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Title: "The African heritage in the Caribbean"

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Source: *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium*. Vera Rubin, ed. (1957), pp. 34-46

Published by: Institute of Social and Economic Research (University College of the West Indies, Jamaica) and Training Program for the Study of Man in the Tropics, Columbia University

Reprinted in: Monograph no. 34 of the American Ethnological Society (1960) by the University of Washington Press

CARIBBEAN STUDIES: A SYMPOSIUM

Edited by
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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE WEST INDIES, JAMAICA, B.W.I.

in association with

**PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY OF MAN IN THE TROPICS
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK**

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Introduction E. Franklin Frazier	v
Preface Vera Rubin	1
Plantation America: A Culture Sphere Charles Wagley	3
Man-Land Relations in the Caribbean Area .. Preston E. James	14
Discussion Jean Gottmann	20
Contemporary Social-Rural Types in the Caribbean Region Elena Padilla	22
Discussion Edgar T. Thompson	29
The African Heritage in the Caribbean M. G. Smith	34
Discussion George E. Simpson & Peter B. Hammond	46
Race Relations in Caribbean Society Eric Williams	54
Discussion Frank Tannenbaum	60
The Family in the Caribbean Raymond T. Smith	67
Discussion John V. Murra	75
Methods of Community-Analysis in the Caribbean Robert A. Manners	80
Discussion Conrad M. Arensberg	92
The Present Status of the Social Sciences in the British Caribbean Lloyd Braithwaite	99
Cultural Perspectives in Caribbean Research .. Vera Rubin	110
Notes on Contributors	123

The African Heritage in the Caribbean

By

M. G. SMITH

The concept of an African heritage in the Caribbean and the New World is not exactly a new one, and its discussion or application cannot help being influenced by previous thinking and research. It is thus both necessary and valuable, before attempting to assess it, to glance backward for a moment at the state of anthropology in which this interest developed.

I think the contrast between anthropology before and since the first World War offers the most direct route to an assessment of present Afro-American studies, in so far as these are conceived in terms of acculturation. Until the time of Malinowski's death, there were three major competing notions about anthropology as a discipline and about the nature of its data. In Malinowski's view, culture was an empirical functional system which included social relations and which lent itself to synchronic studies rather than historical research. In the view of Boas and his students, culture was a historical continuity, the systemic aspects of which could not be predicated in advance of detailed study. In the theory of Radcliffe-Brown, culture was the process of social life, and society as a natural system was the focus of interest in synchronic research.

The ways in which these differing approaches handled historical studies of society or culture varied a good deal. Kroeber's paper on culture as a super-organic, self-determining system, timeless and spaceless, (12) represents an extreme of idealism and reification, while his careful mapping of cultural areas in California (11) represents an equally impressive contribution to ethnology by the study of trait-distribution. Malinowski's search for a zero point at which to begin the study of cultural change (14) was partly an attempt to apply the postulate of the functional equilibrium of culture to diachronic systems without indulging in historical reconstruction or speculation. Radcliffe-Brown ignored this problem, but Robert Redfield, whom he influenced, attempted to combine cultural and sociological data and to develop a typology of change in which spatial position might substitute for time (15). Ultimately, the central conflict between these approaches revolved about conceptions of the nature and relations of culture and society on the one hand, and of diachronic and synchronic anthropological studies on the other.

These differences are still important today; but, as I understand the literature, their former exclusiveness seems to be dissolving. Since the war, it seems that the duality of anthropological data has been recognized in-

creasingly, and the area of agreements about the interdependence of culture and society, and of diachronic and synchronic research, has widened correspondingly. I think few anthropologists today would deny that social structure is embodied in cultural process, or vice versa; and few would hold that, where materials are available, historical research is either outside or exhaustive of the anthropologist's legitimate interests. As I see it, there is now emerging a debate about the nature of anthropology as a natural science, a branch of history, or an aspect of moral science. Fortunately, our subject is broad enough to include all these and other approaches. But the important point to note is that this present debate progresses on the basis of common understanding about the basic materials of interest to anthropologists, culture and society. As Firth has put it clearly: "‘Society’ emphasizes the human component, the people and the relations between them; ‘culture’ emphasizes the component of accumulated resources, non-material, and material, which the people through social learning have acquired and use, modify and transmit. But the study of either must involve the study of social relations and values, through examination of human behaviour" (7). Bidney, whose recent book discusses the most prominent theories of culture and society, shares a similar view (2).

I think this recognition of the mutuality, difference, and interdependence of culture and society has important implications for the study of social and cultural change in general, and for the problem of the African heritage in the Caribbean in particular. If we reject the views of Durkheim and Kroeber, that society on the one hand, or culture on the other, is primary and self-constitutive, then we must admit their equal significance in the study of any process of change. This means in fact that the study of acculturation or cultural change cannot be complete without parallel study of social change; that acculturation studies include studies of assimilation; that enculturation is an aspect of socialization, or vice versa. If this is so, it follows that the study of African heritage in purely cultural terms is not adequately conceived and cannot by itself reveal the processes and conditions of acculturation. Thus, if acculturation, rather than the simple identification of elements as African or other, is the aim of such study, we must study the relevant social and cultural conditions equally and simultaneously. In this respect, it is specially of interest to determine the structural correlates of persistence with or without change on the one hand, and the conditions of disappearance, loss, or new developments on the other. Discrimination of persistence through the functional consistency or appropriateness of traits to particular structural contexts permits some grasp of the structural conditions typical of varying degrees or processes of acculturation; and the comparative scope of inquiry allows further precision in their formulation. But to achieve these results and to follow this method, certain initial ambiguities must be ruled out.

