

**AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY IN AFRICA AND AFRO-AMERICA:
THE EARLY DAYS OF NORTHWESTERN'S PROGRAM OF AFRICAN
STUDIES**

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PAS Working Papers

Number 16

ISSN Print 1949-0283

ISSN Online 1949-0291

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American Anthropology in Africa and Afro-America: The Early Days of Northwestern's Program of African Studies

Simon Ottenberg¹

As a world power after World War II, some U.S. government officials and private foundations realized how little we knew of Africa, though allied troops had been engaged in North Africa and transported through West Africa. And the Cold War was leading to growing USSR influence in Africa. "It was sometimes said in the 1940s that the few African experts in the United States could hold a convention in a telephone booth."² Through funding from the Carnegie and Ford foundations and later from Fulbright awards and other government agencies, in 1948, Northwestern University became the first major African Studies Program, in the United States with support from the Carnegie Foundation. Multiple reasons for the choice were the pre-war research in Dahomey of Melville J. Herskovits, his former student, William R. Bascom's anthropological research

¹ I dedicate this paper to the memory of those fellow students of my generation who are no longer with us, including Alan P. Merriam, Harold K. Schneider, Robert Plant Armstrong, Daniel J. Crowley, Vernon Dorjahn and Robert A. Lystad. I thank Professor Kevin Yelvington of the University of South Florida, and at Northwestern University, Caroline Bledsoe, Anthropology Department, David Easterbrook, Curator, Herskovits Library of African Studies, provided me with invaluable papers and information covering the period of this paper and the latter for kindly reading this manuscript. Kate Dargis, Special Projects Coordinator at the Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, provided invaluable assistance to in arranging for this manuscript to appear. David W. Ames, and Warren L. d'Azevedo, formerly fellow student of my time kindly read a version of this manuscript and made helpful comments. Ames reminded me that much of the criticism of Herskovits occurred after his death, wondering what how he would have replied to it, and that I was too hard in judgment on him in this paper. Correspondence with John Messenger was also of considerable assistance.

² Northwestern University c. 1968. Program of African Studies: the First Twenty Years 1948-1968. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Archives, File: PAS History, 3. Although unsigned, probably authored by Gwendolen Carter, the program director at the time.

among the Yoruba of Nigeria,³ and Bascom's intelligence work in West Africa during the war,⁴ both who were teaching anthropology at Northwestern. Further, three Ph.Ds on African subjects had been awarded there in anthropology by 1945, and one in Political Science by 1949.⁵ And there was the apparent absence of other African programs in the U.S.

I write at a time when there is a resurgence of interest in Herskovits and the Program of African Studies at Northwestern. The art historian Suzanne Blier has critiqued aspects of the Dahomean research of Melville and Frances Herskovits.⁶ There is Jerry Gershenhorn's book on race and politics, a general one in the making by Kevin A. Yelvington, and a film by California Newsreel released in 2009 with the title of *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness*. For the New World there is Robert Baron's dissertation on Herskovits's folklore research, Kevin A. Yelvington's study of Herskovits's Afro-American research and a book on his research in Suriname by Richard and Sally Price.⁷ There are also numerous articles which have appeared in the last twenty

³ The Herskovitses were in Abomey, in the country then called Dahomey, in 1931, Bascom was among the Yoruba of Nigeria, 1937-1938.

⁴ With Ralph Bunche and the staff of the Office of Strategic Services he wrote *A Pocket Guide to West Africa*, 1943. Washington, D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office for the War and Navy Departments. This was for use of the allied troops there. The OSS was the predecessor of the CIA.

⁵ William R. Bascom (1939), Joseph H. Greenberg (1940) and Hugh H. Smythe (1945) in anthropology and Abd El Hamid Hamdi (1949) in Political Science. Smythe's wife Mabel H. Smythe, an early African specialist, also had links to Northwestern. Married to Hugh Smythe in 1939, both African-Americans, she took her M.A. at Northwestern in 1940 and her Ph.D. in 1942 at the University of Wisconsin, both in economics, later carrying out research in Nigeria with her husband leading to the joint publication of *The New Nigerian Elite*, Stanford University Press, 1960. After a distinguished career that included being a Member of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO (1965-1970) and Ambassador to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea (1979-1980), she became Melville J. Herskovits Professor at Northwestern (1981-1983) and Associate Director of African Studies (1983-1985). See the internet site: Hugh H. and Mabel M. Smythe: A Register of their Papers in the Library of Congress.

⁶ Suzanne Preston Blier 1988. "Melville J. Herskovits and the Arts of Ancient Dahomey." *Res* 16, 125-142; Suzanne Blier 1999. "Field Days: Melville J. Herskovits in Dahomey." *History in Africa* 16, 1989, 1-22.

⁷ Jerry Gershenhorn 2004. *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press; Kevin A. Yelvington, ed. 2006. *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology and the Diaspora*. Santa Fe: School of American Research/Oxford: James Currey; Robert Baron 1994. *Africa in the Americas: Melville J. Herskovits's Folkloristic and Anthropological Scholarship – 1923-1941*. Ph.D

years reflecting on and evaluating the work of Herskovits, some of which will be cited here.

