White Makes Provocative Evening

By JUDI TRAVIS

Dr. Leslie White, speaking on "Cultural Evolution" November 28 in Fondren Library, provided interested Rice students and faculty with a most stimulating and provocative evening. Author of several works about the topic on which he spoke, Dr. White is at present Professor of Advanced on culture itself rather than bi-Palo Alto, California.

THE CORE of Dr. White's talk was an explanation and definition of the word "culture," a new science, which is the object, Dr. White feels, of a great amount of misunderstanding. Culture is not the study of behavior nor is it an "abstraction" from a civilization itself.

It is supra-biological and extra-semantic — outside the human organism. "It deals with pottery bowls and marriage ceremonies in terms of their inner-relations among themselves — this is culture..." A vast change of outlook accompanied the emergence of the concept of culture, said Dr. White, a "culturological revolution," which put emphasis on culture itself rather than biological structure or neurological organization.

PART OF the reason why the science of culture was so long in getting started was that sociology and psychology were trying to absorb its subject matter, and no science can function with subject matter. Science observes and classifies, but there are a class of phenomena for which we have no name; things and events which are expressions of "symbolizing," an act which is unique to man, and which may be defined as a "trafficking in non-sensory forms."

Symbolizing becomes human behavior in one context, culture in another. For instance, among the problems of behavior not psychological are 1) the reckoning of descent (it is reckoned from the mother, the father, of bilineally?) 2) various taboos, and 3) warfare.

CULTURE consists of things which are expressions of symbolizing and which constitute a flux, or continuum, such that culture is a thing self-generating. While in certain contexts the "culturologist" has to refer to the human organism, culture is generally explained in terms of itself, the behavior of peoples being a function of their cultural tradition.

Finally, we cannot control our culture; in fact, only our ignorance of culture makes us believe that we can. Dr. White made the point that we know less about our own culture than many primitive ones. Why, for example, doesn't our culture permit polygamy?

WITH characteristic professorial wit, the speaker said that only those who had not thought about this question could answer it.

Men operate through cultural forces which are, in an manner of speaking predestined, much like the weather.

Free-willists and self-determinists are behind the times, Dr. White asserted. Apparently, all of the audience did not agree with much of what he said, but few seats were vacated during the long question-answer period. This was a lecture well worth attending.