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IN MEMORIAM

LEWIS R. BINFORD 1931-2011

Lewis Roberts Binford passed away on April 11, 2011 in Kirksville, Missouri at the age of 79. Lew is survived by his wife Amber Johnson, his daughter Martha Binford, and a multitude of friends, students, and fellow archaeologists and anthropologists. He lived an amazingly rich life and his impact upon many of us was, and is, profound. He masterfully reoriented and reshaped the discipline of archaeology.

His educational experiences included Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the U. S. Army, the University of North Carolina (B.A. 1957), and the University of Michigan (M.A. 1958 and PhD. 1964). His own mentors and intellectual influences included, in part, archaeologists Joffre L. Coe, Fay-Cooper Cole, James B. Griffin, Albert C. Spaulding; anthropologists John Gillin, John Honnigmann, Richard K. Beardsley, Julian Steward, Leslie A. White, and Elman R. Service; sociologist Guy Johnson; and, ecologists Eugene Odum, Ramon Margalef, and Robert MacArthur.

He taught at the University of Michigan (1960-61), the University of Chicago (1961-1965), University of California-Santa Barbara (1965-1966), University of California-Los Angeles (1966-68), University of New Mexico (1968-1991) and Southern Methodist University (1991-2003). He also held visiting professorships at UCLA and in Great Britain, South Africa, China, India, and Yugoslavia.

Lew received many honors including Honorary Doctor of Letters at the University of Southampton, England (1983), the Huxley Memorial Medal from the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain (1986), membership in the National Academy of Sciences (2001), and the Society for American Archaeology Lifetime Achievement Award (2008).

Lew provided us with more than 160 “waypoints” or publications including 23 books and monographs, as well as 141 articles, book chapters, reviews, and comments. These works demarcate the research path(s) that he followed and they also have guided, and will continue to guide, his students and peers along an incredible journey.

During this journey, Lew pointed out to us that the scientific potential of the archaeological record had yet to be realized. “New archaeology” emerged as Lew’s students at Michigan, Chicago, UCLA, New Mexico, and SMU set out to challenge traditional archaeology’s self-limiting views and interpretations of the material record. Reactions to processual archaeology were, and continue to be, quite harsh. Some even spoke of this new perspective in messianic terms. Kent Flannery



proclaimed that he was with Lew when he fed 5,000 undergraduates with a few loaves of bread and a newspaper of fish (it was actually three loaves and five fishes)!

Lew soon realized that the answers to archaeological questions were not derived simply by amassing more artifacts, fine-tuning our descriptive classification systems, or conducting heavy-duty quantitative analyses. As anthropological archaeologists, we were to look for generalizations about past human behavior that could be evaluated via the archaeological record.

Lew adopted a cultural evolutionary perspective that emphasized ecology, human adaptability, and cultural systems. Such a view of culture provided an organizational framework that identified the dynamic linkages between tech-

nology, food-getting, diet, raw material procurement, landuse, mobility patterns, social group formation, mortuary rituals, and so forth. Such linkages enabled archaeologists to explore all aspects of past cultural systems via multiple pathways.

His students also learned that it was human behavior, as well as other formation processes, that created patterns in the archaeological record and not human thoughts. And, human behavior was then seen ultimately as responses to external environmental factors. His seminal work *Constructing Frames of Reference: An Analytical Method for Archaeological Theory Building Using Ethnographic and Environmental Data Sets* (2001) was designed to identify covariant relationships between the biophysical environment (i.e., habitat variability) and human behavior (expressed as ethnographic data). This long-term research program is a gift to us all for it lays out a means by which we can make use for ethnographic data regarding hunter-gatherers, cultivators, pastoralists, and complex societies to serve archaeology.

Now, Lew has slipped away from our seminar room but the class is not over. His passing has brought many of us back together once again. We more fully appreciate the impact that he has had upon our lives, our thoughts, our careers, and our research. He set the “fires in our minds” and instilled within us a passion for anthropological archaeology. And, now, several generations of his students and colleagues will renew their efforts to build upon Lew’s exciting and powerful research, to develop additional frames of reference, and to continue to construct reliable knowledge about the past.

Alan Osborn is a Research Associate Professor and Curator at the Nebraska State Museum.