The ambiguous relation of cultural process and social organization is especially significant. In one definition, culture includes or presupposes the

inclusion of social organization; in another, it is characteristically the activity and content of the social organization. Now if the African cultural heritage is taken to include African patterns of social organization, these specifically social elements of the potential heritage must not be confused with the social contexts in which their persistence or disappearance took place. We must, in other words, keep the New World social context which is the matrix of the acculturation process clearly distinct from those Old World social forms which are included in the possible heritage whose form and function is under study. I think this distinction necessary even where simple identification of African elements is the purpose of study.

But the ambiguities against which we must guard our enquiry are many and serious. There is ambiguity in the concept of an African inheritance itself. Such a concept presupposes a uniformity and uniqueness of African cultures which ethnography does not support. For example, spirit-possession is commonly taken to be an element of African culture persisting among the New World Negroes who practise it. But there are numerous tribes of West Africa among whom spirit-possession is not to be found. Moreover there are many other peoples, including whites, among whom this practice has been reported (4). Similarly, ancestor worship is neither universal among nor peculiar to African societies. Nor is polygyny, and so on. Where tribal attribution can be directly established for elements of the African heritage, these difficulties of formal correspondence tend to disappear, although functional problems remain. But where this tribal ascription is not clearly evident, the types of ambiguity which lurk within the unitary concept of an African inheritance are great indeed. And in my view fairly precise and extensive qualification of this indefinite concept of an African heritage is necessary if it is to prove serviceable for scientific purposes, and to exclude spurious or dubious attributions.

Another serious source of ambiguity derives from the inverted order of this study of African heritage. Instead of starting at the beginning of the process of culture contact and change and then tracing its development up to the present, we start at one end of such a process and try to reconstruct hypothetical courses of development for attributions of varying status and value. This procedure is of course unavoidable if the enquiry is to be pursued at all. It is unavoidable for historical reasons; but precisely because the history of acculturation processes is not sufficiently open to us, it is essential that the greatest care be taken to distinguish between attributions according to their specificity, character, and evidential basis. Failure to make these distinctions clearly and consistently confuses valid and invalid attributions from the start, and thereby confuses thoroughly the hypotheses developed to account for persistence of these attributions. Hypotheses developed to "explain" the acculturation history of accurate ascriptions may be sound or unsound. Those developed about invalid ascriptions, can only be unsound. Confusion of valid and invalid ascriptions or of specific and indeterminate cultural pre-

dicates, therefore conduces to the confusion of hypothetical acculturation histories for ascriptions of all types in a manner which begets controversy rather than cumulative understanding of these acculturative processes. To protect the enquiry against this unnecessary admixture of the sound and the unsound, something like a rigorously critical methodology is requisite.

Ambiguities also develop through the uneven historical materials which bear on African cultural persistence. In some cases, these materials might be sufficient to indicate factors in the processes of acculturation, and their relative weights. In other cases, they may serve as guides to the relative probabilities of competing hypotheses. In yet other cases, they may offer little or no information at all. In all cases, however, supplementary analyses of the institutions or customs under study are necessary to provide hypotheses about their distribution in the area of interest; and these analyses must focus on the functional relations of the forms under study with other social practice, and with varying social conditions and contexts. Checks provided by comparative studies of the distribution of these traits will then serve to refine the hypotheses developed through functional analyses, and may perhaps increase our understanding of the acculturation process at work. But if the study of African cultural persistence is conceived in terms of acculturation rather than the simple identification or attribution of elements, it is necessary to include both lost and persistent culture-traits of African origin as far as these can be established by distributional studies based on African ethnography, and as far as they are known to be present in or absent from the New World areas of interest. In the study of lost forms also, historical and functional approaches must be combined to develop specific hypotheses relating to the conditions of disappearance or change. The same point holds true for new developments among the New World Negroes, such as the Calypso or steel-bands.

Yet other ambiguities in this enquiry develop with reference to the distribution of elements of African heritage among New World populations, Negro or other. For instance, if jazz, which is regarded as a part of the African heritage, is found among the whites also, then we must examine its distribution among whites in the same way that we examine the distribution of African-type folk tales or head-ties among the Negro population. But in these studies of distribution, it is not sufficient merely to report the place-names where items of imputed African provenience are to be found. This tells us nothing at all about their distribution within such areas, their centrality or marginality. It is surely far more informative and important to know the conditions within which such items are to be found characteristically and marginally, the socio-economic levels and organizations of which they are typical and not typical, and their functional values in either context.

Granted these ambiguities, it is especially important in discussing or investigating the African heritage in the Caribbean to define what we mean by each of these terms. Without such definition, discussion and enquiry alike dissolve into amorphous and chaotic forms. Definitions will of course vary

with purpose; but I suggest that the enquiry and discussion can gain a great deal in precision and development from the initial adoption of definitions which rule out, or at any rate, distinguish sharply, ambiguous or uncertain attributions. Some of the ambiguities facing study of this general problem have already been mentioned. In directing attention towards these ambiguities I am simply presenting evidence which indicates the need for a more refined methodology than at present characterizes this area of research, and also for a more precise and less hypothetical system of categories.

The Caribbean as a geographical region appears to present few problems of definition. Socially, however, the area is not a unit. It is differentiated internally by different metropolitan associations, by various religious, linguistic, and cultural affiliations, by different racial-population ratios, and by historical differences, particularly with regard to African slavery and its abolition. Clearly differentiae of this order rule out the possibility of a uniform pattern of African heritage in this area, at the same time that it raises problems and possibilities of comparison with it.^a

This brings us face to face with the problem of defining the African heritage itself. A heritage is something inherited, handed down; loosely speaking, heritage and tradition can be equated. But in areas where change is proceeding, that which is handed down may not be traditional in the usual sense, or not equally so in its parts. Presumably the idea of an African heritage refers to that which is handed down and is African in origin. Such a heritage has three major aspects: the biological, the social, and the cultural. For the study of an African heritage, it is necessary to examine all three, their relations one with the other and with relevant conditions in the wider society.