I will discuss the African Program from 1949 to 1962, especially the early years, which I knew best. I took graduate courses in Northwestern's Anthropology Department from 1949 to 1951, and was there part of 1953, finishing my dissertation on the Afikpo Igbo of Nigeria in 1957, while teaching at the University of Washington. However, I knew most of the anthropology graduate students during the years covered in this paper, keeping in touch with many of them.

The Faculty

When I arrived the anthropology faculty, located in Locy Hall, consisted of Melville J. Herskovits, its Chair, William R. Bascom, Richard A Waterman and Francis L.K. Hsu. There were no full-time Africanists in other Northwestern departments in my first two years. The anthropology department and the African Program were essentially one. Except for Hsu, the department was intellectually ingrown, for both Bascom and Waterman had taken their degrees under Herskovits. Herskovits, who started teaching at Northwestern 1927, founded and developed the anthropology department. By the time the African Program began in 1948 he had not only researched and published on Dahomey, but Trinidad, Haiti, Bahia and Suriname, prepared the ground-breaking book, in 1941, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, had long before finished his early studies of African-Americans racial features, and published a major anthropological statement, *Man and His*

dissertation, University of Pennsylvania; Richard and Sally Price 2003. *The Root of Root: How Afro-American Anthropology Got its Start*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm. Warren d'Azevedo wrote me (Oct. 29, 2008) that there is also a book in the works on Herskovits as a teacher

Works.⁸ Bascom's work among the Yoruba had been supplemented with research in Cuba, among the Gullah of South Carolina and on Ponape Island in the Pacific. Waterman wrote his Ph.D. on Yoruba influences on Trinidad music based largely on Herskovits's music collection, then spending two summers in Cuba⁹ and later studying Australian Aboriginal music. At Northwestern he established a Laboratory of Comparative Musicology. Hsu studied with Malinowski at the London School of Economics, finishing his Ph.D in 1940. Not an Africanist, he was interested in national character studies, the author of a book on Chinese culture and personality.¹⁰ Students heading for Africa and Afro-America took courses with all four faculty member. It was a small program and Herskovits was on every graduate committee, although not always the chair.

There was also a side to Herskovits that we, as students, knew little of. By the time that we were in the African Program Herskovits had ceased field research and was devoting his time to developing African Studies and the anthropology department. Much of the details of his activities were unknown us, and thus unappreciated; negotiations with foundations, trips to Africa, the process of hiring additional faculty, and so on. The

⁸ Herskovits carried out research in Suriname in the summers of 1928 and 1929, in Haiti in 1934, Trinidad 1939 and Bahia in 1941-1942, amassing a great deal of information on Afro-American acculturation, music and folklore. For his major Afro-American publications see his *The Myth of the Negro Past*. New York: Harper, 1941; Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits 1947. *Trinidad Village*. New York: Knopf; Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits 1934. *Rebel Destiny: among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana*. New York: McGraw Hill; Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits 1936. *Suriname Folk-Lore*. New York: Columbia University Press.; Melville J. Herskovits 1954. *Life in a Haitian Valley*. New York: Octagon Books. For his racial studies see Melville J. Herskovits 1964 (1928). *The American Negro: a Study in Racial Crossing*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Melville J. Herskovits 1927. *The Negro and Intelligence Tests*. Hanover, NH: Sociological Press, 1927. For his general anthropology book see Melville J. Herskovits 1948. *Man and His Works* New York: Knopf; For a useful obituary on Herskovits see Alan P. Merriam. 1964. "Melville J. Herskovits 1895-1963." *American Anthropologist* 1964. 66:1, 86-87.

⁹ Alan P. Merriam 1973. "Richard Alan Waterman 1914-1971." *Ethnomusicology* 17:1, 72-89.

¹⁰ Francis L. K. Hsu 1948. *Under the Ancestors Shadow: Chinese Culture and Personality*. New York: Columbia University Press.

results of these efforts existed for us, whether we knew of them or not, and we benefited from them.

Frances Herskovits was a sometimes hidden factor in the African Program and department, virtually invisible in the teaching program. I believe she had more to do with her husband's thinking and writing than we students were aware of at the time. A strong partner for Melville, as I came to realize later on, she worked quietly, leaving much of the prominence to him. She took part in his research projects, was co-author with him of *An Outline of Dahomean Religious Beliefs* (1933), *Rebel Destiny* (1934), *Suriname Folklore* (1936) and *Trinidad Village* (1947), *Dahomean Narrative: a Cross-Cultural Analysis* (1968), and some years after his death, she edited his papers on cultural relativism.¹¹

They were a devoted, hard-working couple. And I have written¹² that they "in many ways created the image of parents toward us as student-children." There was both paternalism and affection. This led to different reactions to them by the students according to their own psychologies. I don't remember spending time socially with the couple at their home but Baron¹³ writes that students "were very much at home in the Herskovitses' house," going on to detail this.

