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TOPIC:

**The Riffians, the Blonde
Warriors of North Africa**

Carleton Coon graduated from Harvard in 1925, and received his Ph.D. in 1928. In the meanwhile he went four times to Morocco, to study the physical traits and habits of the Riffians, who were fighting against France and Spain to maintain their independence. With his wife, Dr. Coon passed through the fighting lines and sojourned among the Riffians until their final defeat. After this every tribe in the country was visited and carefully studied. Subsequently two books resulted from this research, **Tribes of the Rif**, a scientific monograph, and **Flesh of the Wild Ox**, a novel detailing the intimate life and troubles of the Riffians, in their private feuds and in their war against the invading Christians.

Few people realize that the Riffians, until 1926, were almost totally unknown to the outside world, despite the location of their country on the other side of the Straits from Spain. Basically North-European in race, they have for milleniums kept the foreigner out of their small and mountainous country, and preserved a fascinating and dangerous manner of life in defiance of modern civilization. Dr. Coon is prepared to discuss in a popular manner the puzzling problem of the origin of this strange people and their peculiar and interesting customs.

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A book review

'Carleton Coon is not one to rest on his shovel'

by Joe Garland

Ever since Charles Darwin provided us with distant ancestors not entirely to the Victorian taste it has been a truism that in every man, regardless of his grace, there lurks the hunter, that the hunter is the predator, the predator the carnivore, the carnivore the beast.

Our addiction to the flesh of our fellow creatures, our taste for the chase, our preeminence as killers over all things that crawl, swim and fly — this insatiable ravenousness, this blood thirst, is the driving force behind human civilization, is it not?

And is not man the hunter, man the beast, his own most dangerous enemy? Of course he is. It is another truism. That's why I was puzzled as I am fascinated by the latest book, just out, of my distinguished neighbor in West Gloucester, the eminent anthropologist Carleton S. Coon, entitled "The Hunting Peoples," published by Atlantic-Little, Brown, 413 pages, graphically illustrated by the drawings of Aldren A. Watson, edited by another West Gloucesterman, poet Peter Davison, and plenty for the money at \$10.

Now I would no more dream of challenging Carl Coon amongst the hypotheses of his field than I would of questioning his perfectly engrossing account of the way of life of the earth's primitives, 10,000 years ago and today.

But since he is addressing the general reader, meaning me, I do feel entitled to demur from his admiration for the simple hunter-killer and to cavil with his suggestion that there may be something worth emulating in the animalistic virtues of our ancestors and cousins, however at harmony they appear to have lived and live with nature, as who wouldn't perforce in a maximum wilderness clan population of one homo sapiens per square mile?

Among Professor Coon's theses, you see, is the proposition that in primeval societies as in our own, irrational means are frequently employed toward rational ends — for instance, real crazy rites, man, and organized religion for the purpose of allaying anxieties and smoothing personal relations (or opiating the masses, according to your ideology).

And without necessarily endorsing these means, I presume, he notes that the destruction of multiple births, the ostracism of the aged into the snowdrifts in



Professor Coon sits with Allie, Australian aborigine of the Tiwi tribe, Melville Island, North Australia in 1954

times of famine and the enforcement of celibacy against the incompetent hunter tend toward population control and genetic selection. Well, so do cancer, heart disease, automobiles, heroin and war. Take your pick.

Possibly, I suppose, the recidivisms of the naked are more palatable than those conjured up recently with the usual macabre jocularity of the science fiction writer by Isaac Asimov, who thought the day might not be far off when we would be reduced to eating human meat as the ultimate rescue from the failures of The Pill — U.S. Government inspected, prime, to be sure.

All right. It strikes me that the way of the hunter is more of an object lesson in what to avoid than copy, and if I were not so addicted to them — if it were not so deep in the beastliness of my being — I would gladly give up the carnal joys of meat, fish and fowl and settle for watercress and turnip greens. If you think I am setting up a straw man, then read the book for yourself.

