

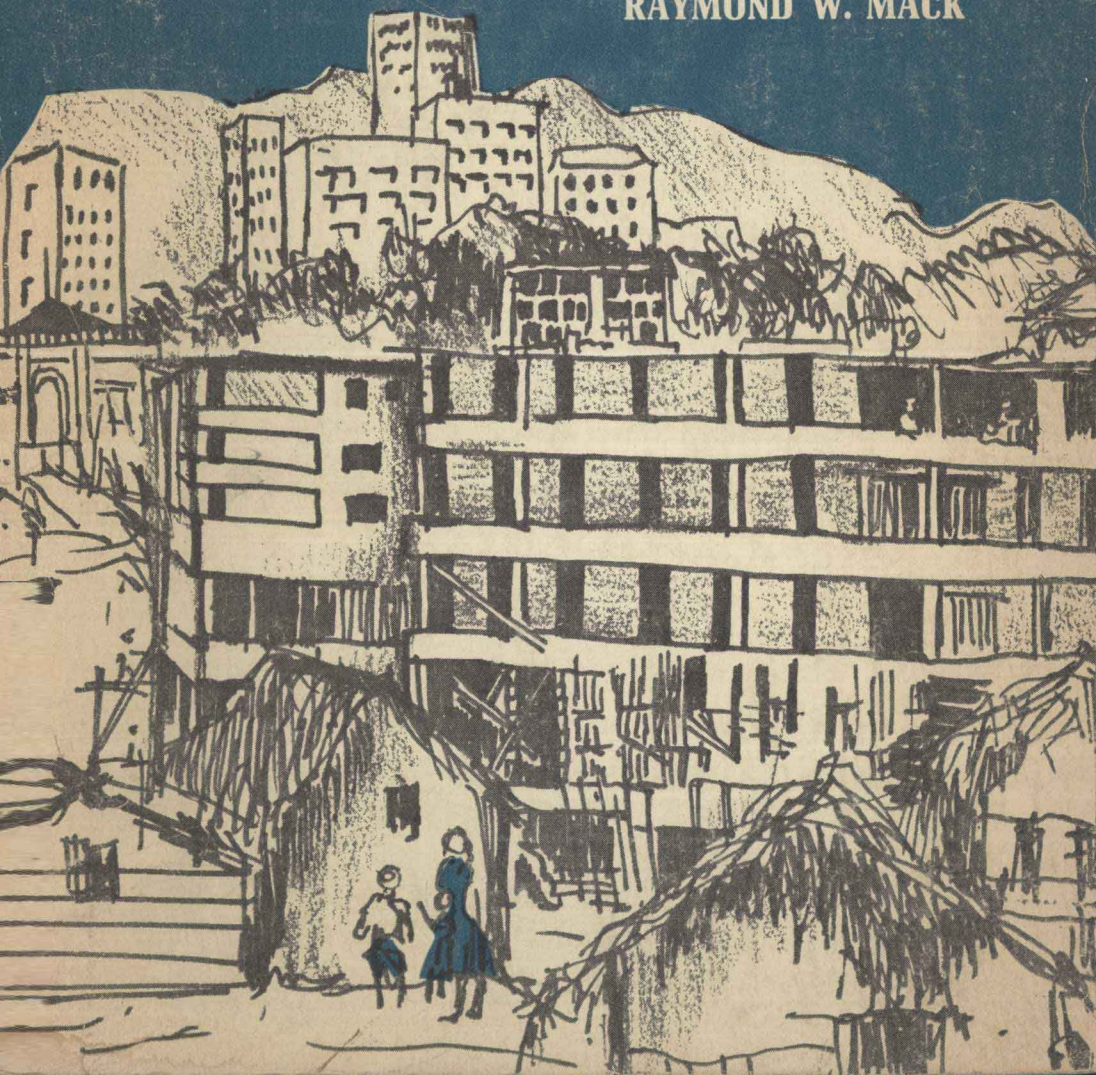
# SOCIAL CHANGE IN DEVELOPING AREAS

Edited By

HERBERT R. BARRINGER

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A Reinterpretation of Evolutionary Theory

*Edited by*

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## PREFACE

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Each of the editors of this volume has wrestled with the problem of a systematic theoretical framework for the analysis of social change in a developing area. In the course of seeking ideas from each other, we have been stimulated to discover a shared conviction that a number of scholars, deliberately or accidentally, are employing a model of social evolution to order their data on underdeveloped areas. Despite the lip service paid in social science theory seminars to Talcott Parsons' querulous "Who now reads Spencer?," a clear-cut assumption of social evolution seems to undergird work ranging from Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth* to Moore and Feldman's *Labor Commitment and Social Change in Developing Areas*. Indeed, the assumption that one can make social scientific generalizations about *patterns* of urbanization, industrialization, or political development as processes suggests sequence—an evolutionary model.