Biological or racial heritage normally provides a common basis of group identification and differentiation in multi-racial societies such as the Caribbean contains. In such contexts, groups develop stereotypes about one another and about themselves also. George Simpson's work on the Ras Tafariites of West Kingston, Jamaica (17), provides a neat illustration of this, a case in which the African heritage functions as an ideological postulate, as a myth which permits withdrawal into defensive escapist cult groups; and clearly a case in which the postulate of African heritage does not correspond with cultural reality. This instance is of course far from peculiar in the ideological racism it represents. As far back in Jamaican history as we care to go we can find equally clear examples of this ideological racism (13). In multi-racial societies, especially with relation to their internal differentiation and classification, we are not merely confronted by differences of a biological character, but are faced with conflicting interpretations based on other non-genetic dimensions, predominantly, of course, on social and cultural practice.

In the British West Indies particularly, this social aspect of African inheritance is obvious, historically unambiguous, and important. The African *qua*

^aI shall confine most of my discussion to the British Caribbean colonies which, although themselves culturally different to some degree, can be taken as a type of historical unit, a subdivision of the wider Caribbean area.

African was imported as a slave. He was not so much a person as property until emancipation was enacted in 1838. His relations with his European masters during this time are thus not fully analyzable in terms of race relations. The statuses of slave and slaveowner and their interpretations are at least as important. Moreover, we must recognize that ever since emancipation Negroes have occupied the lowest position of any biological group in the societies of the British Caribbean; and although there is no clearly drawn race or caste line in these areas, prominence and prestige, wealth and power, have historically been distributed in terms of light pigmentation. At the same time, both during and since slavery, Negroes have been subordinated, exploited, excluded from certain institutional systems characteristic of the dominant groups, and subjected to special acculturative pressures in particular fields. For example, Christianity, membership in the formal political system, education and formal occupational association were not always open to Negro participation. On the other hand, pressure has been directed at Negroes to alter their marital habits, as for instance in the mass-marriage movement of Jamaica. Thus a peculiar distribution of acculturative pressures and processes is intimately bound up with the historical status and role of the Caribbean Negro. And this social background to acculturation compels us to devote equal attention to the processes of assimilation, social differentiation, and acculturation in any scientific study of the African heritage. Moreover, the principal historical changes in the social status of Negroes in this area entail, within these frameworks of social transition, diachronic analysis of their socio-cultural organization and its characteristics. The recent rise of trade unionism, of political-party movements based on universal suffrage, and of ministerial systems of government are themselves decisive conditions promoting further changes in cultural process and social structure alike, both within the Negro stratum and in the total society.

With biological and social inheritance we are dealing with accessible and clearly determinate conditions. Biological characters tend to be highly constant and history provides a fair record of the continuity or change of social position and conditions. But cultural inheritance is not so easily definable. The type and degree of persistence or continuity to which it refers is definable variously, according to the precision or type of interest.

In the study of African cultural persistence in the Americas, we are handicapped by lack of ethnographies of the area from which migration occurred, which describe these areas at the time of migration. It has therefore been necessary to extrapolate backward, using contemporary ethnographies of these regions as evidence of the cultural conditions from which the migrants were drawn. But such a postulate rests on assumptions of cultural stability and immobility which are dubious in the extreme, particularly with regard to the West African area; and these assumptions in any case are unverifiable.

Moreover, we are faced with the problems of marked cultural dissimilarities within the West African regions from which the bulk of Caribbean Negroes

trace descent. Even when the influence of Islam in this area is excluded, there remain sufficiently important differences of culture for reference to or definition of a cultural pattern as characteristic of this area to remain highly suspect (8). If this is true of Africa, it can hardly be untrue or unimportant in relation to African cultural continuities among New World Negroes. Where traits or complexes can be ascribed to particular tribal traditions, such as Ibo, Dahomey, Kongo, Mandinka, Yoruba, or Akan, this type of problem disappears. But without such tribal attribution, the simple description of a trait or complex as African must often consist in question-begging, and may often be quite spurious.

Faced with the relative instability of cultural traits, the diversity of African cultures, and the relative lack of historical records detailing the processes of transmission of African culture in the New World, we are unavoidably committed in the study of this heritage to put the cart before the horse and to start with end-effects, real or assumed, and then try to work back through their hypothetical processes of persistence, development, or change to some particular tribal culture or to some undifferentiated "African" culture. In an enquiry of this type, it is therefore especially urgent that we should distinguish as sharply as possible between precise and indefinite forms and between specific and indeterminate attributions. The alternative is simply to perpetuate a wayward enquiry based on poor methodology and to invite the substitution of speculative derivation by the multiplication of indeterminate concepts and hypotheses in place of the search for demonstrable relations.

I suggest that the distinction between specific and general attributions is basic to the fruitful pursuit of our enquiry. By a specific attribution, I mean the ascription of cultural traits to particular cultures in Africa, as Bascom has done with Afro-Cuban divination practices (1) or Herskovits (9) and Deren (5) have done with certain spirits and rituals of Haitian *vodun*. All ascriptions which lack this tribal reference must be classified as general or indeterminate simply because their conceptual assumptions of a general African culture are of this character. I would give as examples of this indeterminate attributions, Herskovits' concept of serial polygyny or of spirit-possession (10).

Both specific and general ascriptions presuppose correspondences of form. Both may be accurate and useful. But since the particular forms to which attribution is made are more easily demonstrable in specific ascriptions, these enjoy a greater certainty and precision than do general attributions, and they offer more rewarding leads for initial study.

