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### Technology and social change: William Fielding Ogburn revisited

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#### Abstract

This paper reviews William Fielding Ogburn's work on technology and social change. An overview of his basic theory is presented, as well as later refinements found in such works as *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, *Technological Trends and National Policy*, *The Social Effects of Aviation*, and other books and articles. It is suggested that while Ogburn is most widely remembered for his thesis of cultural lag, some of his later work on technology and social change is actually more important and deserves reconsideration and extension. One kind of extension might follow the lines of a systems approach rather than continuing the technological primacy strategy that Ogburn is normally considered to have used. The paper also surveys Ogburn's important work in the areas of technology, planning, and social policy, including materials on technology assessment. Ogburn's nontechnocratic approach to these questions, as well as his insistence that social scientists have a great deal to offer to the formulation of technological and social policies, are some of his most important contributions.

Questions of technology and social change remain important contemporary issues, yet there is a surprising paucity of social science work on these crucial topics. Further study, extension, and reformulation of Ogburn's pioneering ideas offer fruitful means of embarking on new social science analyses of technology and society.



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