A review of the literature convinced us that this was such a promising theoretical frontier that at least a preliminary stocktaking was appropriate. Our excitement was fed as we learned that our enthusiasm for examining this idea was shared by other scholars interested in social change in underdeveloped areas. We invited 22 men to prepare or discuss papers and attempt to organize what is thought or known about the usefulness of evolutionary theory for contemporary social science; every one accepted enthusiastically and took three days out of busy schedules to participate in a discussion of the manuscripts and their implications.

The conference, which resulted in this volume, was held at Northwestern University.<sup>1</sup> The conference enabled the authors of the papers presented here to exchange views with each other and with other interested participants.

Papers were mimeographed and circulated among the participants during the month before the conference. Each author was allowed to present a fifteen

<sup>1</sup> June 8–10, 1961.

minute summary or amplification of his paper. A discussant was assigned two papers, and was also allowed fifteen minutes for a formal critique, after which the session was opened for general discussion of the question which inspired the conference: Does the tenor of current social science research in the under-developed areas constitute a revival of evolutionary theory?

We are grateful to the men who prepared papers for the meeting and participated so enthusiastically in the dissection of their own as well as their colleagues' manuscripts. We thank, too, the discussants who brought fresh ideas to the work sessions, and whose views are reprinted in the introductory discussions.

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*Evanston, Ill.,  
October, 1965*



# **INTRODUCTION**

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Recent studies by social scientists of emergent or “underdeveloped” areas are characteristically concerned with the dynamics of change. When these studies are compared with, for example, sociological studies of the United States, it is apparent that essentially static models are employed for the familiar. In contrast, among studies of emergent areas, and peculiar to them, is a concern with change. The theories employed in the latter appear to share some aspects in common with evolutionary theory.

Given the low esteem of evolutionary theory among social scientists, we believe it worthwhile to examine the possibility that evolutionary theory, either unconsciously or surreptitiously, may be accompanying explicit theories of change. To that end, members of various academic disciplines represented at the conference were asked to discuss the possible relationship of evolutionary theory to their particular theoretical and substantive interests, and to examine the possibility of making any evolutionary undertones explicit.

Some of the specific problems of concern were: (1) To what extent are studies in underdeveloped areas operating in a theoretical framework of determinism? (2) What are the steps or stages prescribed by theories of change? (3) To what extent do these studies involve a “from-simple-to-complex” model? (4) Do social-scientific theories of change assume the value position that change is good; or that increased complexity, or industrialization, or political sophistication, or technological change, is desirable? (5) To what extent are theories of change in underdeveloped areas similar to earlier evolutionary theories in social science?

It was immediately apparent to members of the conference that even this last question was not an easy one to answer. Participants represented eight academic disciplines: anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, political



science, psychology, sociology, and zoology. As our discussion proceeded, it became clear that not only did the methodological and theoretical approaches of these disciplines differ from one another, but considerable variation existed within the ranks of any one discipline. Consequently, a considerable portion of the discussion involved clarification and explication of the various formal theoretical approaches to studies of emergent areas. Furthermore, a number of interpretations or definitions of evolutionary theory arose during the course of the conference, ranging from the lucid explanations of modern biological theories by Alfred Emerson and the similar selective retention model of Campbell on the one hand, to the older theories of Lamarck and Spencer, on the other. As will be seen, a further complication arose from differences in conceptualization of the basic problem. For example, anthropologists and historians tended to view evolutionary theory as an aspect of culture, or as a theory of culture. Sociologists and economists tended to look for evolutionary theory within the other scientific theories of change themselves. Finally, it was not always clear as to whether the major problem of the participants was to determine the relationship of evolutionary theory to their explicit theories of change, or to point out the utility of evolutionary theory for future use in the social sciences. The latter interpretation held its own during the conference with some very useful, if unintended, consequences.

The preceding paragraph may give the reader the impression that very little progress was made toward answering our questions. Actually, the conference resulted in a clarification of the main question, and opened many new avenues for thought. To those familiar with interdisciplinary investigations of such a controversial subject as the present one, it may come as a surprise that civilized communication took place at all.

