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## MORGAN, LEWIS HENRY (1818–1881)

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Although Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) was a successful New York attorney in the mid-1800s, he is remembered as a pioneer in the fledgling science of cultural anthropology. Morgan focused his study on the Iroquois Native American tribe, particularly the Seneca. His objective observations and chronicling of their daily cultural routines became the basis for the study of ethnology as we know it today. He is also credited with applying the idea of evolution to cultural behavior. Accordingly, some have called him the father of American anthropology. Scientists following Morgan's model have recorded the traditions of peoples that have since been acculturated to modern society, and their works have preserved these peoples' customs for future generations to study.

Morgan was born on November 21, 1818, in Aurora, New York. Little was recorded about his personal life. He attended Union College and earned his degree in law in 1840. Lewis married Mary Elizabeth Steele in 1851. His legal practice was very lucrative, and over the span of his career Morgan amassed a small fortune. He was greatly respected among his peers and served in the New York State Assembly and Senate.

Morgan's wealth allowed him to pursue his interests outside of the courtroom. One of his law clients was Ely S. Parker, a prominent Native American engineer and member of the Seneca tribe. Morgan's relationship with Parker inspired him to learn more about the native culture of the region. Setting out to learn firsthand about the customs and traditions of the Iroquois, he spent years immersing himself in the culture of the Seneca people. In 1847 he published his observations in a series in the *American Review* entitled "Letters on the Iroquois." In 1851 he released a longer work, *The League of the Iroquois*, explaining the social and political structures of this tribe. This is considered one of the first ethnographies, or scientific descriptions, of an ethnic group.

These studies led Morgan to think about the social structures of all societies and peoples around the world. He took a broad approach in examining the kinship systems and clan organization of many different cultures. Such a scientific approach

to culture and behavior was a new concept in the 19th century. Morgan wasn't interested in individuals or societies in the ancient past but in the interactions of people in his contemporary world. He was also curious about how culture changed through time. As were many of his contemporaries, he was influenced by Darwin's theory of biological evolution and tried to apply it to cultural behaviors.

Morgan theorized that culture progressed unilinearly through time and that there have been three stages in cultural evolution; savagery, barbarism, and civilization. He linked technological progress with social change and published these ideas in *Ancient Society* in 1877. For better or for worse, he is often associated with the movement of social Darwinism, although he seemed to support equality for all ethnicities.

As did members of the legal community, his fellow scientists held Morgan in high regard. In 1879 he was elected president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He became an official adopted member of the Iroquois tribe and was given the name *Tayadaowuhkuh*, meaning *bridging the gap*. Morgan died on December 17, 1881.

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See also Anthropology; Evolution, Cultural; Evolution, Social; Harris, Marvin; Materialism; Time, Prehistoric; Tylor, Edward Burnett; White, Leslie A.

### Further Readings

- Moore, J. D. (2004). *Visions of culture: An introduction to anthropological theories and theorists* (2nd ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Morgan, L. H. (1877). *Ancient society*. London: Macmillan.

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## MORTALITY

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Mortality is defined as "the quality of being mortal or subject to death." Death is the permanent end or ceasing of the life of a biological organism. A common thread that links all living creatures is the fact that someday they will die. Unlike their fellow creatures, human beings are aware that they are mortal and have devoted much of human history to the pursuit of overcoming this mortality.