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Leslie A. White
By William J. Peace
University of Nebraska Press

Series Editors' Introduction

Biography holds a particular place in the critical history of anthropology, as of any other discipline. Anthropology is perhaps unique, however, in its long-standing professional concern with the impact of culture on personality, to use Edward Sapir's phrase. The history of anthropology is, in this sense, an anthropological problem, with the biographer as archivist presenting an ethnography of his or her subject. Each anthropologist uniquely construes the traditions of a national and transnational anthropology. When the social networks that constitute the profession are approached from the point of view of a single individual, readers are encouraged to construct disciplinary developments as the result of strategic decisions on the part of participants.

Some biographical subjects necessarily present greater challenges than others. Leslie A. White confounds the patterned quality of a single professional life because of the diversity of his interests throughout his career. William J. Peace documents the facets and contradictions of Leslie A. White's life and career, sketching his midwestern farm upbringing and World War I navy service, and limning in meticulous detail the variegated tangents of his contacts with colleagues inside the academy and beyond it.

White is widely remembered within the discipline for three areas of specialization: as a southwestern ethnologist in the Boasian tradition of his initial training at the University of Chicago with Boasians Edward Sapir and Fay-Cooper Cole, as North America's primary proponent of a revitalized evolutionary theory and, in the later years of his career, as a historian of anthropology. His political involvements, particularly in his younger years, constitute a parallel intellectual and activist strand. Very few readers will know all of these sides.

White lived in interesting times. Like many of his generation with socialist leanings, his involvement with the Socialist Labor Party was self-defensively clandestine. Peace documents his writing career under the pseudonym of John Steel, the influences of his travels to Russia, and McCarthy-era challenges to academic freedom. White's unconventional views, particularly on evolution and free will, challenged the integrity of academic freedom at the University of Michigan before the Cold War erupted. The controversy White's lectures and writings prompted enabled Michigan to fare somewhat better than other universities during this dark era in American history.

Although polemic invective characterized much of White's writing, in

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person he was very polite, and his professionalism ensured that his academic disagreements with his colleagues were not repeated on a personal level. As chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan for 25 years, White attempted to avoid the formation of a Michigan evolutionary school, despite his own theoretical commitments to this theory. Diversity of approach was a strength to the anthropology he envisioned.

White turned to the history of anthropology to lambast the Boasian tradition as a straitjacket preventing resurgence of evolutionary theories. His disciplinary history was presentist, almost incidental to his reading of the present and future; it had a persuasive rather than a documentary focus. An uncompleted biography of Lewis Henry Morgan expressed White's continuing commitment to Morgan's evolutionary logic and presented an alternative future for American anthropology.

In White's mind there was no inherent contradiction between his early ethnological work at several pueblos and the universalist basis of his evolutionary theory. Southwesternists remember White's unusual ability to obtain information from the most secretive of the pueblos. Although this work has raised serious ethical questions by contemporary standards, White was respected for his results at the time. White never recanted as ethical standards changed in the discipline, continuing to insist that ethnographic data was a legitimate part of anthropology.

As a theorist, however, White preferred universal generalizations. Peace's discussion of his relationships, both professional and personal, with other evolutionary theorists helps to frame the uniqueness of his theory of culture. White deemed Julian Steward's multilinear evolution, with its strong emphasis on environment, to be tainted by Boasian historical hesitations and thus incoherent as a theory. He was more comfortable with V. Gordon Childe and, indeed, with the archaeological reading of history and time perspective.

The legacy of Leslie A. White is as complex as his career. His materialist models have proved very welcome to museum anthropologists and archaeologists. His cultural theory served to provide theoretical alternatives in the interwar and postwar years. And for many, White continues to be a significant contemporary figure as well as an icon in the history of American anthropology.