Specifically, the conferees dissected the problem, and addressed the following issues: (1) What are the characteristics of various social-scientific studies of underdeveloped areas? (2) What is meant by evolutionary theory? (3) How are various definitions of evolutionary theory related to theoretical approaches to the study of social change? (4) What utility has evolutionary theory for studies of emergent areas? (5) What are some of the problems inherent in the use of evolutionary theory?

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF UNDERDEVELOPED AREAS**

A considerable portion of discussion at the conference was spent in clarifying some of the objectives of the various disciplines involved. Following are some of the highlights of these discussions, together with an

## *Introduction*

analysis of interdisciplinary differences as manifested at the conference. It should be pointed out that these generalizations are approximations: they do not necessarily represent the individual approaches of any one participant.

## **Anthropology**

The first, most obvious characteristic of anthropological approaches to the study of underdeveloped areas is a concern with culture. In effect, the problem for the anthropologist is to build a cultural model for the society under investigation in order to view the world as members of that society would see it, before proceeding to further analysis. Throughout the conference, the anthropological representatives maintained the position that change or stages of change must be formulated in such a way as to be consistent with the culture in question. During discussions of decision-making models, for example, Bohannon insisted that "choice" must be investigated in terms of the culture in question: "*Who* is making a choice about *what*?" Bohannon felt that choice can be made on many levels, but that the level of greatest scientific value is that of culture.

This concern with the cultural perspective is, of course, related to the standpoint of cultural relativism. At one stage in a discussion of economic models, Opler objected strenuously to Rottenberg's contention that modern industrial societies are more proficient technically than underdeveloped areas. Opler felt that societies such as Haiti, for example, are just as proficient, given their geographic, climatic and cultural uniqueness, as is a society such as Switzerland. Further, he indicated that such societies may encounter severe difficulties in attempting to adopt modern Western technology. Rottenberg countered with the suggestion that modern technology allows societies to become less dependent upon their natural environment than is true with pre-technological societies. To this, Opler retorted with examples of China and Japan, who attempted to convert to Western technology, only to find themselves without an outlet for their knowledge *or* their produce.

The problem in the above exchange, as Moskos pointed out, was that Opler based his analysis upon a cultural-environmental model, while Rottenberg employed technical change as the major consideration. Bohannon indicated that both parties were probably correct, and added that in cases of technological change, "Persons entering a modern industrial society do tend to become more secondary in their social relationships. However, when we are concerned about the effects of these people becoming like us, we should remember that they need not become like us in all respects. Technical knowledge may bring technical change, but it need not reach all levels of society." Opler agreed in general with Bohannon, but went on to point out examples where technical change did disrupt the social and cultural life of

peoples in underdeveloped areas. The point to be made here, of course, is that the anthropological approach to emergent areas tends to emphasize the importance of culture, and is therefore led to view change as it affects this culture.

A third characteristic of the anthropological approach is a pronounced reliance upon an open-minded induction unprejudiced by *a priori* theory. This appears to follow from the aforementioned concern with the reconstruction of a culture before analyzing it. Bohannan, in his discussion of the papers of Opler and Moskos, objected to the use of rigid *a priori* stages in research. Bohannan felt that "stages" are best represented by inductively-ascertained points in change where a major stimulus is noted. For example, the introduction of a new idea into a culture may result in a "stage." The exact nature of this change, or where it comes from is not particularly important. Bohannan indicated his agreement that stages are artificial constructs of the scientist, but he objected to the deductive method in formulating them. Here Herskovits noted that such a view might lead one to describe a series of historical accidents without any unifying element. Merriam agreed, but suggested that one might find unifying elements for seemingly accidental events in evolutionary theory. Opler appeared more interested in loose theoretical categories for studying change than did Bohannan, but insisted that these categories take into account the peculiarities of the cultures involved. The categories Opler would employ, however, would be similar to the "functional equivalents" presented by Ralph Linton in his *Tree of Culture*. It should be indicated that although the anthropologists rejected the notion of rigid *a priori* stages for the examination of change, they did recognize the need for theoretical links between whatever categories the social scientist decides to employ. Their arguments were decidedly not the arguments of raw empiricism.

## Economics

Economists attending the conference, with the possible exception of Spengler, represented positions almost completely antithetical to those of the anthropologists. If one were to construct a continuum of views expressed at the conference, anthropology would almost certainly be placed at one pole and economics at the other. There were, of course, some convergences, but these were comparatively few and far between.

