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The Myth of the Negro Past (fragmentos)¹

The Significance of Africanisms

The myth of the Negro past is one of the principal supports of race prejudice in this country. Unrecognized in its efficacy, it rationalizes discrimination in everyday contact between Negroes and whites, influences the shaping of policy where Negroes are concerned, and effects the trends of research by scholars whose theoretical approach, methods, and systems of thought presented to students are in harmony with it. Where all its elements are not accepted, no conflict ensues even when, as in popular belief, certain tenets run contrary to some of its component parts, since its acceptance is so little subject to question that contradictions are not likely to be scrutinized too closely. The system is thus to be regarded as mythological in the technical sense of the term, for, as will be made apparent, it provides the sanction for deep-seated belief which gives coherence to behavior.

This myth of the Negro past, which validates the concept of Negro inferiority, may be outlined as follows:

1. *Negroes are naturally of a childlike character, and adjust easily to the most unsatisfactory social situations, which they accept readily and even happily, in contrast to the American Indians, who preferred extinction to slavery;*
2. *Only the poorer stock of Africa was enslaved, the more intelligent members of the African communities raided having been clever enough to elude the slavers' nets;*
3. *Since the Negroes were brought from all parts of the African continent, spoke diverse languages, represented greatly differing bodies of custom, and, as a matter of policy, were distributed in the New World so as to lose tribal identity, no least common denominator of understanding of behavior could have possibly been worked out by them;*
4. *Even granting enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together, and that they had the will and ability to continue their customary modes of behavior, the cultures of Africa were so savage and relatively so low in the scale of human civilization that the apparent superiority of European customs as observed in the behavior of their masters, would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions as they may otherwise have desired to preserve;*
5. *The Negro is thus a man without a past.*

Naturally, there have been reactions against this point of view, and in such works as Carter Woodson's *The African Background Outlined* and W. E. B. Du Bois' *Black Folk, Then and Now* serious attempts have been made to comprehend the entire picture of the Negro, African and New World, in this historical and functional setting. In still another category of those who disagree with this system are writers whose reactions, presented customarily with little valid documentation, center attention on Africa principally to prove that "Negro culture" can take its place among the "higher" civilizations of mankind. Scientific thought has for some time abjured attempts at the comparative evaluation of cultures, so that these works are significant more as

¹ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Beacon Press, Beacon Hill, Boston, 1958, pp. 1-32.

manifestations of the psychology of interracial conflict than as contributions to serious thought. They are in essence a part of the literature of polemics, and such need be given little attention here.

It must be also recognized that not every writer who has made statements of the type outlined above has accepted or, if he has accepted, has stressed all the elements in the system; and that popular opinion often underscores the African character of certain aspects of the behavior of Negroes, emphasizing the savage and exotic nature of the presumed carry-overs. Yet on the intellectual level, a long line of trained specialists have reiterated, in whole or in part, the assumptions concerning the Negro past that have been sketched. As a consequence, diverse as are the contributions of these writers in approach, method, and materials, they have, with but few exceptions, contributed to the perpetuation of the legend concerning the quality of Negro aboriginal endowment and its lack of stamina under contact [...].

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Though the historical relationship between the present-day Negroes of the United States and Africa admits of no debate, there is little scientific knowledge of what has happened to this African cultural heritage in the New World. Statements bearing on the absence or the retention of Africanisms, even though these are drawn out of differing degrees of familiarity with the patterns of Negro life in this country, share one character in common. That is, their authors, whether lay or scholarly, not only are unencumbered by first-hand experience with the African civilizations involved, but the majority of them know or, at all events, utilize but few, if any, of the works wherein these cultures are described; while such works as are cited in documentation are commonly the older sources, which today are of little scientific value.

Scholarly opinion presents a fairly homogeneous conception as to African survivals in the United States. On the whole, specialists tend to accept and stress the view that Africanisms have disappeared as a result of the pressures exerted by the experience of slavery on all aboriginal modes of thought or behavior [...].