Both specific and general ascriptions may be formally identical with African originals, or they may be somewhat changed. Thus the serial polygyny or spirit-possession mentioned above are not identical with the African institutions to which ascriptions of either are made. I therefore suggest a secondary classification, cutting across the distinction in terms of specific and generalized ascriptions, to differentiate those forms which persist without change, those which have persisted but show change, and those which have not persisted at all.

Our categories of cultural persistence therefore have six divisions:

Degrees of Change:	A s c r i p t i o n s	
	Tribal	General to Africa
Unchanged forms:		
Changed forms:		
Lost forms:		

I suggest that these six different classes of suspected persistence are not evidentially equal and will vary correspondingly in their utility for research. Briefly, it seems that formally unchanged patterns of specific tribal derivation offer a firmer basis for acculturation research than do changed forms of indeterminate or specific tribal provenience. And although it is of course impossible to establish fully that any particular pattern is completely lost, the hypothesis may be admitted for working purposes in relation to particular patterns in defined areas, such as, for example, the withdrawal of women from farm labour, which I will discuss later.

So far we have been talking purely of forms. To grade and classify ascriptions in terms of probable scientific utility we have constructed a simple grid which focuses on specificity in ascription and identity of form, without any implication about the process of persistence. In my view it has been a great source of confusion in the study of our African heritage to classify forms in terms of hypothetical acculturative processes. If our enquiry in this field is to advance, we must distinguish carefully between three aspects, attending to each separately and in turn. Form is one thing, function is another; process, the third, is the ultimate goal of our analysis.

To make ascriptions simultaneously in terms of process and form is to forestall the study of either separately and of acculturation altogether. Yet this is the method of Herskovits and his associates, whose classifications of traits simply consist in distinctions between retentions, or survivals, reinterpretations, syncretisms, and reintegrations. These are of course processual categories, which may be useful or otherwise in analysis of the processes of acculturation. But they can only beget obscurity when applied to the classification of forms. The type of obscurity thus begotten is mainly obvious in the ambiguity of attributions which this method permits. For example, family organization among Caribbean Negroes is classifiable along these lines as a reinterpretation of West African patterns, when they may be nothing of the sort. And patently spurious ascriptions are possible by this method of classification. Thus Herskovits (*10*, p. 234) and Simpson (*18*) both regard baptism and the use of water in the religious practice of New World Negroes as evidence of African cultural persistence through reinterpretation. This is hardly fair. Such uses of water have figured prominently in European Christianity for nearly two thousand years (*6*). Ascriptions made on the basis of form and process simultaneously are inevitably hypothetical and of

ambiguous status. I suggest that form alone provides a sufficiently unambiguous referent for ascriptions, and that we can only proceed to search for process by enquiry into the history and functional relations of ascribed forms.

The functional aspects or values of competing forms have hitherto attracted insufficient interest among Afro-Americanists involved in the study of cultural persistences. Yet its implications for their enquiries are important and various. I shall try to illustrate some of these by certain data drawn from my own experience. Land tenure among the Caribbean peasants, most of whom are of African descent, provides a neat instance. By and large, in most of the British Caribbean islands, the rural population practises a type of family tenure of land which differs markedly from that of the common law and has certain superficial parallels with some African systems of tenure. These resemblances led Edith Clarke, who first described this institution systematically, to speak of "the peasant theory of land tenure, reflecting West African principles" (3). This system of tenure is not peculiar to Jamaica. It is also found among the peasants of Carriacou, a small island off Grenada. There also it bears some superficial resemblances to certain West African systems of tenure. I made a detailed study of the development of this system of folk tenure on a Government Land Settlement established with all regard to the forms and procedure of law. I then found that this customary tenure had developed as a functional adjustment of the population of the Settlement to their social and individual circumstance under the pressure of certain measurable conditions such as migration, population increase, death-order of spouses, and the like (21). In this case African cultural persistence cannot be admitted, partly because the legal establishment of the Settlement broke with this tradition, and more importantly because the development of customary tenure which followed after was governed by demographic conditions.

Other instances of formal parallelism developing on purely functional grounds and in historical conditions which rule out African persistence can be taken from the field of labour organization. In many rural areas, production for subsistence and exchange is commonly found together with *ad hoc* wage labour. When slavery obtained, this balance was paralleled by the distribution of slave labour-time on their subsistence holdings or their masters' cultivation. These distributions were characteristic of slavery in West Africa and the Caribbean (20). Now, as West Indian slaveowners controlled the time allocations of their slaves, and as the owners were Europeans, this formal parallel cannot be interpreted as an instance of African heritage or cultural persistence.

Since the abolition of slavery among the Hausa of West Africa, and in the British Caribbean, there has been a progressive withdrawal of women from manual farm labour. Women are still important helpers in light farm tasks such as harvesting, but in areas of mixed production for subsistence and ex-

change by small-scale farming they are otherwise marginal to the field labour force. In both Hausaland and Jamaica, women were actively engaged in manual field work under slavery. The parallelism in development is thus quite real and could conceivably be mistaken for persistence of African cultural traditions. This would of course be inappropriate.

The basis of this withdrawal of women from farm labour consists in the status transition from slave to free. Under slavery women as well as men were subject to compulsory farm labour. While the abolition of slavery in both areas provided the opportunity to assert the status of freedom, it did not of itself indicate how to do so. In Jamaica, where British land law prevailed and the masters controlled the sugar-producing plains, there was a prompt and substantial exodus to the unoccupied hill country. Among the Hausa, where title to land is based on use and occupancy, this problem did not arise, and the ex-slaves remained where they were. But in both areas women withdrew from manual field labour. In this way they were able to assert their new status as free persons, not merely for themselves, but for their husbands and families also. The contrast in Jamaica today between the hill-folk, descended from those who left the estate areas, and the population of the plains, descended from those who remained in the sugar belts, is especially clear in this particular. In the plains, women continue to carry out cane-weeding and other manual field tasks on and off estates. In the hills, their participation is highly marginal. Thus, in the Top Hill District, St. Elizabeth parish, Jamaica, last year I found that only one woman, an aged destitute, still worked in the fields for cash. The point here is that in Jamaica the same stimulus, abolition of slavery, has developed different reactions, withdrawal or continued participation of women in farm labour, according to different conditions. And that one of these reactions, the withdrawal typical of the women in Jamaican hill country, is identical in form with that observed among the Hausa.