¹¹ Melville J. Herskovits and Frances Herskovits 1933. *Outline of Dahomean Religions Belief*. Memoir 41, American Anthropological Association, Menasha: WI; Frances Herskovits, ed.. 1972. *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism*. New York: Random House; Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits 1958. *Dahomean Narrative: a Cross-Cultural Analysis*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. For the last reference see Olabiyi Babalola Yai 1999. "The Path is Open: the Legacy of Melville and Frances Herskovits in African Oral Narrative Analysis." *Research in African Literatures* 30:2, 1-16. Frances also co-authored with her husband "Sibling Rivalry: the Oedipus Complex in Myth," 1959. *Journal of American Folklore* 71:279, 1-15. She wrote two articles on Dahomean songs: *Poetry* 45, 75-77, 1934 and *the New Republic* 84:103, 95, 1935. On Frances Herskovits see Merriam. 1964. 86-87.

¹² Simon Ottenberg 1990. "Thirty Years of Fieldnotes: Changing Relationships to the Text." In Roger Sanjek 1990. *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Ithaco, NY: Cornell University Press, 140. Also see Warren L. d'Azevedo 2009. *Rebel Destinies: Remembering Herskovits*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, Program of Working Papers No. 15.

¹³ Baron 1994, 62-63.

The Students

As an undergraduate in anthropology at the University of Wisconsin I carried out library research on Wisconsin Native Americans. On receiving a much needed teaching assistantship at Northwestern to continue my anthropological studies, I made no commitment to study Africa, but that was the major focus of the program and I was soon attracted to it. The graduate students, many of them married, came from all over the United States, east and west, north and south and the Midwest. Though bringing diverse educational backgrounds to Northwestern very few of the graduate students in my course years had undergraduate training in anthropology, none at Northwestern.¹⁴ Graduate students normally took two years of classes, largely from Herskovits's viewpoint, which Bascom generally acceded to, after which field research followed. There was no Masters degree, except for those terminated or who went elsewhere. Two years seemed a very brief period of classwork for students lacking undergraduate anthropology.

Most students were of Christian backgrounds, which I imagined was different from Columbia, with a larger number of Jewish ones. Perhaps Jewish students were not interested in Africa at that time in contrast to their concern for Native Americans, and of course, over the years there had been tensions between Jews and African-Americans in the United States (as well as positive relations). A number of students had had Christian religious training. Harold K. Schneider studied for two years at Seabury-Western

¹⁴ Other than my undergraduate anthropology at Wisconsin, Warren L d'Azevedo did undergraduate and graduate studies in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, before coming to Northwestern. An earlier undergraduate major, Jack Sargent Harris, took a B.A. degree in anthropology, and while continuing his studies at Columbia University obtained a Social Science Research Council fellowship, for research among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria (1938-1939) and then gained his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1940 based on a Native American project. During World War II Harris worked for the Office of Strategic Services in West and South Africa. Kevin A. Yelvington 2005. "A Life In and Out of Anthropology: An Interview with Jack Sargent Harris." *Critique of Anthropology* 28:4, 2008, 446-476.]

Theological Seminary in Evanston before giving it up becoming a minister,¹⁵ Robert A. Lystad was no longer a Methodist minister¹⁶ and there was the Episcopalian, Father Joseph Moore, from Minnesota, but who had lived in the Caribbean, been a former chaplain in New Guinea in World War II,¹⁷ and then there was the Protestant missionary Charles E. Fuller. Warren d’Azevedo writes of Herskovits:¹⁸ “I do recall him being a bit disapproving of strongly held religious beliefs if they countered ‘science.’” There were only a few female graduate students, not because of gender views of the anthropology faculty but due to the state of higher education in America. There were two anthropological couples, Philip and Nancy Leis and Simon and Phoebe V. Ottenberg. Justine Johnson Cordwell, who had started her graduate work before I came in 1949 and was rarely at Northwestern when I was there, received her degree in 1952. Wives generally went to the field with their partner, as in Herskovits’s case, and as with Frances Herskovits, wives were active participants in their husband’s research. Messenger wrote:¹⁹ “Herskovits advocated husband-wife team research, but not while honeymooning.”

Herskovits had arranged for some anthropology graduate students to live in a large dwelling near the campus that was owned by the university. “Anthro House” became our social center. We shared the cooking and cleaning. I remember that Harold K. Schneider was its head at one time. Known as “The Squire;” he took the job seriously

¹⁵ He taught for years at Indiana University. “Harold Kenneth Schneider”1988. *Anthropology Newsletter [American Anthropological Association]*. 26:6, 4; Edgar V. Winans. 1988. “Harold K. Schneider. 1988. *American Anthropologist*. 90, 415-517

¹⁶ “Robert Lystad Dies; University Dean Was Africa Expert.” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A10718-20004Jun27.html>

¹⁷ Telephone conversation with David W. Ames, Nov 2, 2008.

¹⁸ Letter to Simon Ottenberg, Oct. 29, 2008, 2.

¹⁹ John C. Messenger, Jr. 1994, “Reflections on a Career.” *Bulletin, The Central States Anthropological Society* 29:1, 4.