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[...] We know today that the analysis of African survivals among the Negroes of the United States involves far more than the commonly attempted correlation of traits of Negro behavior in this country with aboriginal tradition in Africa itself. On the contrary, such an analysis, to be adequate, requires a series of intermediate steps. A knowledge of tribal origins of the Negroes of this country is indispensable if the variation in custom found among the tribes from which the African ancestry was drawn is to be properly evaluated; and this is the more to be desired since almost all those who write of the Negro make a capital point of this variation-variation in terms of the African continent as a whole, however, rather than of that relatively restricted area from which the slaves were predominantly derived. An analysis of the slave trade as revealed in contemporary documents and in African traditions, to give us a knowledge of any selection it may have exercised, and the reaction of the slaves to their status, is similarly essential. The mechanisms of adjusting the newly arrived Africans to their situation as slaves, and the extent to which these operated to permit the retention of old habits, or to force the taking over of new modes of behavior, or to

make for a mingling of old patterns and newly experienced alternatives, must be understood as thoroughly as the data will permit.

Nor may any investigation on these lines confine itself to the United States alone. For in any methodological caution has emerged from exploratory research, it is that knowledge of the Negro cultures of the Caribbean islands and of Latin America is indispensable. The matter has been well put by Phillips:

*As regards Negro slavery the history of the West Indies is inseparable from that of North America. In them the plantation system originated and reached its greatest scale, and from them the institution of slavery was extended to the continent. The industrial system on the islands, and particularly on those occupied by the British, is accordingly instructive as an introduction and a parallel to the continental ragtime.*²

From the point of view of the study of Africanisms, also, it is as important to know the variation in Negro customary behavior, traditions, and beliefs over the entire New World as it is to understand the variation in the ancestral cultures of Africa itself, for only against such a background can be student project a clear picture of what has resulted from the differing historical experiences that constitute the essential control in the research procedure. And only with this background mastered are those mores of Negro life in the United States, which deviate from majority sanctions to be realistically analyzed.

The discussion in these pages will therefore be oriented in accordance with these principles. Our initial concern will be the African background, the processes of enslavement, and the reaction of the Negro to slavery. The accommodation of Negroes to their New World setting and the resultant variation in the degree of acculturation over the entire area where slavery existed will then be indicated, while the aspects of Negro culture where Africanism have been most retained and those where the least of aboriginal endowment is manifest, and the reasons for these differentials, will be pointed to show the complexity of what in general has hitherto been considered a single problem. Finally, further steps in research will be outlined to the end of attaining a better understanding of the processes of culture as a whole, and of an attack on the social issues presented by the Negro in the United States, in so far as the elements of conflict in the interracial situation are sharpened by beliefs concerning the quality of the cultural background of the Negro.

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Before turning to an analysis of available materials, let us consider the theoretical problems and practical issues on which our broad approach can throw some light, indicating at the outset the questions of most concern to students of culture for which the data of our investigation have relevance.

The problems whose answers are to be sought in the study of data from many civilizations fall under several general heads. The organization of human civilization as a whole, and the interrelation and integration of the several aspects of culture when combined into a given body of traditions, technologies and beliefs, are the most fundamental points at issue. The manner of cultural borrowing and, where possible, the circumstances under which an interchange of tradition takes place are similarly

² *American Negro Slavery*, New York, 1918, p. 46.

important, as is the related problem of the degree to which any culture represents inventions originating from within or taken over from foreign sources. The relation between culture and its human carriers, focused especially on the manner in which the cultural setting of an individual conditions not only his general mode of life but the organization of his personality and the character of his motor habits, has in recent years come to the force as a significant problem. Finally, the question of the degree to which the individual, admittedly in large measure the creature of his culture, can influence it while adapting himself to its patterns brings up the essential question of the various forces making for cultural change and cultural conservatism.