Here we have a formal parallel of negative character, that is, one which could presumably be interpreted as the loss of an original pattern. But this trait is characteristic of neither area entirely. In Africa, for example, among the Ibo, Yoruba, and Nsaw, women engage actively in farm work. In Jamaica, in the sugar belt, although not in the hills, they still practise field labour. The instance we are discussing therefore illustrates how complex problems may arise even where formal identities obtain. This complexity develops due to the diversity of African cultures, the diversity of Caribbean practice and its distribution, the impact of common or different historical conditions and their influence on the pattern in question, and the variable functional conditions of its development in the Old or the New World.

Wage-labour forms for farm-work among Hausa and Jamaicans in rural areas are strikingly similar. Hausa *kodago* patterns are either job or day work. In Jamaica also, day work and job, piece or task work, are the two major modes of arranging wage labour on farms. This type of resemblance suggests community of origin. In my view the suggestion is both erroneous and un-

necessary. It is erroneous since such patterns have developed in either area after the African migration to the Caribbean had ceased; in fact, after slavery had been abolished. It is unnecessary since there is a simpler more general explanation of both developments. This explanation also is functional in character. It consists in the fact that cultivators engaged in subsistence production and dependent also on exchange activity for the cash income necessary for certain unavoidable outlays will have to sell their labour to the extent that their demands for cash cannot be met in any other way, as, for example, by trade or craft production. But since these wage-workers are primarily committed to subsistence cultivation, they will not normally be able to engage in long-term labour contracts during the farming season, when their labour will be most in demand locally, nor will they normally be free to migrate at that period in search of continuous work. The appropriate labour contract for such people is therefore one which allows them to attend to their farms as the cultivation schedule requires. This can be provided either by short-term day engagements, or by the type of job, piece, or task-work pattern which allows the labourer to dispose of his labour time as he sees fit.

I have devoted some time to these instances taken from the field of labour organization because the functional values of different types of work organization in different condition are easily appreciated, and because it is in this respect that the historical record of West Indian slavery is probably most helpful to us. I have been concerned with showing that despite formal parallelism between specific or general African arrangements and certain West Indian practices, African cultural persistence cannot be predicated for these forms simply because of the massive historical discontinuities which slavery produced. Yet these discontinuities do not prevent Hørskovits from treating all forms of cooperative farm work among males, such as *gayap* in Trinidad, *combite* in Haiti, *troca dia* in Brazil, or "lend-day" in Jamaica, equally as instances of African persistence (10, pp. 62, 290-91), despite their highly dissimilar constitution (22). While *gayap* and *combite* are *ad hoc* groups of several individuals, sometimes a score or more, *troca dia* and "lend-day" are reciprocal and recurrent arrangements between two individuals. These categories of cooperation thus exhaust the probable forms of farm-labour co-operation. In other words, in terms of this approach any case of co-operation in farm work, whether between two or more persons and whether recurrent or merely occasional, is ascribable to African tradition. Now it seems to me that even if we ignored the historical data on this matter, such attributions weaken the study of African cultural persistence by swelling the claims for such persistence through the inclusion of dubious items. It is my contention that functional imperatives may produce parallel forms in similar conditions without the persistence of African traditions being necessary. I think that if the classification of all free co-work in farming as African persistence is admitted, there should be no objection to regarding all forms of mating practice as equally African.

A sufficient number of examples have now been given to illustrate the principal methodological prerequisites for fruitful study of African cultural persistence in the Caribbean and other areas of the New World. I shall attempt to state these conditions simply.

1) Where specific tribal prototypes cannot be established, the items of African attribution must be demonstrable features of all the principal African cultures contributing to the area in which they are reported.

2) They must also be features of a type, the persistence of which in Africa as well as the New World would appear to be more probable than their change or disappearance during the period since migration has ceased.

3) The distribution of these features among the American Negro population must be general, measurable, and linked to known conditions.

4) There must not be any historical evidence suggesting discontinuous transmission of these attributed traits among the New World Negroes or their recent introduction from Africa.

5) Traits regarded as evidence of the persistence of African cultural forms must be formally peculiar and distinct from the customs or institutions characteristic of all other cultural groups within the society of their location.

6) Identities or similarities of form must be shown between the traits of imputed African provenience and the African models from which derivation is traced.

7) Even where formal identities and historical continuities can be demonstrated, traits which reflect necessary functional adjustments to New World conditions must be distinguished as a group from others for which functional values have not been established. This distinction is of course essential where historical discontinuities in the transmission of African patterns are known or suspected.

This battery of conditions, which should be satisfied before indeterminate attribution is admissible, is simply designed to preserve the specificity of our subject matter, to allow easy verification, and to permit the progressively precise understanding of the processes of acculturation and assimilation at work. Where specific tribal derivation is evident, the enquiry shifts promptly to structural-functional analysis of the traits and contexts concerned; and, on the basis of hypotheses developed therein, attempts to assess the weight of all factors at work in the acculturative process by historical and comparative studies of the custom in question in the various New World *milieux*. It seems quite probable that detailed attention to specific and obvious African traits along these lines will lead gradually to the development of sufficient knowledge about the acculturative processes involved in their persistence, change, or loss, and will reduce the difficulties which at present face enquiries about traits of indeterminate form and origin. We must, in other words, build from the clearly known to the less clearly known, from the concrete and particular to the general.