'Carl Coon is in top form in his far above the madding crowd, sixteenth book, unrivalled in his field, master of his material, the virtuoso scientist-philosopher'

The point is that sandwiched between the thin but crusty slices of rationale at either end of "The Hunting Peoples" is a feast so rich and varied as to salivate the most carnivorous reader, and it is its own *raison d'être*.

Carl Coon is so readable, so earthy, so witty and so wry, so blunt, so never dull, so full of charm, so clear (except where he labors with the complexities of the incest taboos and sexual hierarchies of the primitives — confusing but amusing and he so enjoys to jolt and shock (wake up there in the back row!)). Really, he is in top form in his sixteenth book, unrivalled in his field, far above the madding crowd, master of his material, the virtuoso scientist-philosopher.

Brilliantly he scans the principal hunters and gatherers since the end of the Ice Age, extinct and those still surviving in their hothouse or deepfreeze isolation. He tells us how they made their tools and how they used them, their clothing and their shelter, how they crept up on the elephant and caught the salmon and grubbed the yams, how they had their sex and their babies, how they attained painful puberty and adulthood, how they handled rivalry and adultery, scatology and superstition, magic and morals, disease and death.

It is at the same time fascinating and repelling, and I wonder how our young American primitives, our unshorn children who yearn to return to the land and the clan, will react to the Coon version of the "Whole Earth Catalog"...the side of life in the raw that the Movement's mail order houses don't tell you about.

Carleton Coon is not one to rest on his shovel, and after all of his digs and his travels around the world, measuring the bottoms of the Hottentots and the tots of the Hottenbottoms, his professorships and curatorships of Harvard and Pennsylvania, he keeps his hand in, unretired as ever, as a research associate at Harvard's Peabody Museum, working up new ideas to startle humanity, and always available to peer inquisitively at the bone or tooth or artifact carried to his door by the diggers and finders who have been inspired, often unknowing, by what he has done for our understanding of ourselves.

May Carl and his delightful Lisa go on and on and on, putting their own stamp on the lives of the rest of us — hunters, gatherers and those mere drones called writers.



Veddhas, hunting people of Ceylon, pose with Carleton Coon, West Gloucester anthropologist. Chief is sitting



Carleton S. Coon

(photo by Lila Monell)

"Crowding always has disturbing effects
on all animals, and you
have to take the crowd syndrome into account."

carleton coon

story by mike dorfsman

photography by charles a. lowe

If today's society with its pollution, war, long hair and other social ills has you worried, a conversation with Harvard anthropologist Dr. Carleton S. Coon, Gloucester, can at least explain the causes.

Dr. Coon, the author of 15 books, is primarily concerned with tracing men's physical development through evolutionary changes during the various ages.

"None of this will be new to you," the 65-year-old professor said as he sat in his study at 207 Concord St. "But the first thing is that human beings have gone through ages. There was the Paleolithic (Stone Age), the Mesolithic, the Neolithic and so on up to the Iron Age, the Atomic Age and now the Space Age. These ages used to take hundreds of thousands of years, but now it can happen in a few years."

With the rapid changes, people are born in one age, and die in another.

"This is very hard on the nervous system," Dr. Coon said. "The whole thing has snowballed, and is running very fast. I think a lot of people are bewildered."

Dr. Coon, dressed in a red-checked shirt and plain tie, chatted easily during the conversation. His desk and study were cluttered with books and papers, the sign of a busy man. Bookshelves seemed to be everywhere.

As he talked, in his deep lecture voice, he smoked, tapping an unlit cigarette on his desk repeatedly before lighting it.

Dr. Coon seemed a little reluctant at first to grant the interview because he shies from publicity. "I don't like to pontificate," he said.

Those who are reluctant to be interviewed, frequently have the best stories.

Television, with its monopoly on the mind and commercials, adds to the consequences of today's world, Dr. Coon said.

"Television misses the basic pattern of communication - interaction. If a priest or minister says something, there's a give - and - take. At a football game, the audience jumps up and down and cheers. But when you sit in front of the box, you just look square-eyed. You can't talk to it," Dr. Coon

explained lighting up his first cigarette. "People don't have a chance to respond. If they see violence on television, how do they respond? They go out and hit somebody. If I'm reading a book, and I don't agree with something, I usually write 'Balls' in the margin. You can't do that on television."