There were children at times, as after me Warren d'Azevedo and his family.²⁰ Not all the students living there were interested in Africa or Afro-America. Suragit Sinha, of high caste from India, lived there for a while.²¹ When his turn for cleaning duties came he appeared with a pail of water and a dust mop. "I am now an initiate into the cult of work" he proclaimed. We had to point out to him that it was the wrong kind of mop. Mubeccel ("Bejo") Belik from Turkey, living in the house, was lively and very political²². Not living with us was the only African-American in the program at that time, George Robinson Ricks, who studied Black gospel music for his Ph.D. in 1960, which was published in 1977.²³ He had a successful career as an administrator in Chicago. Another non-resident was Father José Rafael Arboleda Llorente who could out-swear us all. He did an M.A. in 1950 on the ethnohistory of Columbian Afro-Americans. Also not living with us was Robert Plant Armstrong, with whom we had some memorable evenings at his flat. He was a superb cook, a splendid conversationalist and the most sophisticated of us all.

A highlight of our training were the seminars that Herskovits arranged, where specialists on Africa, westerners and Africans, politicians, writers and scholars, came to Northwestern to speak on current issues in Africa.. This was helpful to us in bringing us up to date on modern African events.²⁴

²⁰ d'Azevedo 2009, 29-30, comments with interest and humor on the activities at Anthro House.

²¹ He did his Ph.D. in 1956 on "The Acculturation of the Bhumji of Manbhumi: a Study in Ethnic Integration and Social Class Formation."

²² She did her Ph.D in 1950 on "A Comparative Study of Patterns of Consumption and Systems of Social Stratification," based on Turkish data. She returned to Turkey after finishing her degree and had a distinguished scholarly career there."

²³ George Robinson Ricks 1977. *Some Aspects of the Religious Music of the United States Negro: an Ethnomusicological Study with Special Emphasis on the Gospel Tradition*. New York: Arno Press.

²⁴ Northwestern University c. 1968, 6, states that among those at the seminar were Lord Hailey, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe [sic: Azikiwe], Dr. Van Eck and colonial Governors and Ambassadors—who at various

We also were distant from the undergraduates, who some knew through work as teaching assistants; they were a separate world -- largely upper or middle class, they appeared smug and self-centered. This was reinforced by the setting of the university in a wealthy Chicago suburb. We were aware of being different in experience and background from most undergraduates and the Evanston population. Both undergraduates and the people of Evanston had little interest in Africa. Then there were undercurrents of racism, unconfirmed stories that faculty in other departments had referred to Herskovits as “that cocky Jew,” despite the fact that the university administration was strongly supportive of the department and African Program.²⁵ One night the African-American graduate student George Robinson Ricks came out of Deering Library to the streets of Evanston and a policeman accosted him, saying “Get over the other side of the tracks,” meaning to Skokie, a town bordering Evanston, where some African-Americans lived. For a brief time we had an African-American undergraduate staying at the anthropology house because there was some housing problem at the University. We saw ourselves and our anthropology faculty, as being separate from our surrounding environment.

African and Afro-American Studies

During my first two years there the African Studies Program was almost entirely embedded in the anthropology program. It was a misnomer to call it African Studies, since it was also strong in Afro-American work, the subject of most of Herskovits’s own

times “spoke off the record,” answering questions with an openness all too rare today.” Also see d’Azevedo’s description of the seminars in d’Azevedo 2009. 34-36.

²⁵ I am aware of the importance of backing and support from a university administration for such a program, since at the University of Washington for some thirty years a few colleagues and I attempted to develop a small African Program, but we met with constant opposition and indifference from deans, senior members of the international studies program and others. Only in the past few years has a very modest program evolved.

research and publication. Since the African part of the program was then on Africa South of the Sahara²⁶ we were studying black-skinned peoples there and in the New World, though we generally saw our work in non-racial terms, as analyzing cultures.²⁷ I believe, although I now lack the reference that originally the African Program excluded South Africa, the Horn of Africa and North Africa, although this changed shortly after the program's foundation. We had a course on Africa and another on The Negro in the New World, each taught either by Herskovits or Bascom. Herskovits's thinking in the New World related to what happened to African cultural elements there. For Africa we were looking at aspects of existing "whole" cultures, while for the New World Herskovits employed the concept of cultural traits from American anthropology, as well as other terms he derived or obtained from elsewhere: acculturation, enculturation, retention, reinterpretation, syncretism and cultural imponderables, to describe the cultural processes at work and as the basis for theories of change, particularly in regard to the Negro in the New World. To me these were descriptive terms, quite usable at the ethnographic level.²⁸ They pointed to questions of why retention? why syncretism? why reinterpretation? but without fully explaining the whys. Yet his use of traits differed from Native American research, where scholars dealt with disappearing cultural elements. As the art historian Lisa Gail Collins, who has researched African-American modern art relating to the Sea

²⁶ The lack of interest in North Africa and Egypt was typical of African scholarships until recent years, with the difficulties of learning Arabic and about Muslim life and before historic links between the north and southern Africa became clear. Other universities took up Egypt and Northern Africa as part of Near and Middle Eastern Studies.

²⁷ On the complexity of the interrelationships of African and African-American cultures on the one hand and black as a race on the other see Walter Benn Michaels. 1992. "Race into Culture: a Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity." *Critical Inquiry* 18:4, 645-685.