Regna Darnell and Stephen O. Murray

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Preface

Writing a biography about any figure in the history of anthropology is a difficult endeavor. As a group, anthropologists deeply care about their scholarship and the people they study. They also tend to have prickly personalities. In conducting research about the life and career of Leslie A. White I often felt as though I were traversing a minefield: I never knew when someone was going to blow up in a fury over a question or even the mention of White's name. This was made quite clear to me early on in my research when I contacted an individual who I knew had had a serious falling-out with White. I already knew White's beliefs about why the friendship had ruptured; I wanted to ask this scholar his interpretation. When several letters went unanswered I decided to telephone, assuming the person did not want to reply in writing. When I identified myself there was a long silence, and then the reply came: "I have two words to say: Fuck you!" With that he slammed the phone down.[1]

Given the strong feelings White's name can provoke, he remains a controversial figure to many scholars. White was by nature a feisty, opinionated man whose life was punctuated by heated intellectual engagements with other social scientists. It is no wonder he is not well understood. For over two decades White's work was on the cutting edge of the discipline, yet his legacy has been colored by the semantic battles in which he was so often embroiled. White's work was a major source of study, one that profoundly influenced many of his students, such as Robert Carneiro, Marshall Sahlins, and Elman Service, as well as fellow faculty members at the University of Michigan and elsewhere. His work was widely discussed, as is evidenced by the inclusion of his name in a short list of most frequently cited anthropologists based on references to him in the *American Anthropologist*, *Anthropology Today*, and in *The Teaching of Anthropology* (Shimkin 1964:14–15).

Given White's central place within the discipline, it is surprising that White is one of the few influential anthropologists of his generation who has not been the subject of a full-scale biography.[2]

This is particularly curious considering that the two scholars White is most often associated with, Julian Steward and Vere Gordon Childe, have been the subjects of intense biographical analysis (Clemmer 1999; Green 1981; McNairn 1980). The reasons White's work and life have not been subject to

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detailed analysis are complex. White was a difficult man, prone to attacking those whom he perceived were not supportive of his work.[3]

In addition, some have argued that he spent too much time "defending" Lewis Henry Morgan after he needed no defense, he attacked "antievolutionists" when such attacks were not necessary, and he alienated potential allies when he failed to find common ground intellectually. As a result his peers remember the personal commitment and rhetoric of White's arguments rather than the nature and scope of his contribution to method and theory. Meanwhile, many historians of anthropology, ignoring the sociopolitical context of his work, consider White a technological determinist, unable to see the merit of his other theoretical contributions. In an appraisal of mid—20th century American anthropology, Carroll L. Riley compared the differences between Vere Gordon Childe and Leslie White that underscore the reasons why White's contribution to the discipline has not been adequately studied:

> The neo-evolutionism of men like V. G. Childe and L. White has had considerable influence on American historical thinking. Childe, indeed, belongs in the circle of seminal minds; since he was not an American, he perhaps cannot be claimed as an American historical anthropologist—and in any case his background and training were quite different (British and continental archaeological tradition plus a dollop of Marxism). He was exceedingly historically minded, but his main interest was in generalization, and history—or prehistory—simply formed the means and material for these larger problems. His unquenching demand for good work, his essential lack of dogmatism (in spite of a presumed Marxist bias), his willingness to discard a position when it became untenable or improbable, and his reluctance to accept easy unproven generalizations about human nature all go to make him a spiritual brother of Boas and Spier and others in American historical anthropology.
>
> Leslie White is a study in contrast. His obvious ability and insight is somewhat blunted by a doctrinaire adulation of Lewis H. Morgan and a tendency to polemics when his hero is attacked, criticized, or overlooked. The main difficulty of White, however, is his unwillingness to accept the fact there is no serious theoretical difference between his own reasonable evolutionism and the Boasian approach. [Riley 1967:20–21]

In the foregoing quote there is clearly a nuanced view of Childe's contribution and a forgiving dismissal of his Marxist views, while White is taken to task for being blinded by the polemical content of his work. Just as Childe's