The comparative study of culture, like intensive analyses of individual civilizations, has in the past attempted to base its hypotheses on data from the nonhistoric peoples - those nonliterate folk termed "primitive"- who are relatively but little disturbed by European influence. Until recent times, students have been reluctant to include in their programs of investigation the consideration of changes, which have occurred, and are taking as a result of the contact of these nonhistoric peoples with the historic cultures under European colonial expansion and the westerly march of the American frontier. Yet for the study of problems of cultural dynamics and of social integration, of objective patterning and of psychological interrelations, the contact situations have much of value to offer. For here the conclusions from the study of relatively undisturbed and more static societies may be taken into the laboratory of observable change. Diffusion in process, the forces that make for cultural stability or instability, the reactions of individuals to new situations, the development of new orientations, the rise of new meaning and new values in life-all these may be observed where a people are in continuous contact with modes of life other than their own. What is accepted and what rejected, the influence of force as against more exposure or verbal persuasion, and the effect on human personalities of living under a dual, nonintegrated system of directives may be analyzed under ideal conditions for observing and recording the pertinent data.

Social studies of this type have in recent years come to be designated as acculturation studies, and it is as studies in acculturation that research into the problem of African survivals in the behavior of New World Negroes may be looked to make their greatest contribution to the understanding of the nature and processes of culture as a whole. Acculturation has been most comprehensively defined as the study of

those phenomena, which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.

It is unnecessary here to examine the implications of this definition or the methods of studying these contact situations, as these matters have been treated elsewhere.³ At this point it need only be recalled that by taking his cultural data into the laboratory provided by the historical situation, the social scientist may test his hypotheses in reference to conditions subject to historic validation; to obtain, that is, something of the control that is the essence of scientific method.

³ M. J. Herskovits, *Acculturation, the Study of Culture Contact*, New York, 1938.

That the Negro peoples in the new World offer unusual opportunities or research has been remarked by several students. Sir Harry H. Johnston, in the volume wherein he reports a visit to the West Indies and the United States in 1910,⁴ shows with clarity how rich a yield can be provided by knowledge of the ancestral continent when directed toward the New World scene. Despite the shortness of his stay, and the undisciplined observation and analysis of data that here, as in his other works, characterize the writings of this soldier, writer, and artist, his book is illuminating. For it demonstrates how much in the way of aboriginal tradition exists in West Indian and South American regions where, in disregard of even its surface manifestations, it has been overlooked by those students from the United States who, without grounding in African cultures and equipped only with the hypothesis of the disappearance of African customs as a frame of reference, have tended to minimize African retentions. W. M. Macmillan, a South African, also realized the closeness of affiliation of the west Indies with Africa-though his concern was with the special socio-economic problems of the British possessions-and he indicates the importance of service for colonial officials in the islands before their tour of duty in Africa itself.⁵

Perhaps the earliest student in the United States to point out the importance of research in the West Indies was U. G. Weatherly. He stressed the significance of "social groups in an insular environment," particularly where, as here, an historical record is at hand to aid in determining the people, and where contact with the outside world and other factors such as "internal revolutions" or "radical shifts in control from the outside" have made for "something more than rectilinear development." The "smaller West Indian Islands, extending from St. Thomas to the South American coast," according to him, "possess many of these characteristics." Here the present culture is the result of contact between Africans and Europeans of many nationalities, and their historical experience has been that of transfer from one of these European powers to another, with consequent historically known changes in cultural impulses. In addition, with the "European population as a fluctuating and diminishing element, there remain as major factors the Negro and the East Indian. "The method and value of study in these islands is then indicated in the following terms":

*Systematic research on the problems here outlined would of necessity be a cooperative undertaking. It would call for specialists in social technology, ethnology, culture, history, agricultural economics, psychology and education. The most obvious appeal of such a study would be that of practical problems: and yet it is possible that the most valuable results might come from the opportunity of working out some of the principles of pure social science. These communities, by reason of their isolation and peculiar cultural status, offer a nearer approach to social experimentation than cosmopolitan groups of the continental areas and are no doubt better adapted to the elaboration of a special methodology for the social sciences. The units are sufficiently small and detached to be easily dealt with, and the social forces at work are less muddled than the complex environment of larger groups.*⁶

⁴ *The Negro in the New World*, London, 1910.