²⁸ For an anthropological critique and positive reworking of some of these concepts, particularly syncretism, see David Apter 1991. "Herskovits's Heritage: Rethinking Syncretism in the African Diaspora." *Diaspora* 1:3, 1991, 235-260.

Islands, wrote of Herskovits:²⁹ “Unlike many of his peers, the anthropologist understood African-American cultures as tenacious, innovative and always in the making. Due to this, such concepts as extinction and erasure were not central to his understanding of culture contact and change. Instead, he replaced these fatalistic notions with additions, synthesis and transformation.” His positive view of the dynamism of African culture in the New World holds true today for many regions, though there has been much less analysis as to why some African cultural traits disappeared or even whole cultures, such the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. Despite the fact that nearly a million Igbo slaves came to the New World, they left very little mark.

Herskovits’s ideas on Africanisms evolved over time. In a 1925 publication he stated that African elements did not survive with American Negroes to any extent and it was only toward the end of his summers’ researches in 1928 and 1929 in what is now Suriname that he came to realize the importance of Africanisms.³⁰

Our Professors: The Way We Saw Them

Herskovits, Bascom, Waterman and Hsu had quite different personalities. John Messenger wrote of Herskovits³¹

“Most of my peers at Northwestern had ambivalent feelings about Herskovits, as did I. On the one hand, he and the faculty prepared us well for research in Africa; his influence was sufficient to get monies from funding agencies for most of us; he read our

²⁹ Lisa Gail Collins 2002. *The Art of History: African-American Women Artists Engage the Past* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 78, and Lisa Gail Collins 2003. “Herskovits and Post-Herskovits Visual Art.” *International Review of African-American Art*. 19:1, 56.

³⁰ Melville J. Herskovits 1925. “The Negro’s Americanism.” In Alain Leroy Locke, *The New Negro*. New York: Boni, 259-260. Also see Michaels, 1992, 259-260; Margaret Wade-Lewis 1992.

³¹ Messenger 1994, 4.. Also see d’Azevedo 2009 33-34.

field notes sent to him twice a month and responded almost immediately with invaluable advice; he hurried us through our dissertations to the degree; and he was instrumental in procuring jobs for some of us. On the other hand he antagonized us in a number of ways. Speaking only for myself, he was furious that in an interview with the director of a foundation I admitted honestly that I was more committed to teaching than to research, which would have cost me the fellowship had my advisor not intervened in my behalf; he was equally furious when in a public address after returning from Nigeria in 1952, I revealed that my data on kinship had been collected by a Nigerian high school teacher whom I trained and whose findings, even to complicated charts he had drawn, proved to be accurate when I cross-checked them at length (a rite of passage not honored?); he abhorred my writing style and rewrote many segments of my dissertation (the “pot calling the kettle black”); and at the end of my first paper delivered in 1953 at a Princeton University conference on Africa, he criticized me for not having my coat buttoned and speaking with hand in pocket, but made no mention of my paper.”³² Two other students, David W. Ames and Justine Cordwell felt that Herskovits did not hurry students to finish their dissertations, rather making them do a considerable amount of rewriting.³³

I have written of Herskovits and Bascom:³⁴

“Herskovits’s style as a lecturer was mercurial on occasion; he pushed his theories vigorously, and with enthusiasm, sometimes ignoring critical comments by his students.

³² In a letter to me of January 24, 2007, Messenger commented on the ambivalent attitudes toward Herskovits, writing: “You may recall his own assessment of the situation made after a few drinks that being Jewish and small aroused antagonisms.”

³³ David W. Ames, telephone conversation with me, Oct. 29, 2008. d’Azevedo, personal communication, also had to do rewriting as well as Justine Cordwell. On Cordwell see Philip M. Peek, ed., 1998. *Setting the Tone: Students’ Recollections of Herskovits and the Study of African Arts: Roundtable discussion*, 1998 Annual Meeting, African Studies Association., unpublished paper, 5.

³⁴ Simon Ottenberg.1982. “The Anthropology of William R. Bascom.” In Simon Ottenberg, ed., *African Religious Groups and Beliefs: Papers in Honor of William R. Bascom*, Berkeley: Folklore Institute/Meerut, India: Archana Publications, 5.

Bascom was a quieter instructor, favoring the careful examination of ethnography and the development of basic concepts and definitions to guide thought. He used theory sparingly, helping the student to build up a solid basis of knowledge, factual and conceptual, on the institutions of society. He was a substantial and patient teacher. At [his] home students found him a relaxed and conversational person, always ready to share ideas and to discuss. He sometimes held our seminars there. His delightful and lively Cuban-born wife Berta; herself a former student of anthropology at Northwestern, who helped him so much in his Cuban and later Yoruba researches, was at home, very much a part of the scene.”³⁵

Herskovits was an extremely busy individual. Although small in height he moved faster and was busier than most of us graduate students, but speed did not always lead to the thoroughly working through of his concepts, though he covered a tremendous amount of ground.³⁶ I have thought of him as an “opening man,” in that he was an early explorer of a number of anthropological fields, bringing them out for academia and in some cases the public, whether he originated them or not: Afro-American physical qualities, African culture in the New World, the importance of Africa, cultural relativism, cultural pluralism, enculturation, acculturation, economic anthropology, folklore, music, art, comparative studies, and so on. We worked hard as a rule and almost all of us passed through to our own careers. David Ames told me: “He was noble in the work he did.”³⁷

³⁵ Further comments on Herskovits’s character can be found in George Easton Simpson 1973, *Melville J. Herskovits*. New York: Columbia University Press, 5-9.