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work has been placed in its historic context, in my biography of White I will document the political influences that affected his career, demonstrating that his research, too, was embedded in the broader social and ideological times in which he lived. To this end an underlying theme throughout the text is the conjunction between political beliefs and anthropological theory. My contextualization of White's work highlights a significant shortcoming in the history of anthropology, specifically the failure of historians such as George Stocking and Richard Handler to consider the political beliefs and actions of scholars like White, Melville Jacobs, Oscar Lewis, Alexander Lesser, Bernhard Stern, and many others who were drawn to radical politics. We anthropologists all too often fail to acknowledge what Laura Nader (1997a, 1997b) has identified as the "phantom factor": many of our long-standing traditions were profoundly influenced not only by anthropological theory but also by the committed political beliefs of our intellectual forebears. After all, as Clyde Kluckhohn (1959:147) noted, anthropologists "have characteristically been men and women fervently in search of a theory."

In acknowledging that contemporary sociopolitical events affected the ways in which a scholar such as White worked, one must look beyond merely the anthropological social milieu to integrate broader economic, social, political, and intellectual history into the analysis. The lack of attention paid to White and the degree to which he was influenced by forces outside of anthropology emphasize the need for a balanced, nonpolemical analysis of his career. Hence my biography will look at both White's scientific and anthropological contributions. To this end my emphasis is on his intellectual and political work rather than on his personal life. While I do touch upon aspects of White's nonprofessional life, particularly as it pertains to his childhood, I am principally concerned with his formal thought.

No attempt at a definitive portrait of Leslie A. White could be undertaken without extensive research at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, where his papers are housed. The collection is voluminous, spanning the period before he was born in 1900 to his death in 1975. The archive contains 27 boxes of materials, not hitherto seriously analyzed by any scholar.[4]

Within each box there are approximately 5,000 pages of printed matter. Of particular importance to my research were White's extensive correspondence files. White corresponded with many notable figures within anthropology; taken collectively these letters are an invaluable resource about White's views on a myriad of personal and theoretical topics. Throughout the text I make

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liberal use of White's letters, as they foreshadow and add depth to many of the arguments he engaged in throughout his career. The collection also contains material related to White's unfinished biography of Lewis Henry Morgan.[5]

I also make use of White's personal and academic journals. White faithfully kept a journal from his years as an undergraduate at Columbia University in 1922 until his death—unfortunately, he carefully expunged journal entries he deemed too personal. For instance, he took a razor to his most detailed personal journal and deleted five years of entries, spanning the years 1952 to 1957. Similarly he excised pages from several autobiographical statements regarding the reasons why his family left their farm in Lane, Kansas, in 1917.

Another rich source of information I rely on are copies of White's unpublished articles and books. White left a number of unpublished manuscripts, ranging from poetry to the voluminous sequel to *The Evolution of Culture*. The manuscripts that survive, particularly those that pertain to his activities in the Socialist Labor Party and his fieldwork in the Southwest, yield invaluable insights into the seemingly unintelligible twists and turns his career took. Of special value in this regard are his field notes and correspondence pertaining to his ethnographic work. Closed to scholars at White's own direction for some ten years after his death (Dillingham 1985), White's field notes are a treasure trove of material about the Pueblo peoples. Not only do they highlight the inherent problems with the type of fieldwork he conducted, they also demonstrate how deeply he cared about the people he studied.

I have conducted extensive research to fill in the gaps that exist in White's papers. For example, although at first glance White's extensive correspondence with Marvin Farber and Elsie Clews Parsons seemed complete, several crucial letters were missing. Accordingly I have closely examined not only White's papers but also those of approximately 50 other anthropologists who had close connections to White. More generally I have examined archives that were directly relevant to White's career. Thus I delved deeply into the papers at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library that concerned the Departments of Anthropology and Sociology and the formation of the "Chicago School of Sociology." Similarly I have made use of the papers of the Socialist Labor Party housed at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

In addition to archival sources I have contacted and interviewed many people who knew White. Several people I spoke to requested anonymity, and I have respected these wishes. It was principally through interviews that I got a sense of White's personal reasons for making certain career choices—issues that do not necessarily figure in his writings. These interviews also

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enabled me to understand the interpersonal relationships that existed among anthropologists and, in part, helped me account for disparities that would otherwise have remained puzzling. Throughout the text I try to remain as objective and dispassionate as possible, neither an apologist nor a critic of White. Nonetheless, during the course of my research I have grown exceedingly fond of a man I never met: an extremely complicated man who let few know him well and even fewer know him intimately.

