, the hole punched with a steel awl, right hand, and the weft pushed through from the outside.¹⁶

In this seemingly innocuous description, Steward describes a recently observed practice. This measured example, however, includes numerous tensions. While Steward chooses to measure the specifics of basketmaking, the “knife edge,” “pan,” and “steel awl” are obviously recently introduced material items for the Paiute. Such instances of obvious cultural adaptation are repeatedly unrecognized throughout Steward’s narratives. Furthermore, the basketmaker, similar to all his informants, here remains voiceless, nameless, and powerless to define her practice in her own terms. Although the basketmaker is silenced, in this brief example, Paiute “culture” does appear momentarily fluid and compatible with Euro-American society.

This Paiute incorporation of industrial materials into their existing cultural practices contradicts Steward’s conception of Paiute culture as “practically disappear[ing].” Such incorporation also provides an example of potential cultural resiliency which challenges the general ahistoricism of the text. Failing to recognize the possible flexibility of Paiute culture, Steward assumes that the few metal objects—the knife, pan, and nail—are simply replacing previous indigenous tools, but making a basket, as he suggests, requires a great deal of labor. Since this example, like all his others, is presented completely without cultural and historical context, the implied assumption is that this is a vestige of former traditions, not potentially a telling example of indigenous creativity and/or cultural adaptation. Basketmaking could indicate the Paiute’s economic integration into a regional arts and crafts economy, or the production of

gifts for various cultural ceremonies, and/or the teaching of various gender-specific songs and activities to a younger woman—basketmaking being, as he details, a “woman’s” activity. Such more complicated understandings involving economic, religious, or gender relations within Paiute society are lost in this example and throughout his first ethnographic text.

In his next ethnography, published in 1937, Steward charted the “Linguistic Distributions and Political Groups of the Great Basin Shoshoneans.”¹⁷ More concerned with outlining the territorial boundaries of all Great Basin societies than with internal social relations, Steward systematized and mapped different Shoshone groups. “Present data,” he states, “make it possible to bound the main linguistic divisions of the Great Basin with some accuracy and to define and locate most of the political divisions of the Shoshoni and their neighbors.”¹⁸ Conducting over forty “test vocabularies of one hundred words...from Shoshoni of California, Nevada, Utah, Idaho and from Northern Paiute, Bannock, Gosiute, Ute, and Southern Paiute,”¹⁹ Steward grouped all these various groups into three major divisions of the Shoshonean linguistic family. The main focus of this text was, however, the identification of the different territorial and political boundaries of various Shoshonean groups. He states:

It is not wholly revealing to record merely that a group had a chief or considered itself a band, for neither the nature and extent of the authority delegated to the chief nor the kind of solidarity among members of the band is self-evident.... Among the Nevada Shoshoni, restriction of political organization to the village is a function of social and economic activities. These Shoshoni were primarily gatherers.... From fall to spring, individual families, or at most two or three related families, wandered together foraging for food.²⁰

As opposed to more “sedentary” groups, such as the Owens Valley Paiute or the Northern Shoshone of Wyoming, the Western Shoshone of Nevada, according to Steward, lacked any cohesive political organization. Since their subsistence patterns were so disparate and varied annually depending on irregular fall pine nut harvests, these “gatherers” simply could not maintain extended large-scale territorial organization. He states, “The pine nut, therefore, induced a comparatively unsettled life; a family journeyed each year to areas where the

crop was most convenient or the harvest most promising...it found itself wintering...in widely separated localities."²¹ These "separate localities" varied annually depending on the ecological variation in subsistence patterns. Because of their fluctuating, inconsistent composition, these winter villages in which numerous families banded together for a few months did not constitute political organizations. The nuclear family consequently remained for the entire year the primary system of sociopolitical organization for the Shoshone. For Steward, then, the designations of "tribe," let alone "nation," were therefore entirely inapplicable to the Nevada Shoshone, as "Shoshoni society resembled a vast net"²² of interrelated but separated family units.

In his 1938 ethnography, "Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Socio-Political Groups," Steward comprehensively elaborated on his ideas about the composition of Great Basin Indian political organization. Employing a comparative approach to the entire Basin-Plateau peoples, he developed systematic explanations for the presence of differing political organizations throughout the "Intermontane Area." He based these interpretations of the social structures among linguistically similar but organizationally different "Shoshonean" peoples from specific environment conditions. The fundamental attribute for these institutional variances, he argued, were numerous "ecological determinants."