⁵ *Warning from the West Indies*, London, 1938 (rev. ed.).

⁶ "The West Indies as a Sociological Laboratory", *American Journal of Sociology*, 29:290-291, 304, 1923-1924.

Park likewise has called attention to the research possibilities presented by the Negro, though he does not in this place envisage the problems as falling outside the limits of the United States:

For a study of the acculturation process, there are probably no materials more complete and accessible than those offered by the history of the American Negro. No other representatives of a primitive race have had so prolonged and so intimate an association with European civilization, and still preserved their racial identity. Among no other people is it possible to find so many stages of culture existing contemporaneously.⁷

In a later paper⁸ Park considers the resources of the West Indies for such research. Reuter, who phrases his conception of the problem in these words, also holds comparative study to be of importance:

For this scientific study the Negroes in Africa are valuable above most other social groups. They represent various stages of cultural development. In the group are men and women highly and fully educated defined, persons who have thoroughly assimilated the European cultural heritage and have in some respect added to it. At the opposite extreme are persons but slightly removed from the African culture level. There are other groups of longer time in America but whose residence in the isolated regions of the hinterland has so retarded the assimilative process that they are still, in many respects, outside the modern culture. There are Negroes in America who speak dialects hardly intelligible to outsiders. In the group it is possible to study the evolution of human and social institutions in process. Almost every stage in cultural evolution may be seen in coincident process of becoming. What must usually be studied by an historic method may here be studied by an observational and scientific procedure.⁹

From the point of view of the methods, objectives, and achievement to be discussed in ensuing pages, these earlier proposals, as we shall see, must be regarded as eddies in the principal stream of interest of the authors and their colleagues in the social sciences. Certainly these formulations have stimulated no exploration of the problems sketched; and it is of some importance to examine into the cause or causes that have determined this.

If we refer once again to the assumption of American students that Africanisms have failed to survive under contact with European civilization, we at once come upon a valuable clue. For, with this approach, the question, in West Indian research becomes not, "What has happened to the aboriginal cultural endowments of those concerned in the contact of Africans and Europeans?" but rather, "Since African culture has given way before European contact, to what extent does the resulting adjustment indicate inherent aptitudes for specific forms of tradition, and what light can research throw on the innate ability of Negroes to handle European civilization?" The answer to this latter query is patent. It needs no training in scientific method to discover that Negroes in the New World have mastered European culture where opportunity has permitted; or that, where their modes of behavior diverge most strikingly from those of the

⁷ "The Conflict and Fusion of Cultures with Special Reference to the Negro", *Journal of Negro History*, 4:115, 1919.

⁸ "Magic, Mentality, and City Life", in R. E. Park *The City*, Chicago, 1925.

⁹ *The American Race Problem, A Study of the Negro*, New York, 1938 (2nd ed.), pp. 15-16.

majority, the reasons for this can be phrased in such terms as "isolation", "discrimination", and the like.

In the minds of these students, however, the major problem has been the obvious one of racial aptitudes and limitations, as, for example, is to be seen in the following:

Now the Negro belongs perhaps to the most docile and modifiable of all races. He readily takes the tone and color of his social environment, assimilating to the dominant culture with little resistance. Further, he is ordinarily, though not quite correctly, assumed to have brought with him from Africa little cultural equipment of his own. If culture is diffused only through contact, there is here a means of following, in the experience of an especially susceptible people, the processes of transformation, which different types of association have generated. If the racial theory is sound, race traits ought here to have persisted; or at least definitely modified the new influences with which the dominant European peoples have brought the Negro in contact.¹⁰

Now, it is not to be denied that the problem of the relationship between innate endowment and cultural aptitudes is important, but the deeper this problem is probed, the larger the methodological difficulties it presents. When therefore, the materials on the New World Negro are attacked in terms of this problem alone-or as, in the case of Park and Reuter, of a concept of "social evolution" which must inevitably involve an attempt to trace "stages of cultural development"- the data are too complex, too cumbersome to see in workable perspective, and in consequence, the suggested researches die stillborn. But if an assumption of the vitality of African cultural traits is accepted as a working hypothesis to be tested, and the geographical area for study is conceived to include the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the relevant regions of Africa itself, attainable directives are made possible and research is encouraged.