In the first chapter I explore White's lonely and unsettled childhood and his early educational experience. Growing up in Lane, Kansas, had a profound impact on his personal development, as did his eventual rupture with rural farm life. White's experience in the navy during World War I transformed his worldviews. It made him question all that he had been taught and led him to study at Louisiana State University, Columbia University, the New School for Social Research, and finally the University of Chicago. The second chapter discusses White's fieldwork among the Pueblo peoples. This is probably one of the least appreciated aspects of White's academic career, although his work was highly regarded by ethnologists of his generation. He was a diligent fieldworker, returning to the Southwest frequently between 1926 and the late 1950s. It was his early fieldwork that convinced him anthropology was the proper career path for him. In fact had he not been attracted to socialist politics and evolutionary theory during the 1930s and become embroiled in heated debates with Robert Lowie in the *American Anthropologist*, he would not have become a controversial figure in the discipline. The third chapter analyzes why he was attracted to the Socialist Labor Party, evolutionary theory, and socialism, all of which were intricately intertwined in White's view. After honing his arguments with regard to the value of evolutionary theory under the pseudonym John Steel in the *Weekly People*, the official publication of the Socialist Labor Party, White forcefully tried to rekindle an interest in social evolution among American anthropologists. This battle was long and lonely and it exacted a great toll. White's unpopular views had an adverse affect on his academic career, for he was hounded by the University of Michigan administration, the Catholic Church and, for a brief time, the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The fourth and fifth chapters argue that White was able not only to remain employed but also to take up a courageous intellectual stand because he had already established himself as a scholar of merit.

A fundamental part of my analysis concentrates on White's attempt to define the concept of culture as the core of anthropological investigation. This effort

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was intertwined with a forceful argument that culture could be reduced to a number of variables that could be used to predict a course of action for the future. It was this concept of culture within an evolutionary framework that inspired other scholars, although there was a major difference between White's evolutionary work and that of scholars such as Julian Steward and Vere Gordon Childe, both of whom I discuss in some detail. By the time Steward and Childe joined White in arguing for the value of evolutionary theory, it was politically dangerous to acknowledge any form of Marxist or socialist literature or influence. Given the impact the Cold War had on all scholars, in chapter 6 I will detail why three men who had so much in common spent more time differentiating their work from one another than in seeking theoretical linkages.

The final chapter examines the impact that White's work had on other scholars, particularly his role in the development of the anthropology department at the University of Michigan, one of the foremost centers of thought in the discipline. I also detail the last 15 years of White's life. After Mary White's death in 1959, his life was sad and lonely. He entered into a short-lived second marriage and struggled with alcohol abuse for a decade. After joining Alcoholics Anonymous he tried to reorganize his life, but by the end of his life he was embittered and depressed—an outlook that was reflected in his work. Finally, although I am sympathetic to White's theoretical perspective, his views and some of his actions during his life were not without fault. Like all scholars, he made errors and in some cases displayed poor judgment. Viewed as a whole, however, his career was of seminal importance to the development and shaping of mid-20th-century American anthropological theory.

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Chapter 1

Early Life and Formative Experiences

I am beginning to question very closely the value of my college training. I don't believe the knowledge I will gain at college will really help me much.—White, journal, circa 1922

Childhood

Leslie A. White, the second of three children, was born in Salida, Colorado, on January 19, 1900. He and his siblings (Helen, born 1898, and Willard, born 1902) were the children of Alvin Lincoln White, a civil engineer, and Mildred Mae Millard. Alvin White, originally from Calhoun, Nebraska, received an A.B. and B.S. from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. For several years the elder White worked for various railroads locating routes in Colorado, mostly in the vicinity of booming mining towns. Mildred Mae Millard, born in Boone, Iowa, met White's father in Nebraska; they were married in 1896 and moved to Salida in the late 1890s.[1]

Alvin White was employed by the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, and Salida, a busy mining town, was division point for the railroad. All three children were born in Salida, where they resided in a small brick house.