"Most of the Basin-Plateau people," Steward began, "lived at a bare subsistence level. Their culture was meager in content and simple in structure. Pursuits concerned with the problems of daily existence dominated their activities to an extraordinary degree and limited and conditioned their institutions."²³ "The problems of daily existence" revolved, for Steward, around a continuous subsistence cycle—their "unending food quest."²⁴ Unlike his previous study of the Owens Valley, Steward organized this ethnography conceptually around the relationship between "culture" and the "environment," and although it included similar ethnographic categories and descriptions, they all centered around this operative idea.

Throughout this ethnography, Steward identified how specific different ecological variables helped to determine the composition of various Great Basin Indian social institutions. Regular festivals, for example, in which previously dispersed family groups would gather to socialize and hold dances "were made possible in most of the western area by the temporarily

increased food supply produced by rabbit drives, pine-nut trips, antelope hunts, or other communal economic affairs."²⁵ Unlike the Owens Valley Paiute who lived in a more fertile area, many of the other Great Basin peoples remained too "unsettled" because of harsh environmental conditions to construct and maintain "sweat-houses" or other communal edifices. Marital practices in the Great Basin also had ecological determinants:

Marriage created an economic unit which insured survival of the individual, a biological unit which somewhat insured certain sex privileges, and a social unit which guaranteed security for children and which untied kinship groups. Though none of these was distinctive of the area, it is possible to show that many features of them were delimited and patterned by local conditions....In a region where the burden of subsistence overshadowed all other activities [marriage] was extremely important. Although any particular marriage might be of brief duration, a person could not, in the interest of self-preservation, afford to remain long single. He was generally wed to one person or another during most of his adult life.²⁶

Steward interpreted instances of polygamy and polyandry along similar environmental lines.

This description of the rationale behind Great Basin marriage presents another telling example of the limitations of Steward's understandings of culture. Minimizing the legitimacy of his subjects' cultural motivations and emotive experiences, Steward attempts to structure the most intimate aspects of his subjects' personal lives along environmentally conditioned lines. Although these marriage patterns were invariably influenced by "local conditions," to suggest that "the burden of subsistence" "delimited and patterned" all marital relations throughout the region is clearly an oversimplification. Such oversimplifications recur throughout Steward's ethnography. In addition to marriage, child-rearing practices, instances of infanticide, and gambling patterns, all had ecological determinants which superseded all other potential explanations for Steward. With his own categories biasing his interpretations, it became difficult for Steward to attempt to gain any alternative insights into the intricacies and variances of Great Basin indigenous societies.

In "Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Groups" and its "cultural element list" published shortly thereafter, Steward solidified his ideas about cultural ecology as the basis of Great Basin sociopolitical organization.²⁷ His text solidified his emerging interpretive paradigm linking cultural development with ecological variances. Its meticulous concern for ethnographic data, however, did not preclude its usefulness for Steward's interests in cross-cultural comparisons. Two years earlier, Steward had drawn together his research among Great Basin peoples with other ethnographers' works on the Aborigines of Australia and the Eskimos of the subarctic and presented "The Economic and Social Basis of Primitive Bands" in honor of Alfred Kroeber's birthday.²⁸ Systemizing the classification of "culture types," Steward then issued his first call for cross-cultural taxonomy based on environmental criteria. Categorizing the Great Basin Indians among the least developed "primitive bands" in the taxonomy of world cultures, Steward equated these and others' cultures taxonomic status explicitly with ecological influences. As Marvin Harris remarks about this seminal text in cultural ecology:

It constitutes the first coherent statement of how the interaction between culture and environment could be studied in causal terms.... This achievement has a double focus: first, the identification of a cross-culturally valid form of social organization, the "primitive band": second, its explanation. The band occurs among widely separated hunting and gathering peoples.... It is a type of social organization distinguished in its most general form by political autonomy and a small population, in that it consists of several nuclear families whose access to land is controlled by ownership privileges vested in the larger group.²⁹

The concept that "cross-culturally valid forms of social organization" such as the "primitive band" exist has irrevocably transformed the study of world cultures. As Harris suggests, generations of anthropologists have employed versions of Steward's concepts of cultural ecology to draw comparisons between various societies throughout the world. In the study of American Indians, anthropologists have grouped, categorized, and defined Indian societies and cultures based on perceived commonalities in social organization and natural environments. By establishing measurable standards with which to

identify and study these "valid forms," Steward has significantly influenced these transformations. However, these ethnographic theories and categories of analysis have been severely challenged by numerous recent ethnographic and cultural theorists. Outlining the nature of these critiques provides a framework for exploring the broader implications of Steward's representations of Great Basin Indians.