Coon suggested a system similar to the British Broadcasting Company's where the station operates only for a limited time each day.

"It's not the content that bothers people," he explained. "It's the inability to respond to it. I'm almost sure of that."

Commercials are harmful because they teach you to cheat, Coon said. "They make you lose your sense of comparison. They try to wheedle you into buying things you don't need. And people are being brainwashed by all this propaganda."

Television, with its effect on styles, thought and action, is a powerful influence on the nation, sometimes confusing roles, Dr. Coon said.

"We're getting our categories confused," he said. "Entertainment is getting to the point where we don't remember that an actor or a singer is just a performer. I don't want to hear what Joan Baez thinks."

The age of Aquarius is marked by long hair which seems to bother more people than just barbers.

"A lot of people are very furious about long hair," Dr. Coon said. "And the kids don't know why they get so angry."

He traced the number of other cultures where hair and beards were very important to a man. A tribe of aborigines in Japan sports long hair for more important reasons than appearance.

"If one of the tribesmen cut his hair, he'd think he'd die," Dr. Coon said. "Although some cut their hair now, because they want to mix with the other Japanese."

He also pointed to Hasidic Jews who don't shave and wear earlocks.

"The hair means something to the kids," he said,



"and hair is important psychologically to identify each other. Besides, what difference does it make?"

Dr. Coon doesn't know if civilization is moving into better times with youth leadership; he frowns on comparisons like "better," but he believes the young have greater tolerance.

"One thing that's gone," Dr. Coon said, "is ethnic labels. They're much more tolerant of other religions, nationalities."

A modern phenomenon like the Woodstock Music Fair where 400,000 Americans gathered to hear rock, smoke grass and find peace is a part of that frenzy, Coon believes.

"If we didn't have modern transportation, they wouldn't have been able to get there. My kids think nothing of going to Colorado, but in my day, that was a big trip. And if there hadn't been today's communications, even more would never have heard about it."

While on the subject of youth, he examined the peaceful attitude that permeated the festival.

"You couldn't have done it with an earlier generation," Dr. Coon suggested. "Crowding always has disturbing effects on all animals, and you have to take the crowd syndrome into account."

Coon manages to keep abreast of the youth movement by maintaining his classes at Harvard.

"Teaching is a face - to - face, person - to - person business," Dr. Coon explained. "Some classes the teacher gets up in a big lecture hall and talks into a microphone. That's not teaching," he said in his deep voice. "That's broadcasting."

Too often, he explained, a graduate student does the professor's job.

"You've got to impress the student and make him think you're on his side. Defend him against the dean, if you have to," Dr. Coon said.

Dr. Coon, during field work in North Africa, discovered the fossil of the Aterian man in 1939. On a dig in Iran, he found the remains of the Hotu man in 1951.

He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard with

an A.B. in 1925. Three years later, he received his doctorate. He and his wife Lisa live in a one - story wooden house with big windows over - looking Wingaersheek Beach.

Student unrest has fermented, he believes, because of the quality of teaching and improved education.

"ROTC isn't the issue," Dr. Coon said. "It's a reflection of the Vietnam War. The students are honest in thinking ROTC's a valid issue. But it's something they're trying to figure out."

The jungle terrain, and the war's longevity is partially to blame for the country's reluctance to fight the war, he said. "There's very little that the young can see we're fighting for."

The language of foreign relations developed a vocabulary that led to terms like underdeveloped, he noted. "What they should call it," Dr. Coon said, "is normal and overdeveloped. When we go into other countries trying to change them, I think that's a bit of arrogance."

If the human race is to survive its own destruction with radioactivity, air pollution and overpopulation, Dr. Coon thinks we have to work to do it.

"We should have a little less scaring people, and more action," he said. "The government is terrifying the people without any clear programs."

Another sign of the times is dirt euphemistically called pollution.