White's father was apparently a brilliant engineer but had little time for his family (White to Meyer, April 3, 1964, BHL-WP). He was one of six children and his father, Alvin Granville White, was an outstanding Nebraska pioneer whom White described as being "a straight-laced deeply moral, profoundly religious New England Puritan Methodist minister" (White to Webb, May 7, 1968, BHL-WP).[2]

Perhaps due to his influence, the younger Alvin White believed, as Calvin did, that work was a virtue unto itself. He was a hard man, emotionally distant from the family. White wrote that his father "tried to break away from the orthodoxy and fervor of his [own] father" but never truly succeeded (White to Webb, May 7, 1968, BHL-WP). A childhood friend of White remembered his father as being "the straightest man I ever saw, who walked like he was going into a fire."[3]

According to Mrs. Lippard, a neighbor in Salida, White's father was "brilliant, studious, withdrawn and nongregarious; a man who regarded gaiety and frivolity wasteful, if not a bit sinful" (Meyer to White, April 23, 1965, BHL-WP).[4]

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White's mother, 12 years younger and much more outgoing, did not receive the necessary emotional support or love she expected from her husband. Apparently, White's father refused to attend picnics or parties planned by his wife, and in time she began going out while he stayed home. When White was five years old his mother fell in love with another man, and his parents divorced. This caused quite a stir among family and friends, who were evenly divided as to who was to blame for the end of the marriage. White's mother moved to Denver and, as was the custom at the time in cases of abandonment or adultery, custody of the three children was awarded to White's father. White never spoke nor wrote about the impact his parents' separation had on his childhood, yet he retained a number of vivid memories of Salida; for example, he remembered seeing Teddy Roosevelt speak from the rear platform of a train during a campaign stop there (White to Meyer, April 3, 1964, BHL-WP).

After White's parents separated in 1905, his father moved the family to Kansas City, Missouri. With his career advancing, White's father no longer conducted regional surveys but worked in the main office of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. However, he did not like working in an urban setting and became convinced that spending all day indoors was unnatural and was adversely affecting his health. Having spent a portion of his younger life working on a farm, he firmly believed that a return to vigorous outdoor life would improve his health. Accordingly, in 1906 he moved his family to a farm near Greeley, Kansas (approximately 65 miles southwest of Kansas City). Although he knew little about farm management, he purchased a farm in March 1907 near Lane, Kansas. The White family would remain in Lane from 1907 to 1914. Leslie White's formative years and earliest memories were dominated by rural farm life.

When in a retrospective mood, White would tell people he learned many valuable lessons living on a farm. However, he told precious few that his childhood was unsettled and unhappy. At first he was excited by the livestock and the huge expanses of land, but this was quickly forgotten. In an autobiographical document, White wrote: "The household became desolate and lonely. I used to cry almost every night before going to bed. My father used to ask me, in helpless sympathy, why I was crying, but I could not tell him. I did not know. I knew only an overwhelming loneliness and need for love. My father loved us children deeply and his devotion to us knew no bounds. But perhaps as a stern Puritan's son, he could not express his love affectionately" (White, untitled reminiscence, circa 1952, BHL-WP).