It is recognized, to be sure, that no matter how the problem is formulated, it brings the student extremely close to the fundamental quality of the relationship between the biological and cultural potentialities of human groups. Yet by posing the question on the cultural level, this issue does not become paramount. The analysis is consistently held to the plane of learned behavior, so that whatever role innate endowment may play, it is not permitted to confuse the issues of the research. The problem thus becomes one of accounting for the presence or absence of cultural survivals in all of the New World, assessing the intensity of such survivals, discovering how they have changed their form or the way they have assumed new meaning in terms of the historic experience of the peoples concerned, and indicating the extend to which there has been a mutual interchange between all groups party to the contact, whether European, Indian, or African. Should certain constants be discovered in the behavior of all Negroes in the New World and of their Old World relatives as well, then, and then only, need the question be faced of the degree to which we are dealing with a deeply set traditional factor or with inherent tendencies have persisted.

¹⁰ Weatherly, *op.cit.*,p. 292.

The study of the results of race-crossing is important, and there are aspects of such research where, as in the matter of social selection, the mores must be taken into account. But the reverse is not true, and had the social scientists who have indicated the research potentialities in the study of New World Negroes been more concerned with their major field of interest, and less with the relationship between race and culture; if, above all, had they not assumed that the Negro presented a cultural *tabula rasa* on which to receive this New World experience, their suggestions might have stimulated the studies whose usefulness they recognized.

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A plan to profit by the research potentialities of the New World historical "laboratory" through a coordinated attack on Negro cultures in Africa and the Western Hemisphere was first suggested in 1930.¹¹ It envisaged study in West Africa to establish the cultural base line from which the differing traditions of the dominant New World Negro peoples might be assessed, and concomitant study of the life of Negroes in the West Indies and South America, where acculturation to European patterns has proceeded less rapidly than in the United States. Negro communities of the United States were to be held as later research objectives, since it was recognized what only on the basis of the broadest background could an adequate investigation of the presence of Africanisms and their functioning in such groups be achieved.

This plan, which outlined a reconsideration of the problem of Africanisms sketched in preceding pages, resulted essentially from findings of field research among the coastal and Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana. It was evident, for example, even on initial acquaintance that many ancestral African customs were to be found among the Negro tribes of the Bush, who because of their long isolation had experienced a minimum of contact with Europeans. But to one expecting a modicum of Africanisms in the Bush, and an absence of them in the coastal city of Paramaribo, where the Negroes have had close and continuous contact not alone with Europeans, but with Caribs, Javanese, British Indians, and Chinese as well, the results of close study were startling. In the interior, a full-blown African religious system, a smoothly functioning African clan organization, African place and personal names, African elements in economic life, a style of wood carving that could be traced to African sources showed what might be looked for in the institutions of any isolated culture that is going a concern. In the coastal region, however, underneath such Europeanisms as the use of European clothing and money, or baptismal certificates and literacy, numerous African institutions, beliefs, and canons of behavior were likewise encountered.¹² The question thus posed itself: If this obtains in Guiana, might not Negro behavior elsewhere in the New World be profitably reinvestigated with the lessons of this research in mind? An intensive review of published sources made an affirmative answer inescapable, and culminated in this outline of a comprehensive approach.

The conceptual tool, which represented the widest departure from earlier usage was described in the following passage:

¹¹ M.J. Herskovits, "The Negro in the New World: The Statement of a Problem", *American Anthropologist*, 32:145-156, 1930.

¹² M. J. and F. S. Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny; Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana*, New York, 1934, pp. VIII-XII, *Suriname Folklore*, New York, 1937, pp. 1-135.

