Political Life: Definitions

- Power is the ability to exercise one's will over others.
- Authority is the socially approved use of power.
- Prestige refers to esteem, respect, or approval for culturally valued acts or qualities.
- Law refers to a legal code that includes trial and enforcement.

Political Life: Typology

- In 1962, Elman Service developed a typology of political organizations
- Bands
- Tribes
- Chiefdoms
- States

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Bands are small kin-based groups found among foragers.

In foraging societies the only two social groups that are significant are the nuclear family and the band. Membership in these groups is fluid and can change from year to year. Kin networks, both real and fictive, are created and maintained through marriage, trade, and visiting.

Foraging bands are egalitarian, in that all differences in status are achieved. Foragers lack formal law; conflict resolution is embedded in kinship and social ties (e.g., blood feuds). Leaders emerge from knowledge or ability in a particular activity (i.e., hunting). Prestige based system.
Political Life: Punishment as a Collective Action Problem

- What are the things that are punished?
  - Stealing
  - Lying
  - Killing
- Who punishes?
- Is it more expensive to punish than to let the infraction go?

Political Life: The Great Forager Debate

- How representative are modern foragers of our hunting and gathering ancestors?
- Some say that we can learn a lot about our past by looking at modern h/g’s.
- Others say that modern h/g’s are poor examples because they live in marginal environments.

Political Life: The Great Forager Debate- The !Kung San

- The !Kung San Territory
Political Life: The Great Forager Debate - The !Kung San

- Modern band level group in Botswana
- Not fully contacted until late 1950’s
- Have a long history of contact with horticultural and herding groups who live on the margins of their territory

Political Life: The Great Forager Debate

- All modern h/g groups have had some contact with non-h/g groups.
- Many have been forced into marginal environments
- Marginal environments require different cultural adaptations than plentiful environments