White's father was tender at times such as these, but this did not stop his

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son's tears or alleviate his overwhelming sense of loneliness. White frequently argued with his father and took great delight in being able to catch him in logical fallacies. These arguments frequently ended in White's father beating him.[5]

A number of autobiographical letters White exchanged with various people toward the end of his life confirm that his father had a profound impact on his development. For example, White remained grateful, if not relieved, that his father did not speak for or against religion. Apparently his father "believed that there was a God of some sort, and that he was good. But there was never any suggestion that God had anything whatever to do with the world we lived in or in our personal lives" (White to Webb, May 7, 1968, BHL-WP). White was not exactly sure why his father never spoke of religion and did not know if this nonverbalization was a conscious decision on his father's part. White did specifically recall that his father never set foot in a church after his marriage.[6]

In 1952 he returned to the farm near Lane in the hope that it would cause him to remember things of consequence he had forgotten. The visit prompted him to describe the farm: "Our home was a small two-story structure. As was the case of houses in that community at that time, it was without running water, plumbing, or electric lights. We had a windmill and a well nearby, an outdoor privy; we heated the house with wood stoves and lighted it with kerosene lamps. Near the house—not beneath it—was a cellar which served as a refuge from cyclones as well as to store potatoes, apples, and canned fruit. There was an old dilapidated barn, a tool shed, a big old straw stack and a few forlorn trees. The railroad ran through our farm about a half-mile from our house" (White, untitled reminiscence, circa 1952, BHL-WP).

The isolation of farm life created a lonely existence. There were no neighbors and no playmates aside from his brother and sister, and White quickly became bored by the tedious work required to maintain a farm. The farm was several miles from Lane, a small town with stores abutting a single dirt road. White's limited social life revolved around school, where the teacher was 18 years old and had only just finished the eighth grade herself. Eight grades coexisted in a one-room schoolhouse dominated by a wood-burning stove. The stove heated the room in the winter and kept the ink bottles from freezing at night. The highlight of White's social life was the monthly Saturday afternoon trip to Lane with his father, sister, and brother. In town his father sold butter, cream, and eggs to purchase groceries from the general store. White revisited Lane several times and kept in contact with several people from his childhood. After one such visit he was prompted to write:

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> I have seen quite a few people and the old town. It is not an inspiring sight. It is small grubby, untidy, in fact ugly. It has deteriorated considerably since I was here twenty-five years ago. . . . Many, many houses here are just as they were 25 years ago except for the natural weathering and degeneration that a quarter of a century will bring. . . . Not only are little towns like Lane untidy, and their houses unsightly, but the men are dirty. . . . It is hard to understand how so many of the men can be so dirty. The town is full of weeds. There are no lawns. The trees have had no care. Cows, pigs and chickens are kept right in town. They all have outdoor crapping cans. . . . I seem so remote here. The world where I customarily live has been so far left behind it hardly seems to exist. Of course, it is just the other way around—time has marched on and left Lane behind—the "town that God Forgot." Only I don't know whether Lane knows it or not. [White, untitled reminiscence, September 2, 1938, BHL-WP]

White's father employed an elderly housekeeper and a hired man to help with farm chores. White found the hired man, John, a novelty; unlike his father, he was capable of carrying on light-hearted conversations. John joked with the boys and was willing to play practical jokes on White's younger brother, Willard. The housekeeper was an elderly woman whom White and his brother named "Aunt Frank." She mothered the children, told them endless stories, and cared for them through routine childhood illnesses. As White's father became more settled, the hired man was fired; when the children became more self-sufficient, the housekeeper was dismissed as well. Hence by the time White was eight, he was responsible for many of the household chores; when his father was too tired to prepare a meal, which was often the case, White cooked for his siblings. He was expected as well to help feed the livestock, milk the cows, and work in the fields. He was exposed to the elements and wrote that he suffered greatly in the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter. White sadly recalled: "First John left, then Aunt Frank. We were alone, my father, Helen, Willard and I. The house seemed so quiet and desolate. There was no woman there. There was no odor of coffee, no aroma of John's Bull Durham. We had only one kerosene lamp lighted. Papa would cook supper, or sometimes we would have a cold meal. Helen would help him wash and dry the dishes. Then Dad would take Billy [Willard], as he would always call him, and who by this time was asleep, upstairs and put him to bed" (White, untitled reminiscence, circa 1952, BHL-WP).