It is quite possible on the basis of our present knowledge to make a kind of chart indicating the extend to which the descendants of Africans brought to the New World have retained Africanisms in their cultural behavior. If we consider the intensity of African cultural elements in the various regions north of Brazil (which I do not include because there are so few data on which to base judgment), we may say that after Africa itself it is the Bush Negroes of Suriname who exhibit a civilization, which is the most African... Next to them, on our scale, would be placed their Negro neighbors on the coastal plains of the Guianas who, in spite of centuries of close association with the whites, have retained an amazing amount of their aboriginal African traditions of the dominant group. Next on our scale we should undoubtedly place the peasants of Haiti...and associated with them, although in a lesser degree, would come the inhabitants of neighboring Santo Domingo. From this point, when we come to the islands of the British, Dutch, and (sometime) Danish West Indies, the proportion of African cultural elements drops perceptibly, ...though...we realize that all of African culture has not by any means been lost to them. Next on our table we should place such isolated groups living in the United States as the Negroes of Savannahs of southern Georgia, or those of the Gullah islands off the Carolina coast, where African elements of culture are still more tenuous, and then the vast mass of Negroes of all degrees of racial mixture living in the South of the United States. Finally, we should come to a group where, to all intents and purposes, there is nothing of the African tradition left, and which consists of people of varying degrees of Negroid physical type, who only differ from their white neighbors in the fact that they have more pigmentation in their skins.¹³

Revision of detail in this outline, necessitated by the work of decade, must obviously be made in charting the intensity of Africanisms in the various areas of the New World when this conceptual tool is employed today; but the technique itself has richly proved its usefulness.¹⁴ Thus more concentrated research has been done on the African forms of Religious life of the Negro in Brazil during the past decade than in any other part of the New World, and this has made available materials of first importance not at hand ten years ago. Studies in race relations and, most recently, in nonreligious patterns of the African survivals in the Negro culture of that country have also been initiated.¹⁵ Haitian peasant life is far better known,¹⁶ and the importance of

¹³ M. J. Herskovits, "The Negro in the New World...", *American Anthropologist*, 32:149f., 1930.

¹⁴ Cf., for example, Arthur Ramos, *As cultural Negras no Novo Mundo*, Rio de Janeiro, 1937; M. J. Herskovits, "The social History of the Negro", in: C. Murchison, *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Worcester, Mass., 1935.

¹⁵ E.g., the numerous works of Arthur Ramos, among which may be cited *O Negro Brasileiro*, Rio de Janeiro, 1934, *O Folklore Negro do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 1935, and *The Negro in Brazil*, trans. Richard Patte, Washington D. C., 1939; of Gilberto Freyre, especially his *Casa-Grande & Senzala*, Rio de Janeiro, 1st ed., 1934, 2nd ed., 1936, 3rd ed. 1938; of Edison Carneiro, *Religiões Negras*, Rio de Janeiro, 1936; of Jacques Raimundo, *O elemento Afro-Negro na Língua Portuguesa*, Rio de Janeiro, 1933, and *O Negro Brasileiro*, Rio de Janeiro, 1936; of João Dornas Filho, *A Escravidão no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 1939; and the proceedings of the two Afro-Brazilian Congresses, *Estudios Afro-Brasileiros*, Rio de Janeiro, 1935, *Novos Estudos Afro-Brasileiros*, Rio de Janeiro, 1937, and *O Negro no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 1940; likewise Rüdiger bilden, "Brazil, Laboratory of Civilization", *The Nation*, 128:71-74, 1929, and Donald Person, "The Negro in Bahia, Brazil", *American Sociological Review*, 4:524-533, 1939

the syncretisms, which mark the reconciliation between African, and European custom in many places of this culture has been pointed out.¹⁷ These discussions bring into bolder relief the corresponding syntheses in the field of religion which likewise exist among the Catholic "fetishist" Negroes of Brazil and Cuba,¹⁸ and indicate aspects of New World Negro acculturation that have far wider meaning for an understanding of the results of cultural contact than its significance for this particular problem. With fuller comparative materials at hand, it has also been possible to utilize more effectively older sources from these regions and from Jamaica, the customs of whose Negro populations were described in one of the pioneer ethnographic works from the entire New World Negro area.¹⁹