It is now in vogue and relatively easy to critique "classic" ethnographic works such as Steward's. Recent critical ethnographic theory has questioned the many biases in traditional anthropology and has produced a series of epistemological "crises" concerning the fate of the discipline. Many of these critiques focus on broader trends in anthropology and the social sciences and are themselves, paradoxically, quite abstract with little reference to the peoples under study—peoples whose lives were the raw material for classic ethnography. For those attempting not only to question the authority of traditional ethnographic texts but also to illustrate exactly how these texts have functioned to subordinate their "objects," this paradox remains especially difficult.

The attempts by traditional ethnographers, such as Steward, to construct "scientific" anthropological theories of culture and social organization have been severely challenged in recent years. The disciplinary discourse which claimed not only to represent accurately (and authoritatively) the lived experiences of other peoples but also to systematize this knowledge for other anthropological specialists has come under severe criticism by recent cultural theorists who systematically challenge the essentialized, categorical representations of non-Western societies. "Who has the authority to speak," James Clifford rightly asks, "for a group's identity or authenticity?"³⁰ This question, as well as what precisely constitutes "identity," has triggered fundamental reevaluations of the fate of ethnography.

"The predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant-observation, data collection, and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside—looking at, objectifying, or, somewhat closer, 'reading' a given reality,"³¹ Clifford writes. These ethnographic methods of objectification have become a central focus of many critics of anthropology who, like Clifford, examine the theoretical assumptions of such processes. Of the many contradictions in traditional ethnography, Vincent Crapanzano identifies two fundamental paradoxes. First, he writes, "the ethnographer does not recog-

nize the provisional nature of his presentations. They are (for the ethnographer) definitive."³² Expressed interpretively in writing, this definitiveness, paradoxically, limits any reinterpretation and produces fixed, static understandings. Secondly, the ethnographer must "render the foreign familiar and preserve its foreignness at one and the same time."³³ This second, seemingly inescapable conundrum represents a fundamental challenge to traditional ethnographic legitimacy. Ethnography not only ascribes presumed difference between peoples, but then proceeds to attempt to capture and maintain it.

The emergence of various postmodern theories challenges the legitimacy of traditional ethnographic assumptions of difference. Many critical theorists now argue that certain dialectics revolving around understandings of difference pervade Western and Euro-American metaphysics. Designations of "self" become possible, they argue, only when constructed in reference to specifically designated non-selves, or "others." Tzvetan Todorov summarizes this well: "Self-knowledge develops through the knowledge of the Other."³⁴ Dating back to Martin Heidegger, many antipositivist theorists have questioned these processes of self-differentiation and revealed how such notions of difference function to replicate and support asymmetric relations of power between Western and non-Western societies. This realization of the defining power of ethnographic discourses has been extremely pronounced in the study of peoples and cultures, the purported *raison d'être* of anthropology.

In the face of such challenges, anthropologists have attempted to formulate less troubling and contradictory methodologies. Like Clifford, Todorov, and Crapazano, other scholars have examined the ways in which ethnographers, as well as novelists, travelers, and artists, have problematically represented designated "others." Such examinations, however, generally fail to convey the profound implications of such representations on their "objects." As Paul Rabinow suggests:

We [anthropologists] need to anthropologize the West: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been; emphasize those domains most taken for granted as universal; make them seem as historically peculiar as possible; show how their claims to truth are linked to social practices and have hence become effective forces in the social world.³⁵

This suggestion, however, has been slow in coming.

This brief discussion of the emergent critiques of traditional ethnographic authority illustrates the limiting nature of many of the practices and assumptions of traditional ethnography, and Julian Steward embodies many of these classical techniques. Analyzed not only for what they say about anthropology, or Steward himself, Steward's texts are remarkable for what they do not say about the Shoshone Indians of Nevada.

An analysis or summation of the silences within Steward's texts is beyond the parameters of this paper. Clearly, despite Steward's emphasis, neither the Great Basin Indians themselves nor the environment of the region can be understood so monolithically and simplistically. In order to further apply the arguments that (a) Steward employed problematic representations of Great Basin Indians based on troubling conceptions of cultural ecology, and (b) that these representations can potentially influence and narrow the possible choices for these various indigenous societies, this final section analyzes Steward's involvement with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Contacted in 1936 by Indian Office Commissioner John Collier, Steward testified against granting federal status to various groups of the Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada.