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DISCUSSION^a

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Dr. Smith is quite right in saying that ". . . the study of acculturation or cultural change cannot be complete without parallel study of social change; that the study of acculturation involves assimilation; that enculturation is an aspect of socialization, or vice versa." He then says that "the study of African heritage in purely cultural terms is not adequately conceived, and cannot by itself reveal the processes and conditions of acculturation." And he continues,

^aOur indebtedness to the work of M. J. and F. S. Herskovits is apparent in this discussion.

“. . . if acculturation is the aim of such study, rather than the simple identification of elements as African or other, we must study the relevant social and cultural conditions equally and simultaneously.” Few, if any, investigators in the Afro-American field have studied the African heritage in purely cultural terms, but we are not convinced that it is necessary for every investigator to devote *equal* attention to social and cultural conditions. It may be advantageous to have a variety of empirical studies carried out with the use of different conceptual schemes.

Dr. Smith speaks of “ambiguities”, including the ambiguity in the concept of an African inheritance itself, against which we must guard our enquiries. He states that the concept of African inheritance “presupposes a uniformity and uniqueness of African cultures which ethnography does not support.” Then he cites spirit-possession, “commonly taken to be an element of African culture persisting among the New World Negroes who practise it”. “But”, he continues, “there are numerous tribes of West Africa among whom spirit-possession is not to be found . . . [and] there are many other peoples, including whites, among whom this practice has been reported”. The fact that a number of West African tribes do not practice spirit-possession is of limited importance. It is important to know the specific provenience of the first Africans introduced into a New World community. The first arrivals and their traditions tended to structure the situation. Other Africans, arriving later, adjusted their slightly different behaviour to the already existing situation. This sort of adjustment occurred and still occurs both in West Africa and in the New World. For example, Mohammedanized Africans exercised a relatively weak influence upon the cultural configuration of New World Negro communities. Historical documents indicate that Mohammedan slaves arrived in the New World considerably later than other Africans. While it is probable that they exerted some influence on the slave communities into which they were introduced, it is important to point out that the West Africans who had arrived earlier had already developed, out of their basically common cultural heritage, an adjustment to the New World situation. The newly arrived Negroes had to adapt themselves to these ways of acting and thinking, and in doing so they tended to lose those aspects of their cultural heritage which were not generally shared with their fellow West Africans.

Hammond's field work in French West Africa^a provides examples of the sort of generalized cultural similarity which is under discussion here. In studying the Islamic conversion of the Mossi, an analysis which failed to descend beneath the superficial level of form would have missed the pro-

^aWith the assistance of a grant from the Ford Foundation during the years 1954-56, an eighteen-month field study of the cultural processes which have characterized the adjustment of the Mossi to European economic organization was undertaken by Peter Hammond. A chapter by Hammond, “Economic Change and Mossi Acculturation”, will appear in a forthcoming book edited by William R. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits, tentatively entitled *Backgrounds of Modern Africa*. A book concerned with a more detailed exposition of the same material, *Yatenga: The Adjustment of an African People to European Economic Organization* is in preparation.

found and vastly more significant level upon which the Mossi's psychological response to religion rests. The basic premises of their theology have remained unaffected by an Islamization which actually amounts to little more than the adoption of some new propitiatory forms.

Both past records and an examination of the contemporary situation in the New World indicate that beneath the relatively superficial level of form there is a more significant, non-conscious level of psychological function. On this level there is an important basic similarity between varieties of religious behaviour both throughout West Africa and in the various New World Negro communities.

Returning to spirit-possession, we shall point out several differences between Dr. Smith's point of view and ours. While it is true that numerous tribes in Africa lacked spirit-possession, such possession was very widespread in West Africa. Rattray (9) and others report spirit-possession from the Gold Coast, Herskovits (6 II, p. 199) from Dahomey, Bascom (1, 2) and others from Nigeria. The question is whether the kind of spirit-possession one finds in the cults of Haiti, Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and Jamaica is derived from Africa or from Europe, or from both continental sources. Perhaps the Jamaican situation will illuminate this problem. There, if anywhere among the Caribbean countries, the influence of the European types of spirit-possession should be evident. But we have to discard immediately one type of European possession, the private trance experience of European mystics, because the commonest and most important kind of spirit-possession in Jamaican revivalism occurs publicly. The other type of possession, found in Great Britain and Ireland and like that of the camp meetings in the United States, differs in two important ways from spirit-possession in Jamaican revivalism. In the first place, those possessed were almost always possessed by the "spirit", presumably the Holy Ghost; only a few were possessed by the Devil, the only other spirit we have seen mentioned in accounts of revivals such as the Scotch-Irish revival in Ulster in 1859 (3, ch. 7). In Jamaica, on the other hand, revivalists are possessed by a variety of Old Testament prophets, new Testament saints, archangels, Satan and his assistants, beings from the de Laurence publications, and the dead.

The second difference is that the seizures in Kentucky and Ireland (and these were not always spirit-possession) occurred after the minister had condemned the wickedness of his hearers and had portrayed Hell in vivid terms. Listeners felt sinful and guilty, they were afraid, and they wept, shouted, prayed, fell on the ground, jerked, shook in every joint, barked like dogs, and burst out into a "holy laugh" (3, pp. 78-81). While some of this motor behaviour is similar to that seen in Jamaican revivalism, the muscular movements, particularly of the neck, shoulder, and back muscles, which appear to be identical in Haiti, Cuba, Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad, and West Africa, are not characteristic of the eighteenth-century revivalism in the United States and in Ireland. Furthermore, Jamaican revivalist leaders do not

frighten their followers into a state of possession. It is a mark of distinction to be possessed by a spirit, and one benefits from the messages received during this religious experience. The differences between the Kentucky and the Scotch-Irish type of possession and spirit-possession in Haitian *vodun*, Trinidadian *shango*, Brazilian *candomblé*, and Cuban *santería* are even more marked because in the latter cases devotees are possessed by old African gods.

