

*Science & Technology*

**THE PHYSICISTS: The History of a Scientific Community in Modern America**  
by Daniel J. Kevles  
Knopf, 1978, 489 pp. \$15.95  
L of C 77-75005  
ISBN 0-394-46631-4

In the 1870s, no more than 75 U.S. scientists called themselves "physicists," and federal support for research was virtually nonexistent. Even so, a few scholars—notably the Smithsonian's Joseph Henry—foresaw the day when America would "lead the science of the world." That day has come: The United States has won 7 of 11 Nobel Prizes in physics since 1965, and annual federal outlays for basic physics alone top half a billion dollars. In the past 10 years, theorists and technicians working in high-energy (particle) physics have nearly obliterated the boundary between cosmology and physics as they draw ever closer to explaining the origin of the universe itself. Nevertheless, support for such abstract science may be eroding as the public realizes, to quote one physicist, that "isobaric analog states in nuclei won't solve racial tensions in Detroit." With verve and wit, Kevles chronicles such milestones in physics history as the "miraculous year" of 1932, which saw discovery of the neutron, the positron, and the hydrogen isotope deuterium.

**CANNIBALS AND KINGS: The Origins of Culture**  
by Marvin Harris  
Random, 1977, 240 pp. \$10  
L of C 77-5977  
ISBN 0-394-40765-2

"As a result of the studied neglect of the science of culture," writes Columbia University anthropologist Harris, "the world is full of moralists insisting that they have freely willed what they were unwittingly forced to want." If a bright, popularly written book can help to correct this situation, Harris has provided it. He believes that human progress is not inevitable. Traipsing over a vast historical terrain from the Aztecs to the ancient Hebrews for supporting evidence, he asserts that, time and again since the Stone Age, population control has broken down; proteins have become scarce, sometimes resulting in cannibalism and/or food taboos; and new environmental balances have been struck, sometimes at the cost of a civilization. His chapter on the origin of war (as play? as "human nature"? as politics? as none of these?) is particularly striking.