First, as might have been expected, economists viewed the study of social change in underdeveloped areas as an examination of changes in technology or in the production and distribution of goods and services. In contrast to sociologists and anthropologists, the economists tended to treat social and cultural changes as consequences of economic changes. For example,

Spengler indicated that "social evolution" is not much help in analyzing the phenomena of interest to an economist. The most "sociological" of the economists present, Spengler, did indicate an interest in problems such as institutionalization of inventions or innovations, criticizing older economic models for treating change linearly. Rottenberg and Spengler disagreed over the problem of incorporating change into economic models, as will be indicated, but there was no question throughout the conference as to the major categories of interest to economists. If social or cultural concepts could assist in understanding economic growth, one had the impression that Spengler would be willing to incorporate them, but primarily as "intervening" variables. Moskos—a sociologist—indicated during the conference that Spengler tended to view change itself as integrative for society, while Feldman and Opler treated change as disruptive for the social and cultural systems respectively. De Schweinitz pointed out, however, and Rottenberg agreed, that "some stability" is generally considered necessary for economic growth. It was not always clear as to whether economists viewed change as beneficial for the society as a whole, or whether this was confined to the economic system alone. Rottenberg's exchange with Opler, however, indicates that "what is good for the economic system is good for society" may still characterize economic analysis.

Unlike the anthropologists, economists tended not to be cultural relativists. Spengler did indicate that independent variables affecting economic development might not be the same for underdeveloped areas as for Western societies. Even here, however, Spengler did not refer so much to cultural perspectives but rather to factors such as climate, geography, and standard economic variables. The difference appears to be that anthropologists view the whole problem of change from the cultural perspective, while economists tend to employ "objective" conceptual models directly.

Exchanges between Spengler and Rottenberg, plus additional comments by de Schweinitz, indicated clearly their favorable attitude toward *a priori* theoretical categories. However, all three pointed out that present economic models are not entirely satisfactory for the examination of change, and particularly in underdeveloped areas. It was striking that the complaints of economists about their models was not that they were not dynamic but that the dynamics involved were not completely satisfactory. Spengler indicated concern with both static models and linear dynamic models. Rottenberg defended static models as being useful for some purposes, but both agreed that dynamics must be examined. To those who have had an opportunity to compare economic models with other social-scientific models, it will come as no surprise that economics is head and shoulders above other disciplines

in its attempts to deal with the time dimension. In Blanksten's words, "They have done their homework."

With respect to the problem of stages, economists agreed that the constructs employed do not represent "reality." In Rottenberg's terms, "I join with (Professor Spengler) in his healthy skepticism about the merit of Rostow on stages. I am even doubtful of the value of a perception of history that sees stages marching across the proscenium of time . . . . Change occurs in small steps. It is continuous and not linked, autonomous and not imposed. . . . If a stage is only an intellectual construct it is potentially dangerous because it blinds the observer . . . ." However, Rottenberg did advocate the use of intellectual constructs which would *not* "blind the observer." He and Spengler agreed that a dynamic model of "equilibrium and equilibrium changes" is needed. This would not be a purely inductive model, however, but rather a different form of the theoretical construct than has been employed in the past.

### History and Political Science

The only reason for lumping together these two disciplines for analysis is that their respective representatives tended to be more concerned with social science in general than with any more restricted disciplinary approach. Consequently, the reader is referred to papers appearing elsewhere in this volume by Professors Brace and Weiner for more specific disciplinary problems.

Brace's approach as a historian is similar to that of the anthropologists with respect to culture. Brace's analysis of the Algerian elite was based entirely upon the point of view of the Algerians themselves. On the other hand, his paper and further remarks during the conference indicate that he is not at all opposed to the use of *a priori* theoretical categories for analysis. His interest in F. S. C. Northrop's analysis of evolutionary theory and Aristotilean logic can hardly be considered inductive. Brace clearly viewed change within an abstract theoretical framework, with an equally clear empirical reference.

If the foregoing approach to history does not reflect the common stereotype of historians, the political scientists at the conference appeared to be even further removed from their popular image. Snyder's concluding remarks, which will be examined in more detail subsequently, indicated quite clearly that any social-scientific concepts or theories of heuristic value to the political scientist are of interest as defining or independent variables. For example, Blanksten pointed to his interest in employing economic variables as predicting variables for political change in emergent societies. Weiner expressed interest and decided familiarity with functional social system theory, though he indicated that functional analysis is not sufficient for the understanding of

social change. All three agreed that newer or more refined theories are needed for the investigation of social change in underdeveloped areas.