It was not until 1860 that missionaries in Jamaica imported the revival idea from the United States and the British Isles. As the movement spread over Jamaica, there were prostrations, oral confessions, trances and dreams, prophesying, spirit-seizures, wild dancing, flagellation, and mysterious sexual doings (4, p. 171). Such behaviour was not entirely new to Jamaica. In the 1840's, even in the orthodox churches "an occasional member would be seized by the spirit during a service" (4, p. 170), and in those years Myalmen had thousands of followers in St. James, Westmoreland, and Trelawny. Gardner wrote: "Fowls were sacrificed, and wild songs sung, in the chorus of which the multitude joined. Dancing then began, becoming more and more weird-like in character, until one and another fell exhausted to the ground, when their incoherent utterances were listened to as divine revelation . . ." (5).

The evidence on spirit-possession in the religious cults of New World Negroes seems to indicate mainly a West African provenience. If further research shows that persons of African descent derived any substantial part of their inspiration for spirit-possession, or of the motor behaviour which characterizes such possession, from European sources, this conclusion will be revised. The problem, as Herskovits has remarked, "is the determination of the manner in which elements of European, African, and to a lesser degree, American Indian cultures [have] exerted mutual influences on one another and . . . [have] merged to produce their present-day ways of life (8).

We agree that it is desirable wherever possible to have tribal ascriptions for elements of the African heritage, and these have often been cited in New World Negro studies, as, for example, the Dahomean influences in Haiti, the Yoruban persistences in Cuba and Brazil, and the Ashanti elements in Jamaica. Where specific tribal ascriptions are not possible, the "base-line of African culture" constructed by Herskovits (7) is a most useful device.

It is true that socially the Caribbean region is not a unit. Each country does have its own metropolitan associations, religious, linguistic, and cultural affiliations, racial distribution, and historical differences. These differentiae rule out the possibility of a rigidly uniform pattern of African heritage in the region. But, in our view, they do not rule out a general West African cultural base-line as a part of the heritage of Caribbean peoples. No one maintains that Africanisms are apparent in every phase of life in every Caribbean country. However, it seems to us, an equally untenable position would be one which held that because of the differentiae Dr. Smith has mentioned, as well as the impossibility of giving specific tribal ascriptions in every instance, very few Africanisms are known or can be discovered.

What the peoples of many Caribbean countries have in common is a set of similar West African cultural traditions which have been handed down unwittingly, both orally and through the overt behaviours of relatives and other members of the community, among the folk. Wherever possible, differences in the African background of these populations should be pointed out. Also, the European cultures and the social structures to which these populations and their ancestors have been exposed, as well as the special historical conditions and contexts, should be spelled out as fully as possible. All of the peoples of the Caribbean have been affected by Western European, West African, and, to a lesser degree, Carib cultural influences. It is the degree of intensity and the specific nature of the influences which varies: French and Dahomean influence having been strongest in Haiti, Spanish and Yoruba influences, in a somewhat different ratio, having characterized the situation in Cuba, etc. In considering the effect of West African culture in the Caribbean, comparisons will be most useful if we keep the West African cultural background, not as a rigid, standardized constant, but as a variable construct which helps us to see how the special European affiliations and historical circumstances have, in each case, brought about the synthesis which exists at the present time.

Dr. Smith speaks of "the relative instability of cultural traits" and "the diversity of African cultures". We are concerned here with West Africa only, not an "undifferentiated 'African' culture", as Dr. Smith states. Furthermore, there is much evidence that the diversity is most important on the superficial level of form and that beneath the level of form culture traits manifest not instability but remarkable tenacity. Examination of the form and meaning of institutions throughout West Africa indicates much more similarity than diversity, if the institutions are studied and compared in terms of their psychological and sociological meaning. That West African languages differ greatly on the level of vocabulary, for instance, is not in conflict with the fact that many of them share a common morphology. Again, differences in religious usage which occur on the level of form, ceremonial organization, etc., are not in conflict with the essentially similar nature of religious conviction throughout the whole West African area.

Dr. Smith states that "form alone provides a sufficiently unambiguous referent for ascriptions". But form is a most superficial level of cultural reality. Since it is consciously realized, it is often much quicker to change than the profounder philosophical principles and psychological attitudes which are frequently more persistent and tenacious because they exist beneath the level of consciousness. A mode of dress or a figure of speech, for example, is less persistent than a motor habit or a psychological response. We suggest that Dr. Smith's criteria imply an incorrect understanding of acculturation theory and the way culture works. Examination of the value system or the social organization of a Hopi wearing "Levis" and driving a Ford truck might well reveal that he had remained significantly Indian despite his conscious adop-

tion of certain of the forms of Euro-American material culture. If one is to demand such explicit evidence as the retention of cicatrization or tribal dress in order to accept the influence of West African culture in the Caribbean, there is little future for acculturation studies among New World Negroes.

A further obstacle is thought to be "the relative lack of historical records detailing the processes of transmission". On the contrary, there is a considerable documentation which anthropologists should utilize. Much of this documentation exists in languages other than English, but there are records of slave shipments, accounts of travel in West Africa and in the American colonies, etc., which, if interpreted with "anthropological sophistication", can be extremely valuable. Other sources, such as Spanish and Portuguese archives, are of great potential value to New World ethnographers. Lamentation concerning the limitation of historical resources can become a rationalization for the avoidance of diachronic study.