As a "Consultant Anthropologist" to the Office of Indian Affairs, Dr. Julian Steward issued his report on "Shoshonean Tribes: Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Eastern California" in December, 1936.³⁶ The Office of Indian Affairs under the guidance of Commissioner John Collier had asked Steward for his recommendations on its efforts to restructure existing American Indian tribal governments and, in certain instances, to create reservation lands as called for by the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934.³⁷ "My facts have been gathered during ten years' work among Shoshonean tribes," Steward stated in his eighteen-page report, "My statements are supported by several published monographs and papers and about 1,000 pages of manuscript."³⁸ Despite his many interactions with the Shoshone, Steward strenuously opposed Collier's and the Indian Office's current attempts to provide reservation lands and federal recognition for the so-called "landless" Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada.³⁹

"Do not segregate them as a racial group," Steward suggested. "Do not complicate and endanger them with a tribal council, do not baffle them with a constitution and charter...(S)egregating Shoshoni in large groups will...lessen race and cultural contacts

and increase the difficulties of assimilation."⁴⁰ Prefiguring themes which he later developed into his broader theories of cultural ecology, Steward based his observations of contemporary Western Shoshone Indians on his understanding of "traditional" Shoshone culture and social organization. He argued, "(t)he Nevada and southern Idaho Shoshoni had no bands or other tribal groupings.... Their native culture was so meager and their socio-political groupings so tenuous that no well-defined and stable patterns had emerged. Shoshoneans had a loose society, in which an individual's social horizon extended scarcely beyond his family and in which his motivation was largely the acquisition of subsistence from day to day."⁴¹ Since, as Steward interpreted it, the Western Shoshone had always lacked political structures due to the sparseness of their local ecology, federal attempts to recognize and create different Western Shoshone reservations and tribal governments contradicted existing patterns in Shoshone society. He continued:

The implication of these facts for the Indian Office program is that there were no native divisions among the Nevada and southwest Idaho Shoshoni which afford a logical basis for present segregation of the people.... It must be recognized therefore that the present program... is completely illogical and unwarranted in terms of native conditions."⁴²

Steward's prodigious research and academic prestige undoubtedly brought considerable credibility to his recommendations against bringing the IRA to Nevada.

Steward's suggestions did not, however, go unchallenged and were eventually rejected by the Indian Office. Alida Bowler, superintendent of the Carson Indian Agency which administered Indian policy in Nevada, campaigned heavily against the report. "The interpretations and opinions of the members of your own field organization are... diametrically opposed to those of the Consultant Anthropologist," she told Collier in a 1937 memorandum.⁴³ Steward, Bowler maintained, had misinterpreted not only the administration's policy objectives but also the nature of Shoshone culture. "He made no contacts at the agency to inquire into the program or to learn what we hoped to accomplish or how we proposed to go about it," she explained. In response to "the report's comments on native culture. These are hard to understand. One can only assume that the writer failed to catch many glimpses of the

inner life, the heart and soul of the Indian.... We have no reason to conclude that it (Shoshone culture) does not have living values and satisfactions for the people out of whose past it grew.... No one who merely brushes the surface of Indian life in a cursory, inquisitive, exploratory manner suspects (its) existence."⁴⁴ Summing up her feelings on Steward, she expressed in a "confidential" letter to Collier: "I am unshakably skeptical about the scientific thoroughness of (his) work.... what I have heard of his work among the Shoshones here makes me doubt anything he might publish in that field."⁴⁵

Although they sporadically received various government entitlements, unlike most other American Indians at the time, the Western Shoshone's legal status as an identifiable tribe or tribes remained unclear to the federal government. Moreover, federal Indian policy was less effective in dealing with Indians who did not live on recognized reservation lands and thus did not have federally recognized tribal governments. The Indian Reorganization Act was principally designed to restructure existing tribal governments, but it offered conditions for federal recognition and reservation lands to so-called "landless" Indian groups such as many of the Nevada Shoshone. The IRA consequently offered many Western Shoshone the opportunity to become federally recognized American Indian tribes.