More recent research in West Africa has also emphasized the complexity of the cultures of that part of the continent from which so large a number of Negro slaves were captured. This work affords us leads toward the solution of the riddle of how the Negroes, coming from different tribes and speaking different languages, have by a hitherto unrecognized least common denominator in tradition and speech found it possible to preserve elements of their heritage.²⁰ Research in the Virgin Islands,²¹ and Trinidad,²² also, has similarly made revision of the scale of intensity of Africanisms necessary, for this field work has demonstrated the principle that the acculturative process in each locality is to be analyzed in terms of the peculiarities of its own historic past and its own socio-economic present.

Ten years ago it would not have seemed possible that the survivals to be found in the southern United States could be comparable to those discernible in any of the West Indian islands. Yet variation in intensity of Africanisms in the Antilles, while

¹⁶ Dr Price-Mars, *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle*, Port-au-Prince, 1928; J.C. Dorsainvil, *Vodun et Névrose*, Port-au-Prince, 1931; M. J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, New York, 1937; Harold Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, Chapel Hill, 1940.

¹⁷ M.J. Herskovits, "African Gods and Catholic Saints in New World Negro Belief", *American Anthropologist*, 39:635-643, 1937.

¹⁸ A. Ramos, *O Folk-Lore Negro do Brasil*; Fernando Ortiz, *Los Negros Brujos*, Madrid, 1917

¹⁹ Martha Beckwith, *Black Roadways, a Study in Jamaican Folk Life*, Chapel Hill, 1929

²⁰ E.g., R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, Oxford, 1923; *Religion and Art. In Ashanti*, Oxford, 1927; *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, Oxford, 1929; *Akan-Ashanti Folk Tales*, Oxford, 1930; H. Labbouret, *Les Tribus du Rameau Lobi*, Tr. Et Mém du l'Institut d'Ethnologie, No. XV, Paris, 1931; M.J. Herskovits, *Dahomey*, New York, 1938; C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, Oxford, 1931, and *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 1937; and the volumes of the journal *Africa*. Unpublished results of fieldwork done in West Africa under fellowship grants of the Social Science Research Council by W. R. Bascom (among the Yoruba, 1937-1938), Joseph Greenberg (among the Hausa and Maguzawa, 1938-1939), and by J. S. Harris (among the Ibo, 1939-1940), are also of considerable importance in filling out our knowledge of the range of West African custom. The wealth of materials available on Gold Coast tribes alone is strikingly indicated by the number of titles listed in A.W. Cardinall, *A Biography of the Gold Coast*, Accra (Gold Coast), not dated, esp. Sections I-IX.

²¹ Carried on by J. C. Trevor in 1936, under the auspices of Northwestern and Columbia universities, and A. A. Campbell, in 1939-1940, as Fellow of the Social Science Research Council.

²² Carried on by M. J. and F. S. Herskovits in 1939, under a grant made by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

undoubtedly greater than in the South on the side of its African elements, runs the full range toward the most complete acculturation to European patterns that might be encountered not alone in the South, but also in northern states. Certainly it is not commonly understood that the socio-economic situation in such an island as Trinidad presents aspects that have meaning when compared with that of the Negroes of the United States—sharecropping, the presence of the industrial worker, and the like. Impressive parallels, however, are to be found – and, it may be hoped, will be saved from the neglect which students of these phases of the Negro problem, in their reluctance to make comparative analyses, have so unanimously accorded them.