³⁶ At the time of his death in 1963 Herskovits had 479 publications, comprising books articles, reviews, reports, letters to the editors, and this was not complete, as others appeared after his death. Allan P. Merriam 1964. “Melville J. Herskovits 1895-1963.” *American Anthropologist* 66:1, 83-109.

³⁷ Telephone conversation with Ames, October 19, 2008.

d'Azevedo's memoir of Herskovits³⁸ suggests that he and his family were much closer personally and socially to the Herskovitses than Phoebe and I were, and that there were quite variable attitudes toward him among the students.

Waterman was amusing, whimsical, at times a jokester, a jazz musician and a strong drinker. Very perceptive about others and extremely bright, he never lived up to his considerable talents. Bascom wrote that he was "imaginative and brilliant."³⁹ Hsu was thoughtful, quiet, enigmatic, constantly observing American culture and behavior and contrasting it with the Chinese. Our four teachers appeared to get along, although I think that Bascom was happy to be on his own when in 1957 he became director of the then Robert Lowie Museum of Anthropology at the University of California in Berkeley, occasionally teaching a folklore course in the anthropology department there.⁴⁰

Herskovits and the African-American Scholars

Herskovits, a scholar of strong views, readily faced criticism. In class he attacked the African-American sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, who denied that most persons of African descent in the United States possessed cultural traits that pointed to Africa.⁴¹ Throughout his life Herskovits held differing opinions with other African-American scholars, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson and Ralph Bunche, who had interests in Africa and in African-America life; although at the time we knew little about all of this.⁴² There was little possibility of scholarly cooperation between Herskovits and

³⁸ Warren L. d'Azevedo 2009. *Rebel Destinies: Remembering Herskovits*. Evanston: Northwestern University, Program of African Studies Working Papers 15.

³⁹ William R. Bascom 1964. "Richard Alan Waterman." *American Anthropologist* 76:1, 77.

⁴⁰ However, there was tension between his wife Berta and Frances Herskovits who had very different personalities. Bascom died in Berkeley in 1981.

⁴¹ Gershenhorn. 2004, 99-102.

⁴² Gershenhorn. 2004, 99.

American black scholars despite common interests. Jerry Gershenhorn wrote:⁴³ “At times Herskovits’s relations with black scholars were marked by tension. Although he wanted to include blacks in academia, he was usually unwilling to relinquish his dominant position or support an activist agenda that would confront social restrictions on black scholars. Herskovits’s actions led some black scholar to characterize him a paternalist.” Nevertheless, Warren d’Azevedo points out to me, that on the part of African-Americans, there was “minority irritation with bumptious usurpation of their interests and concerns by claimants to this role among the dominant intelligencia.”⁴⁴

Perhaps some white hegemony in African Studies still exists, as there is a tendency to consider the Program of African Studies at Northwestern as the first in the United States. For example its publication, *The First Twenty Five Years 1948-1969*, written either by Gwendolen M. Carter or under her auspices, calls it the “first formally established Program of African Studies in the United States,”⁴⁵ whatever “formally” means, and in everyday speech it is often considered the first program, as indeed I had thought of it while a student. Yet the first formal American university program was probably at a black institution, Fisk University, in 1943. One of its founders and its director from 1944 to 1946 being the noted African-American linguist, Lorenzo Dow Turner, author of *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*.⁴⁶ The program had the assistance of the South African-born missionary and anthropologist, Edwin W. Smith.⁴⁷ In 1946 Turner moved to Roosevelt University in Chicago, a multiracial and multicultural

⁴³ Gershenhorn. 2004, 143.

⁴⁴ Letter from d’Azevedo to Ottenberg, Oct. 29, 2008, 2.

⁴⁵ Northwestern University c. 1968, 1.

⁴⁶ Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949.

⁴⁷ Kenneth Little 1966 *Contemporary Trends in African Urbanization* .Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; Philip C. Stine. 1998. “Smith, Edwin Williams.” In Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*. New York: Macmillan Reference, USA, 625-626..

institution, where he shortly established another program, now called the St. Clair Drake Center for African and African-American Studies, while the one at Fisk died out after he left.⁴⁸ Both programs appeared before Northwestern's, both were small, neither had major financial support, nor likely the connections to obtain it. Turner was into Africanisms at the same time as Herskovits, also studying Creole in Louisiana, African culture and language in Brazil, and the Krio language in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Unlike the other African-American scholars mentioned above, he had very cooperative relations with Herskovits; each learned from the other since they were both very much interested in and researching Africanisms, while many of the other African-American scholar's primary concerns were with race and social and political issues in America.⁴⁹

Herskovits's death in 1963 did not end African-American criticism of him and the African Studies Association, which he had been much involved. The confrontations at the 1969 Montreal African Studies meeting between its members and African-American students and faculty was an implied criticism of Herskovits's past efforts in the association. In 1976, Elliott P. Skinner, a well-known Trinidad-born Africanist anthropologist teaching at Columbia, published a paper where he charged that the association and its members were white dominated, including Herskovits, and had failed

⁴⁸ Margaret Wade-Lewis.1992.."The Impact of the Turner/Herskovits Connection on Linguistics and Anthropology." *Dialectical Anthropology* 17:4, 391-392; Margaret Wade-Lewis 2001. "Lorenzo Dow Turner: Beyond Gullah Studies." *Dialectical Anthropology* 26: 3/4, 252-253.