"No one realizes anything until too late," Dr. Coon said. "Ten years ago, nobody listened, now everyone is yelling their heads off about it. I don't know. These problems are much too big for me," he replied when asked for predictions.

The race problem isn't encouraging either. "It's going to get worse," Dr. Coon said, "simply because people are going to get more conscious of it."

The best solution, he believes, is to let people do what they want to do. "But whatever they do, get them to think they thought of it themselves."

As for life on other planets, "No idea," he answered simply.



carleton coon, continued

Here is what Who's Who in America says about Carleton Coon of Gloucester: Carleton Stevens Coon, anthropologist; b. Wakefield, Mass., June 23, 1904; s. John Lewis and Bessie (Carleton) Coon; grad. Phillips Acad., 1921; A.B. magna cum laude, Harvard, 1925, A.M., 1928, Ph.D., 1928; m. Mary Goodale, 1926; children — Carleton S., Charles Adams; m. 2nd, Lisa Dougherty Geddes, 1945. Field work, anthrop. research, N. Africa, Balkans, Ethiopia, Arabia, 1925-34, discovered the remains of Aterian fossil man (Neanderthal) in North Africa, 1939; began as an instructor became asst. prof., assoc. prof., prof. anthrop. Harvard 1934-48 (on leave 1942-45); curator of ethnology and prof. of anthropology at the Univ. Museum, Phila., 1948-63; research curator in anthropology, 1963 —; led archaeological exped., Iran, which discovered Hotu man, 1951; exped. Afghanistan, 1954; Syria, Central Am., 1955; India, 1956; Alakaluf Indians, Chile, 1959; Morocco, 1962-63 discovering Jabel Ighoud man No. 2, Sierra Leone, 1965; was a major in U.S. Army in 1943-45, awarded Legion of Merit, 1945; among anthrop. recognition awards, gold medal of the Phila. Athenaeum 1963. Author: *Tribes of Rif*, 1931; *Flesh of the Wild Ox*, 1932; *The Riffian*, 1934; *Measuring Ethiopia*, 1935; *Races of Europe*, 1939; *Principles of Anthropology* (with Eliot D. Chapple), 1942; *A Reader in General Anthropology*, 1948; *Races* (with Garn and Birdsell), 1950; *The Mountains of Giants*, 1950; *Cave Explorations in Iran*, 1951; *Caravan*, 1951; *The Story of Man* 1954; *The Seven Caves*, 1957; *The Origin of Races*, 1962; *The Living Races of Man*, 1965; was panelist on What in the World TV show in late 40s."

Dr. Coon's book, *The Living Races of Man*, is a complete survey of the racial composition of all peoples of the world and was termed a "masterpiece" by critics. It made a number of surprising conclusions.

It pointed out: "Wild animals vary geographically. Populations of warm-blooded animals of a given species that live in cold places tend to have larger bodies than other populations of the same species living in warm places. The opposite is true of cold-blooded animals; the big snakes live in the tropics. Among warm-blooded species that live in cold climates, special adaptations provide insulation, increase peripheral blood flow, or both, thus enabling them to survive the winter. Some groups of people are similarly adapted to a certain extent, although for severe cold we must rely on protection furnished by our hands and our brain."

In *The Future of the Races of Man* Coon discusses a subject that has been highly controversial in recent months, that of "interracial differences in the genetic capacities of individuals for learning, decision making, and certain aspects of behavior ..."

Coon writes that modern educators are already trying to devise new didactic procedures to utilize each person's innate capacities for behavior, in an increasingly crowded and competitive world.

"Essential to the success of the educators," writes Coon, "would be a recognition of differences in race, and steps might then be taken to adjust the new educational techniques which are now being devised to fit the needs of different races and cultures ... Some publishers of them now realize that their responsibility both to their customers and to their stockholders is to do their share in guaranteeing that as many kinds of people as possible shall be as well adjusted to their physical environments, to available resources, to each other, and to other kinds of people, as are the few surviving bands of Australian aborigines who still live in a state of freedom, and these aborigines are as well adjusted as a bird in its nest or a clam between its shells."