### Sociology

Sociologists composed the largest contingent at the conference, with six members attending. Their approaches to the study of underdeveloped areas varied widely, from Cottrell's emphasis on "technology" to Feldman's and Mack's concern with definitional or "cultural" problems. Cottrell's approach bordered economics closely, while Feldman, particularly, demonstrated substantive theoretical interests similar to anthropology. Nevertheless, a common interest in types of social organization (as a dependent variable) appeared to unite the sociologists present.

Cottrell's comments about technology complemented portions of his paper. In general, he indicated a belief that technological progress has been so rapid that social organization or culture lose much of their predictive power in studies of decision-making. Modern computers make decisions so rapidly and efficiently that men do well just to keep up. Where technology has "taken over" in this manner, rational decision-making models are of little utility. Cottrell also indicated that democracy may be in process of becoming less of a decision-making process and more of an adaptive process. However, he qualified these generalizations by acknowledging that not all aspects of modern life are permeated by this phenomenon. Condit, in his critique of Cottrell's paper, indicated some dissatisfaction with the notion that technology has displaced "purposeful action." However, he agreed that modern technology has brought with it substantial changes. Both agreed that the question of the effect of technology remains open, but Cottrell remained closer to viewing technology itself as an independent variable, while Condit seemed to be in favor of employing it as an "intervening variable" between purposeful action and result.

Another block of sociologists, notably Bell, Greer and Moskos, appeared particularly concerned with the transition of societies from the *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* orientation. Unlike economists or anthropologists, however, their concern was with "increasing scale through time and space." Greer included in this concept such variables as ecological pressures. The problem presented here is the determination of functional adaptations of societies to increasing scale. Both Mack and Feldman cautioned that such an approach can lead to "taking a manager's view of society," but both agreed that it is necessary to go beyond cultural differences to explain or predict differential social action. In general, Bell found in his studies of Jamaica that increasing scale was accompanied by increased internal inclusiveness, *plus* increasing heterogeneity. Expanding scale appeared to result in more and more

diverging groups, each "agreeing to hate one another." This diversity set the pattern for a new kind of consensus, a procedural consensus setting the limits upon intergroup interaction. Bell and Moskos, however, indicated that values or cultural definitions could not be ignored. They appeared to view increasing scale as an independent variable, cultural definitions as intervening variables, and types of social organization as consequent variables. Feldman, while acknowledging some utility in the concept of increasing scale, found it imprecise. Furthermore, he indicated that studies employing the concept did not deal adequately with the conflict between older *Gemeinschaft* values and the contractual values accompanying increased industrialization. His position, and that of Mack, were not radically different from those of Bell and Moskos, but demonstrated a much greater concern with cultural definition.

In general, sociologists appeared to agree on the utility of *a priori* categories in research, though it was indicated again that present theories are not sufficient, and need modification. Sociologists seemed not so committed to the inductive method as anthropologists, but were perhaps more interested in modifying their conceptual schemes than were the economists present. Feldman, particularly, expressed dissatisfaction with the structural-functional, or equilibrium, models of society, maintaining that models of social change must be incorporated. He disagreed sharply with Rottenberg on the latter's contention that static models were useful for studies of developing areas. Feldman indicated that sociological theory has avoided the problem of violence or disintegration in change, and has been led by equilibrium models to view change as peaceful and integrative. He maintained that from other theoretical perspectives, e.g., "the bottom levels of societies," systems *do* break up violently and change *is* disintegrative. Moskos, in discussing his work with Albanian elites, indicated that inductively derived results correspond quite closely to the ideal types of Max Weber, and some of the theoretical notions of Pareto. However, he agreed with Herskovits that these stages of change did not incorporate an *adequate* underlying dynamic action system. Addressing the same problem, Feldman and Bell noted that categories or "stages" of change are merely theoretical artifacts, substituted for sufficient knowledge of the underlying processes.

### Summary

Interdisciplinary differences were evident. Discussions at the conference pointed up the wide disparity of viewpoints among social scientists, particularly with respect to theory and methodology. These differences in approach resulted in rather different views concerning the status of evolutionary theory in the study of underdeveloped areas.

The foregoing discussion, however, indicates clearly that the social



scientists attending the conference were united in a recognition of the need for more adequate theories with which to study social change. Furthermore, they were unanimously concerned with this problem as it applies to the study of emergent areas. Some conferees considered static models to be of some value, but all agreed that improved models of change were needed.