The paradigm of degrees of change (unchanged forms, changed forms, and lost forms) coupled with ascriptions (tribal and general to Africa) proposed by Dr. Smith is interesting but not entirely new. For years Herskovits and his associates have been using both specific tribal and general attributions and they have employed the concepts of retention, reinterpretation, and syncretism. In a paper by Simpson on the acculturative process in Jamaican revivalism (10), five categories of change were used: full or nearly full African retentions; parallel traditions; syncretisms; reinterpretations of African elements; and European-borrowed traits and reinterpretations of European elements.

Dr. Smith states that the classifications of Herskovits and his associates simply consist in distinctions between retentions, or survivals, reinterpretations, syncretisms, and reintegration, and that these are "processual" categories which result in confusion when applied to the classification of forms. We see the situation somewhat differently. To us each element or trait-complex should be examined in terms of form, meaning, function, and process. Any analysis which ignores any one of these aspects is bound to provide an inadequate understanding of acculturation. Certainly baptism and the use of water, to take one item mentioned by Dr. Smith, have been described according to the different forms they take from one Caribbean country to another. Also, their functions, separately or as parts of the total magico-religious complex of *vodun*, or *santeria*, or *shango*, or revivalism, or the *candomblé*, have been set forth. But we also need to be concerned with the meaning of water and the processes through which water has come to be incorporated into religious rituals in various parts of the New World. Incidentally, neither Herskovits nor Simpson treat baptism and the use of water as reinterpretations of African belief and practice, but rather as syncretisms of European and African belief and practice. The processes through which (a) syncretisms, (b) reinterpretations of African elements, (c) the borrowing of European traits and reinterpretations of European elements, (d) African retentions, (e) the persistence in relatively unchanged form of parallel European and African

traditions, and (f) purely local practices have come about should be delineated as fully as possible.

Considerable use is made of economic institutions for comparative purposes by Dr. Smith. It is well to keep in mind that economic activity was an aspect of the Negroes' cultural behaviour which was most purposefully changed by their white masters. Considering this, it is striking that so many institutions were retained. In this connection, Dr. Smith's remarks about co-operative work in New York World countries call for some comment. The co-operative work-system known as the *combite* in Haiti, with its practice of giving a feast at the end of the day instead of pay, is related to the *dopkwe* of Dahomey. Of interest also is a non-relationship grouping in Dahomey which is akin to the *troca dia* in Brazil. This mutual-aid society, called *so*, is entered into by compact between individuals. According to Herskovits: "A group of this kind is organized for cooperative work and one of its aims is to give mutual aid in cultivating the fields of the members. . . (6, I, p. 253). We cannot agree with Dr. Smith's contention that the co-operative factor in Caribbean agricultural pursuits cannot be related to African culture because the work groups are not parallel in all respects to the African model of the *dopkwe*. The concept of parallel development is a valid and useful tool, but it does not refute the equally valid concepts of acculturation theory.

Finally, we turn to several points selected from Dr. Smith's summary:

a.) Where specific tribal prototypes cannot be established, the items of African attribution must be demonstrable features of all the principal African cultures contributing to the area in which they are reported.

On the contrary, what must be considered is the provenience of the first Negroes to be brought to a given area. This point is just as true in the study of the cultural influences of the various metropolitan powers whose populations contributed to the New World amalgam. In order to understand why English culture traits are so numerous in the United States, one has to understand that the first Europeans in the North American colonies were English. So is it important to know that the Yoruba preceded the Mandingos in Brazil and that they were always numerically more important.

b.) The distribution of these features among the American Negro population must be general, measurable, and linked to known conditions.

Dr. Smith refutes his own point about the importance of considering the specific milieu into which the Africans were introduced, of consideration of social process, function, etc. Because a West African cultural trait is not retained to the same extent among the Negroes of Nova Scotia as it is among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana does not invalidate it for inclusion among the evidences of the West African cultural heritage of American Negroes.

c.) Traits regarded as evidence of the persistence of African cultural forms must be formally peculiar and distinct from the customs or institutions characteristic of all other cultural groups within the society of their location.

This is an impossible condition. If one accepted it, one could show African influences on New World cultures only by revealing African cultural traits in pure form. This would mean that African cultural traits are so strong that nothing can modify them. Or, if one failed to find any evidence of African

culture, it would mean that African cultural traits are so weak that they are very easily displaced. Peoples of African descent in the New World, and African cultural traits, have not been hermetically sealed off from other peoples and cultures — not even in Dutch Guiana. As far as we know, this condition is not insisted upon in the study of other acculturative situations.

d.) Identities or similarities of form must be shown between the traits of imputed African provenience and the African models from which derivation is traced.

Demanding identity or similarity of form could result only in a superficial type of analysis. Form is the first thing to be changed in the acculturative situation. To illustrate this point we attempted earlier to show that in studying spirit-possession meaning is important, and that some superficial resemblances in form are not enough on which to base judgments.

In discussing the investigation of the African heritage in the Caribbean, Dr. Smith does not seem to take into consideration the intertribal acculturation which has occurred in Africa. Also, he appears not to understand what the Afro-American field is, nor what is meant by reinterpretation. Although written records on the pre-contact cultures, the conditions of contact, and present-day cultures are available, he avoids any mention of the ethno-historical approach and touches only lightly upon actual historical materials. It is especially interesting that he does not mention the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana. Because these people have retained so much of African culture, and in a form which fulfils even his requirements, they are a key group in tracing Africanisms from the Old World to the New World.

The historical materials bearing on the persistence of African culture elements in the Caribbean are uneven, but there is much that is useful. Both the ethno-historical and the functional approaches have a great deal to offer. Let us use them and any other methods which promise to throw light on our problems.

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