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This way of life abruptly ended in 1915, when Helen became pregnant at the age of 17. A strict and devout man, White's father was devastated and reluctant to let anyone he knew see his daughter's "condition." Deeply embarrassed, he moved the family from place to place during Helen's pregnancy because of the stigma attached to her age and marital status, eventually settling down in Zachary, Louisiana (north of Baton Rouge), one year later. The event caused a profound rupture in the household and led to White's estrangement from his father, and to a lesser degree his brother, for several years, although he was never estranged from his sister.[7]

While White's sister was pregnant, the family lived a nomadic existence. White also spent some time in Denver with his mother for the fist time since he was a young child. White's mother was with her daughter when she gave birth at the East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana (White to County Clerk, Denver, Colorado, April 5, 1967, BHL-WP). After baby Herbert was born, Helen moved to Denver to live with her mother and stepfather, who legally adopted Herbert.[8] Although White and his brother remained with their father, they began to visit their mother on a regular basis. The two boys subsequently became closer to their mother and White's feelings for his father hardened.[9]

Growing up in a house that was male-dominated had a profound effect on White. This was exacerbated by the rupture his sister's pregnancy caused; for instance, he could no longer accept his father's dichotomy that there were two kinds of women—good and bad. Although no letters survive between White and his sister regarding her pregnancy, he remained close to her throughout his life. White could not accept that an unplanned pregnancy suddenly made his sister a "bad woman," which led him to question what he had been taught by his father. Certainly, traveling around the United States while his sister was pregnant exposed him to things and ideas he had only heard about on the farm in Lane. While the following passage does not concern his sister's pregnancy directly, White recalled how the lack of a female presence affected his development:

> This all-male family unquestionably had a profound effect on the development of my personality and character. There were girls in the schools I attended, of course, and my teachers—except the principal—were women. But that was different. I had no chance to become well acquainted with womankind. The greatest difficulty that I encountered in my social life after I left home was learning how to behave toward, and with members of the opposite sex. This difficulty was compounded too,

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> I believe, by my father's Puritan conception of women: all women could be divided into two classes: good and bad. A good woman was a good woman, and a bad woman was a bad woman. This classification may have simplified matters for my father, but its artificial nature created enormous difficulties for me in my efforts to find my way in the real world of real people. [White, untitled reminiscence, circa 1952, BHL-WP]

Despite the turbulence of White's home life, he distinguished himself in school. His grades rarely dipped below 90 percent. His teachers remarked that he was intellectually gifted, and more than one report card noted he had "Marked Ability." When White graduated from Zachary High School in 1916, he was class president and valedictorian. By now openly antagonistic to his father, on the day he graduated from high school he moved out of his father's house. Anxious to explore the world and make a life for himself, he had only been waiting until graduation. He put his meager possessions into a single valise and left home for good—on foot.

He immediately got a job as secretary—bookkeeper with his former high school principal, Chapple R. Regan, and moved to Alexandria, Louisiana. Regan published a school journal entitled *Louisiana School Work*, for which White took dictation, wrote letters, kept books, and wrote some editorials. Unfortunately, no editorials have survived. Regan concluded that White could get a much better job, and he suggested White apply for a position at the Armour and Company as stenographer and bookkeeper. White held this position until summer 1917, when the U.S. government began construction of Camp Beauregard. White worked at Camp Beauregard in the fall of 1917 and spring of 1918. In March 1918 he visited his mother and sister in Boulder, Colorado, where he enlisted in the navy.[10]

The Navy

Although White never articulated exactly why he joined the navy, several factors surely figured significantly. First, like many men his age, White perceived the sinking of the passenger liner Lusitania as a threat to democracy and the nation. He vividly recalled when his father told him the war had begun: "I was in a corn field with the temperature about 102 and my father came out and said to me the Germans invaded Belgium. This was profound and it had a disturbing, upsetting affect upon me. Wars to me had always been in history books and they had no other reality. But now this was a real war and the Germans were real men" (White, lecture, 1974, UCSC). White must have concluded that enlisting was the best way to actively "make the world safe for democracy." Moreover,

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