⁴⁹ The problem of white hegemony also occurs in the general separation at universities with substantial African studies and African-American or Black studies programs, where white scholars predominate in African Studies and Black scholars do so in African-American Studies, and where the major financial resources, often in the form of external foundation grants, usually go to African Studies, albeit there are those on both sides who prefer it that way. In smaller programs the two are often together. For example, see Guy Martin and Carlene Young 1984. "The Paradox of Separate and Unequal African Studies and Afro-American Studies." *Journal of Negro Education*, 53:3, 257-267.

to recognize and support African-American scholarship on Africa.⁵⁰ After Herskovits's death, the African philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe criticized Herskovits's concept of cultural relativism while during Herskovits's lifetime, the philosophers David Bidney and Eliseo Vivas, had also done so.⁵¹ Further, Herskovits's and Bascom's views that African-American folklore was largely African-derived was denied by Richard M. Dorson, an expert on American and African-American folklore, who argued that except along the Carolina and Georgia coast it was minimal.⁵² The idea that African-American music had African roots, held by Herskovits, Waterman and Bascom, was rejected by some scholars, but refuted by Waterman.⁵³

Herskovits did not seem depressed by criticism but almost relished contestations as opportunities to further explain his views. In class we rarely criticized him, although I remember one seminar when we discussed cultural relativism we students attacked one of his concepts and he finally said, "Well, it is a crude tool to be held lightly in the hand."⁵⁴ Yet Herskovits was very supportive of his students in obtaining funding and teaching positions.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Jerry Gershenhorn. 2004. Elliott P. Skinner. 1976. 'African Studies, 1955-1975: an Afro-American Perspective.' *Issue: a Journal of Opinion* 6:2/3. 57-67.

⁵¹ V. Y. Mudimbe. 1994. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 40-41, 46-52. David Bidney. 1953. *Theoretical Anthropology*. New York: Columbia University Press; Eliseo Vivas. 1950. *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life Chicago: University of Chicago Press*.

⁵² Richard M. Dorson. 1971. *American Folklore and the Historian*. 1971. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. On page 40 he writes: "Most Brer rabbit tales come from Europe and many Negro beliefs are pure British. A whole body of traditions has grown up on American soil. Slave songs reflect successive historical periods," etc. *Au contraire* see William R. Bascom. 1973. "Folklore and the Africanist." *Journal of American Folklore* 86:43, 253-259.

⁵³ Richard A. Waterman. 1963. "On Flogging a Dead Horse: Lessons Learned from the Africanism Controversy." *Ethnomusicology* 7:2, 83-86.

⁵⁴ David W. Ames, who was at this seminar, remembers this incident clearly. For other classroom encounters with Herskovits see d'Azevedo 2009, 30-31.

⁵⁵ Kevin A. Yelvington writes of Jack Sargent Harris, a former undergraduate Northwestern anthropology student, who went on to take a Ph.D. at Columbia on a non-African topic. It is evident how much Herskovits assisted Harris outside of the classroom and for some years after he finished his doctoral degree, although not after Harris was accused of being a communist. See Yelvington 2005.

Herskovits lectured widely to further African studies, strove to develop both the anthropology and African Studies Program, encouraged the growth of very useful library resources and collected folklore and art in Africa and various sites in the Americas.⁵⁶ The first president of the African Studies Association,⁵⁷ he was also very active in obtaining grants for Northwestern's African studies. He was an advisor on Africa to government and non-government agencies. He researched in widely different locations, and nurtured students through their Ph.Ds. Though sometime handling a number of activities at the same time, he still had time for a smile and a bit of talk with others.

Other American Anthropologists Involved in African Scholarship

Herskovits was not the first anthropologist living in the United States who had an interest in Africa at about the same time as he did. There was a German-born and trained anthropology curator at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Albert Freidrich Wieschhoff, who first taught in the Anthropology Department and then was a curator at the University Museum during World War II, when seven *African Handbooks* were prepared by various authors through the African Section of the University Museum and by the University's Committee on African Studies. Of this committee I have yet to find any information, other than the suggestion of the anthropologist, Kenneth Little⁵⁸ that it was in existence as early as 1942. This appears to have been an informal program rather focusing on teaching, to service the U.S. government; its Handbooks "were widely used