Several Indian groups, including the Nevada Shoshone, greeted Collier's reform efforts with skepticism.⁴⁶ Many, for instance, resented the imposition of new tribal governments and constitutions, but Steward opposed the IRA more on the theoretical basis that Great Basin Shoshone culture and social organization remained fundamentally diffuse, with no ethnographically definable individual groups eligible for the status of "tribe." For Steward, organizing and granting political status to unorganized, former nomadic hunters and gatherers was completely illogical. Reservations and federal recognition would bestow upon the Western Shoshone inapplicable and overly complicated political systems that contradicted existing patterns in their culture and social organization. In his final view, if the Nevada Shoshone became concentrated on reservations, they would ultimately fall deeper into economic and social deprivation and paradoxically come to rely further on the government for assistance.

Steward's opposition to the creation of reservations and new tribal governments for the Shoshone in Nevada was at odds with many of the Western Shoshone groups' efforts to secure a

firmer land base and relationship with the federal government. As Steven Crum indicates in his pioneering history of the Western Shoshone, "The IRA provision that had the greatest impact on the nonreservation Western Shoshones was the purchase of lands to create new reservations....[The Indian Bureau] accepted the Shoshones' cultural trait of deep attachment to the land and took the initiative in creating reservations in some native Shoshone valleys."⁴⁷ Rejecting Steward's suggestions, the Indian Office officially recognized several previously unclassified Indian groups and granted them reservation lands and federal recognition.⁴⁸

The broader implications of Steward's testimony before the Office of Indian Affairs suggests that Steward's ideas about Great Basin Indian peoples have had potentially powerful results in addition to shaping academic debates about the region and its people. His role as a preeminent narrator of a region and its peoples reflects much broader assumptions and relations of power that characterize much of the history of Indian peoples and Euro-Americans in the Great Basin. As Edward Said suggests, struggles over representation and narration are crucial elements in imperial and anti-imperial contests. Steward's works and representations of these peoples cannot be excluded from these broader imperial and colonial contexts.

With his study of the Great Basin, Steward began an entirely new field of study. His theory of cultural ecology paved the way for numerous other anthropological studies and positioned Steward professionally to dominate the study of the Great Basin as well as much of American anthropology for over a generation. This theory, however, remains predicated on problematic assumptions about the nature of Great Basin society. Scholars who critique problems of ethnographic authority need to recognize not only how such representations serve to exclude and silence their objects of study, but also how these studies can potentially shape the conditions in which Native peoples themselves must operate.

Producing fixed, categorical understandings of the Great Basin Indians, Steward's texts reduce vibrant, resilient, and infinitely complex peoples to static, materially and ecologically determined generalizations. Such generalizations fundamentally obscure the innumerable ways in which these Indian peoples express and represent themselves. The meanings, beliefs, and values they give to themselves, their lands, and their his-

tories never enter into Steward's works. Their philosophy, cosmology, and hermeneutics are thus denied not only contemporaneity but also past as well as future existence. Interpreting specifically how Steward accomplishes this does not warrant the same attention as what it is he silences. Although the subject of literally hundreds of sentences, the Great Basin Indians do not speak in Steward's text.

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NOTES

1. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), xii-xiii.
2. Alfred L. Kroeber, *Shoshonean Dialects of California* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 4, 1907), 65-165; Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Washington: Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 78, 1925); Robert H. Lowie, *Notes on Shoshonean Ethnography* (Washington: American Museum of Natural History Anthropological Papers, 1924).
3. *Shoshonean* refers to the linguistically similar but ethnically different indigenous groups of the Great Basin and Plateau regions. These include Northern Paiute, Northern Shoshone(i), Western Shoshone, Southern Paiute, and Gosiute Shoshone. The Western Shoshone occupy most of central-northern Nevada and parts of southern Idaho and southeastern California. Scholars have now generally abandoned this linguistic and ethnographic classification in favor of the Numic culture and language family. See Wick R. Miller, "Numic Languages," in *Great Basin*, ed. Warren L. D'Azevedo, vol. 11 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 98-99.
4. Julian H. Steward, "Native Cultures of the Intermontane (Great Basin) Area," in *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America*, Published in Honor of John R. Swanton, (Washington: Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection, 1940), vol. 100, 474-475.
5. Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 663.
6. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear*

Evolution (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955), 4.

7. Harris, 654-55.

8. After his training at the University of California, Steward accepted a position at the Bureau of American Ethnology in Washington, D.C. He continued to study North and South American societies throughout his tenure in Washington, editing the four-volume series, *The Handbook of South American Indians* (Washington: Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 143, vols. 1-4, 1946-48). He subsequently returned to academic teaching both at Columbia University and the University of Illinois, Urbana.

