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**A NATIONAL ACCOUNTS STUDY**

**OF THE**

**ECONOMY OF BARBADOS**

**By**

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He suggests, quite correctly, that a set of different decisions on the part of Governor Eyre might well have prevented the riot at Morant Bay from growing into a constitutional crisis. I quite agree with him that contingency, chance, or human decision could have averted the crisis or turned it into another course. I wrote, in fact, in *Two Jamaicas*, that I did not "mean to imply that men are puppets in the hands of such major forces as intellectual background or social structure. 'Institutions' are, after all, only the habits of individuals, and 'idea.' are no more than abstractions from the thoughts of men." It seems to me that the only difference between Dr. Hall's interpretation and my own is one of emphasis. He would lay more stress on the immediate and accidental causes of the crisis, while I was more concerned to explain the longer background in thought and sentiment. It is not really worthwhile trying to decide which set of causes was more important — both were essential. Nor is it worthwhile speculating on what would have happened if the situation had been different. The situation wasn't different. The riot *did* turn into a major crisis, and the historian's obligation is to describe as best he can why things happened that way.

University of Wisconsin.

Philip D. Curtin.

*Africa, Its Peoples and Their Culture History.* By George Peter Murdock. McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1959. 456 pp.

Professor Murdock is a distinguished anthropologist of the American school, who combines penetrating interests in social organization and in ethnology. The present work deals with the traditional cultures and peoples of Africa from the early days of Neolithic agriculture until the end of the last century when Europeans assumed control. The author seeks to write the cultural history of Africa by doing likewise for each of its main population groups. This interest is explicitly ethnological, but Murdock's interest in developmental sequences in social organizations is evident throughout, with the result that his ethnological argument leans as heavily on data and theories about social organization as on linguistic relations, archaeology, trait distributions, or ethnobotany. This considerably increases the general significance of the work, and strengthens the argument in many ways.

A book with such vast learning and coverage as this is not easy to digest or assess in detail. The sweep of the study is striking, but the details organized therein require careful evaluation. Murdock has shown that to understand the cultural history of any single ethnographic province in Africa, it is necessary to have a general idea of African ethnology as a whole. He has also shown that inattention to ethnology has led British anthropologists of the structural school to dogmatize positivistically about the stability of African social systems or about their functional logic. In future, as a consequence of Murdock's work, such exclusively synchronic analyses may well

show more modesty; and Murdock's demonstration of the services which ethnology may provide for structural analysis, together with his cogent criticisms of defective inferences from these studies, may perhaps be the most important features of this impressive enterprise.

However, the structuralists are not alone in seeking by means of limited techniques to reduce all to order, ignoring the irreducible when necessary. Murdock is equally guilty of this. Ethnology is itself committed to reduce the past and present to intelligible order, and it can rarely tolerate unresolved issues or problems within its field. To circumvent these, it either omits or de-emphasizes them, or else relies on hypotheses of unequal probability and status for their reduction. When the ethnological coverage is a continent of Africa's size, complexity, antiquity, and historical darkness, the result is inevitably a heaping of hypothesis on hypothesis, some brilliant, others rather less so, but all serving to tie particular sequences into the general order and argument. The result is an uneven volume, containing many fine and dubious interpretations: but this itself indicates the value of Murdock's study. A modern ethnology of Africa has long been overdue; and it is highly doubtful whether any scholar could have produced a volume to equal Murdock's in its clarity, scale, range of detail, meticulous resort to objective data, emphases on sound methodology, and imaginative insights.

Even so, the work rests on dubious foundations. By combining botanical, linguistic, racial, distributional, and structural materials, Murdock sub-divides the African peoples into a number of cultural provinces, each of which is characterized by homogeneity of basic culture. These provinces none the less exhibit significant internal variation, and Murdock seeks to reduce this condition to differing historical sequences. Conversely, distinct cultural provinces which exhibit significant similarities are held to have shared common origins or historical influences. In this way the contemporary cultural province is defined by historical postulates, and the culture history itself consists largely of relations between these cultural provinces. Despite Murdock's insistence on caution and factual data, this unsatisfactory method encourages the reduction of refractory materials to order by the multiplication of hypotheses, some primary and critical for the argument as a whole, others less immediately so, but indispensable none the less. Mistakes of fact and emphases sometimes add their quota to the resulting interpretation. Omissions — such as the Neolithic Nok Culture on the Nigerian Plateau or the role of the Atlantic slave trade in the emergence of West African coastal despotisms — are equally significant. Professor Murdock will hardly expect a general agreement with his numerous hypotheses and derivations; but he is greatly to be applauded and thanked for reducing African ethnology to some order.

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M. G. Smith.