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A further tool, which has been of increasing use as research has proceeded, is the concept of an Old World cultural province. As one comes to know the cultures of the entire African continent, one becomes cognizant of numerous cultural correspondences between African, European, and Asiatic civilizations. As will be indicated later in our discussion, this is most apparent in the field of folklore, where, for example, animal tales of the Uncle Remus type are found in the Reynard cycle of medieval Europe, in the fables of Aesop, in the Panchatantra of India, in the Jataka tales of China, and in the animal stories of Indonesia. Certain aspects of the use of magic, of ordeals, of the role and forms of divination, of conceptions of the universe (especially the organization of deities in relationship groups), of games, of the use of proverbs aphorisms, are also widely distributed over the Old World.

All these, and many others not possible to detail here, have bearing on the study of the survival of Africanisms in the New World. For it is here we must turn for an explanation of the seemingly baffling fact, so often encountered, that given traits of New World Negro, and especially of American Negro behavior, are ascribable equally to European and African origin. This may well be viewed as but a reflection of the fact that deep beneath the differences between these varied civilizations of the Old World lie common aspects which, in generalized form, might be expected to emerge in situations of close contact between peoples, such as Europeans and Africans, whose specialized cultural endowments are comprehended within the larger unity.

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It is apparent that research into the problem of African survivals in the United States, when set in its proper context, carries the student into areas of importance for an understanding of the nature and process of human civilization. It is apparent, further, that the problem cannot be studied most profitably except under terms of such a broad approach; and that, above all, if it is so realize its potentialities as a means of scientific comprehension, there must be an end to unsupported assumption concerning the disappearance of the traditions brought by the slaves from their homeland. As will later be indicated, African culture, instead of being weak under contact, is strong but resilient, with a resiliency that itself has sanction in aboriginal tradition. For the Africans holds it is pointless not to seek an adaptation of outer form, where this can "in a manner" be achieved. Before this point can be discussed at length, however, we must consider the significance of our analysis of cultural tenacity and resilience for those issues of practical importance, suggested in the opening section of this chapter, which no student of the Negro, however detached his approach, may disregard.

We turn again, therefore, to the phenomenon of race prejudice, the factor that provides the rationalization for many of the interracial strains that are the essence of concern to the practical man. Racial prejudice, when analyzed, is found to rest on the operation of two closely interrelated factors, one socio-economic, the other historical and psychological. These social and economic factors are well recognized; certainly, it is with these that both practical and academic studies of Negro life have been primarily, and often exclusively, concerned. The reason for this is clear. Stress lodging in this area are immediate, and call so compellingly for solution that the impulsion to render first aid is difficult to resist. Moreover, on the surface, at least, these stresses can be referred to the situation of slavery; and their accentuation during the slave regime and since its suppression can thus be readily and satisfactorily explained. Finally, in programs of action, many of these difficulties are of a kind encountered in analogous form elsewhere in the socio-economic configurations of this country, and can thus reasonably be regarded as susceptible of effective attack through the operation of short time ameliorative projects.

The effect of this approach has been to relegate to the background the psychological basis of the race problem, and its less immediate historical aspects, when not entirely ignoring them. Again, this is understandable, for phenomena of this order cannot be studied, much less evaluated, without long and sustained analysis, such as has been already sketched. And this, too often, gives these problems an air of remoteness, which militates against their appeal to those seeking the immediate solution of pressing needs. Yet these factors are as deeply entrenched in the interracial situation, as are those other elements, which lie on the social and economic level, and they are far more insidious. In the light of current thinking about racial differences in general, they are the most effective cause in perpetuating all shades of superiority-inferiority ranking given whites and Negroes by members of both groups. For here we are dealing with points of view that have received their directive force through generations of reiteration of cultural values, of comparative worth, of historic dignity. It is, therefore, at this point that entire historical setting, which includes the problem of Africanisms in American Negro behavior, becomes crucial, since the question of social endowment enters intimately into the determination of the assumptions on which attitudes regarding Negro inferiority rest. And it is these attitudes, as validated by the series of conceptions grouped under the heading of the myth concerning the Negro past, which rationalize and justify the handicaps that, perpetuated from one generation to the next, cause current unrest among the Negroes who suffer under them and make for a diffused, all-pervading sense of malaise and even guilt among those who impose them.