9. The University of Illinois, Urbana houses the Julian Steward archives. Unfortunately, much of his personal reports, journals, etc. from his 1930s Great Basin fieldwork are missing.

10. Robert Murphy, "Introduction," in *Evolution and Ecology: Essays on Social Transformation by Julian H. Steward*, eds., Robert Murphy and Jane C. Steward, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 1-2; Robert A. Manners, "Julian Haynes Steward, 1902-1970," *American Anthropologist* 74 (Fall 1973): 888-889.

11. For the only published (although shortened) version of Steward's dissertation, see Steward, *The Ceremonial Buffoon of the American Indian* (Ann Arbor: Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters 14), 187-207.

12. Steward, *Ethnography of the Owens Valley Paiute* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 33, 1933), 235. Although not indicated in the title, this text includes some ethnographic information on several neighboring Shoshone groups.

13. Murphy, *Evolution and Ecology*, 2.

14. Steward, *Ethnography of the Owens Valley Paiute*, 239.

15. *Ibid.*, 238.

16. *Ibid.*, 271.

17. Steward, "Linguistic Distributions and Political Groups of the Great Basin Shoshoneans," *American Anthropologist* 39 (Winter 1937): 625-634.

18. *Ibid.*, 625.

19. *Ibid.*, 625 fn.

20. *Ibid.*, 628-629.

21. *Ibid.*, 629.

22. *Ibid.*, 630.

23. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Socio-Political Groups* (Washington: Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 120, 1938), 1-2.

24. The use of this phrase occurs repeatedly in several of Steward's texts. See *ibid.*, 238, and Steward, *Theory of Culture Change*, 112.

25. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Groups*, 237.

26. *Ibid.*, 241-242.

27. Steward, *Culture Element Distribution: XIII Nevada Shoshone* (Berkeley: University of California Anthropological Record 4, 1941) offers nearly 3,000 individual "culture elements" collected from his fieldwork among the Shoshone and is essentially the empirical basis for much of the 1938 ethnography.

28. Steward, "The Economic and Social Basis of Primitive Bands," in *Essays in Anthropology Presented to A. L. Kroeber*, ed. Robert H. Lowie, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), 331-45.

29. Harris, 666.

30. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 8.

31. Clifford, "Introduction," *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds., Clifford and George E. Marcus, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 11.

32. Vincent Crapanzano, "Hermes' Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description," in *Writing Culture*, 51.

33. *Ibid.*, 52.

34. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 254.

35. Paul Rabinow, "Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology," in *Writing Culture*, 241.

36. Steward, "Report on Shoshonean Tribes (Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Eastern California)" 1936, Papers of Julian Steward, University Archives, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Box 10, File: "Indian Reorganization, 1937."

37. The restructuring of tribal governments was one of the principle tenets of the Indian Reorganization Act which reversed the assimilative federal Indian policy instituted with the 1887 Dawes Severalty, or General Allotment, Act. The IRA and Collier's administration are often referred to as the "Indian New Deal." Although championed by many reformers, Indian communities greeted the IRA skeptically, with many groups, including the largest tribe the Navajo, rejecting Collier's reform efforts.

38. Steward, "Report on Shoshonean Tribes," 1.

39. Most members of the Western Shoshone Indians in 1934 had not been granted reservations in Nevada. The Indian Office labeled off-reservation Indians as "landless."

40. Steward, "Report on Shoshonean Tribes," 11.

41. *Ibid.*, 9, 7.

42. *Ibid.*, 9.

43. Superintendent Alida Bowler, "Memorandum: To Commissioner Collier," March 7, 1937, Papers of Julian Steward, University Archives, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Box 10, File: "Indian Reorganization, 1937," 1.

44. *Ibid.*, 3, 5.

45. Bowler, "Letter to John Collier," March 21, 1936, Office Files of John Collier, 1933-45, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, File: "Alida C. Bowler (Miss) 1934-37 incl," 1.

46. Many Western Shoshone throughout Nevada recognized that the granting of reservations would hinder their outstanding land claims case. Such land claims dated back to the provisions of the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley which granted the U.S. government access to natural resources and passage

rights throughout the region but never officially ceded any territory.

47. Steven J. Crum, *The Road on Which We Came: A History of the Western Shoshone* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 91-92, 97.

48. The Te-Moak Bands of Western Shoshone Indians, currently the Te-Moak Tribe, and the Yomba and Duckwater Shoshone Tribes were officially recognized during this period. See Crum, *The Road on Which We Came*, 103-113.