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Lewis Henry Morgan. *Ancient Society*

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possibility. How can power develop if there is no history? In what does social power subsist if there is no society? How can there be any sources of power when there is nothing which potentially cannot serve as a source of power, i.e. as a means to some end? But if The Sources of Social Power is not a history, nor a sociology, nor a theory of power, then what is it? It is precisely this problem of identity that is raised by the condition of postmodernity, and which should serve as the starting point for any serious postmodernist text. Otherwise, writing becomes a mere game of charades in which words can mean anything and nothing.

Jeffrey A. Shad, Jr.

References


MORGAN REDIVIVUS


This book is published in a Classics of Anthropology series. Morgan (1818-1881), a lawyer by profession, acquired a student interest in the Indian culture of the Iroquois. That growing social-political interest in ethnology paralleled a relatively brief but highly successful career in law. He was able to retire with a modest fortune and devote his life (from 1856) to
ethnological-anthropological studies. As was common in the pursuit of intellectual studies in the 19th Century, Morgan was able to transform multidimensional amateur interests into what became, by the end of the century, more professional concerns. When he died, he was America's foremost anthropologist; a member of the National Academy of Science; and a past president of the AAAS. His chief writing, *Ancient Society*, attracted the attention of his European peer, Karl Marx, and Engels made extensive use of its material in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* wherein it becomes part of the corpus of Marxist literature as a data source.

What we find in Morgan's book—a common difficulty with amateurs' and originators' writings—is that except for a few elementary kernel facts, the book is Victorian fairy tale, myth makery. Its main themes are introduced in the Preface:

1. Mankind has probably existed far longer than the last glacial age.
2. Mankind has evolved progressively in the ordered states of savagery, barbarism, and civilization.
3. Through the latter part of the period of savagery, and the entire period of barbarism, mankind was organized socially in *gentes* (bodies of kinfolk each possessing a common name and descended from a common ancestor—in an archaic period, a female ancestor; with the appearance of property, a male ancestor); phratry (a brotherhood, a union or association of two or more *gentes* joined for certain common objects); and tribe (several *gentes*, developed from a few, all of whose members are intermingled by marriage, and all of whom speak the same dialect).
4. Sexually, mankind has evolved within five forms of families: consanguine family (intermarriage of brothers and sisters in a group); the Punaluan family (derived from a Hawaiian usage, intermarriage of several "brothers"—male cousins of all degrees—to each other's wives in a group; and of several "sisters"—female cousins of all degrees—to each other's husbands in a group); the pairing family (pairing of a male and female in marriage but without exclusive cohabitation); patriarchal family (marriage of one man to several wives); monogamian family (marriage of one man to one woman with exclusive cohabitation).
5. Mankind has evolved economically within the progression of the idea of property through its ordered states—zero in savagery, to dominant in civilization.

These are the five classes of ideas, "facts," that Morgan pursues. As he moves through the various states of mankind and their exemplars, Morgan notes the progress in inventions and discoveries, and the changing form of institutional relations. He notes also the changing appearance of subsistence, government, language, the family, religion, house life and architecture, and of property.

Most of the book (Part II) is devoted to government of society and the idea of government, in gens, phratry, tribe, and nation—among the Iroquois (his original study field); other Indians; the Aztecs; the Greeks; the Romans; other European and Asian peoples including the Hebrews. The third, lesser, fraction of the book (Part III) is devoted to the family and the growth of the idea of family.
It is clear that some approximation of Morgan’s idea of a progression of social, technological, cultural, and political changes has become the common view of those educated in Western traditions. Upon this has been grafted a somewhat more sharply delineated picture of a stone, a pottery, a metal (copper, then iron) age of technological evolution, progressing from hunting-gathering to agriculture to manufacture. This picture is meant to serve as both historical outline and theory. We are still caught up in that generalized fiction of “progress.”

Nevertheless it behooves all educated persons to own such books, so that—if nothing else—they have a basis to compare facts as modern discoveries are made and offer a better view of reality. Hopefully, in time, some more compelling theory than a progression of states (Comte) or a dialectic turning of history on its head (Marx) may arise to account for man.

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COMMAND VS. MARKET IN CIVILIZATIONAL HISTORY


This book by a noted historian provides some material and a viewpoint that may be of some use to civilizationists, as well as to peace researchers, educators, and activists. The book focuses on the period since 1000 AD, but an introductory chapter provides some background on arms and society in antiquity since 3500 BC, at which time bronze weapons and armor came into being at or near the beginning of civilization in the Middle East. At this time, and throughout most of the time until and including the present day, wars were fought by what the author calls “command economies,” that is, economies responding to governmental needs rather than the needs of the marketplace. In the beginning of civilization these “commands” took the form of pillage and plunder as early civilized governments provided for the needs of their armies by authorizing the armies to take what they needed from the “citizenry” along the way. This “command” procedure apparently worked well enough for several thousand years, but military progress was slow. Weapons and armor were not much better than those used by primitive peoples, except that they were made of metal instead of sticks and stones. The nobles and royalty rode to battle in chariots, but as often as not they dismounted from their awkward chariots before fighting, because the chariots only got in the way. New and improved chariots appeared sometime after 1800 BC, but this did not help the so-called “civilized” (city-dwelling) peoples as much as it helped their “barbarian” (agricultural) neighbors, who had better access to horses, which enabled them to raid their Middle Eastern civilized neighbors.

Barbarian successes led Egypt to hire some of them as a permanent army in the 16th century BC, which served to defend the New Kingdom very