⁵⁶ Merriam. 1964, 89-90 summarizes Herskovits's interests in art, music ad folklore. A detailed study of Herskovits's New World folklore studies is to be found in Robert Baron 1994. Africa in the Americas: Melville J. Herskovits's Folkloristic and Anthropological Scholarship – 1923-1941. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁷ On the beginnings of the African Studies Association see Gwendolen M. Carter. 1983. "The Founding of the African Studies Association." *African Studies Review* 26:3/4, 5-9

⁵⁸ Kenneth Little.1966. 4-5, ft.1.

in the Department of State and in the African section of the Office of Strategic Services”⁵⁹ during World War II, but are hardly known today. Wieschoff was a consultant to the O.S.S. There is again the suggestion that the Northwestern program was not the first one. But as with the brief life of the African Program at Fisk mentioned above, this one disappeared after the war, although later revived at the university as an African Studies Program. Wieschhoff published a survey as one of the Handbooks, : *Colonial Policies in Africa* in 1944, wrote up the African collection at the museum in 1945, a monograph on the ancient Zimbabwe-Monomotapa culture in 1941, and very useful for its time, he published in 1948 a 461 page bibliography on Black Africa. On one of a series of U. N. missions to Africa after the war he was killed along with the U.N.’s Secretary General, Dag Hammerskjold in a 1961 plane crash in Africa.⁶⁰

Wilfrid D. Hambly, an English anthropologist, was a curator at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago from 1926 until 1944, was in charge of the African collection. He led a museum expedition to Angola in 1929-1930, bringing back a substantial collection. He published a booklet on the culture areas of Nigeria in 1935, a book on the Ovimbundu of Angola in 1934, a *Source Book in African Anthropology* in 1937 and *Jamba*, a novel on caravan traders in Africa. I don’t remember Herskovits ever mentioning him in or out of class but I have to presume that they knew each other as they lived in the general Chicago area. Hambly also wrote a book on education among non-western peoples, which, given Herskovits’s interest in enculturation, he must have

⁵⁹ Kenneth Little 1966. 5, ft. 1.

⁶⁰ “Wieschhoff was U. N. Specialist on African Affairs, Trusteeships.” *The Washington Post, Times Herald* Sept. 19, 1961, pg. A10. Albert Freidrich Wieschhoff, *Colonial Problems in Africa*, 1944. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, University Museum. *Zimbabwe-Monomotapa Culture in Southeast Africa*, 1941. Menasha, WI: George Banta; *Anthropological Bibliography of Negro Africa*, New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1948.

known, and another publication on African art and material culture and a book on tribal dancing, both subjects of interest to Herskovits⁶¹ Hambly's anthropology, while old-fashioned compared to that of Herskovits covered a lot of ground.

The Anthropologist Ralph Linton, who trained at Columbia but was not particularly close to Boas, while at the Field Museum led a collecting expedition to Madagascar in 1925-1927 that resulted in his monograph on the Tanala, the only major work he produced in an African setting, but in its time a classic study.⁶² He did no further African work. I believe that there was little interaction between Linton and Herskovits, but rather some tension. Wieschhoff, Hambly, Linton and Herskovits largely went their own way in African studies.

The situation differed greatly in Afro-American studies, where Herskovits and his wife had considerable interaction with a number of scholars who were actively researching Afro-American culture, as is clear from his *Myth of the Negro Past*. This included Fernando Ortiz of Cuba, Jean Price-Mars of Haiti and Arthur Ramos in Brazil, all who published in this area.⁶³ Later on Herskovits continued contacts with younger scholars from the Caribbean and South America such as René Ribeiro and Robert Matta.

⁶¹ Wilfrid D. Hambly 1935. *Culture Areas of Nigeria*. Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series 21:2; Wilfrid D. Hambly 1934. *The Ovimbundu of Angola*. Anthropological Series 21:2; Wilfrid D. Hambly 1937. *Source Book for African Anthropology*. Anthropological Series 26; Wilfrid D. Hambly 1937. *Jamba* 1947. Chicago: Pellegrini & Cudahy; Wilfrid D. Hambly 1926. *Origins of Education among Primitive Peoples, a Comparative Study in Racial Development*. London: Macmillan; Wilfrid D. Hambly 1945. *Clever Hands of the African Negro*. Washington, D.C.; Associated Publishers; Wilfrid D. Hambly 1927. *Tribal Dancing and Social Development*. New York: Macmillan. [no author] 1953. "Two Staff Members Retire: Other Changes." *Chicago Natural History Museum Bulletin* 24, 1, 2.

⁶² Ralph Linton 1933. *The Tanala: a Hill Tribe of Madagascar*. Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological series 22.

⁶³ Kevin A. Yelvington 2006. "The Invention of Africa in Latin America and the Caribbean: Political Discourse and Anthropological Praxis 1920-1940." In Kevin A. Yelvington, ed. *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora*. Santa Fe: School of American Research/Oxford: James Currey, 35-82; Apter 1992 mentions other scholars. For Ortiz see Judith Bettelheim, ed., 2001. *Cuban Festivals: a Century of Afro-Cuban Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, xiii-40.

I have taken the trouble to mention these American continent scholars who shared African or Afro-American interests with Herskovits, particularly in his early scholarly years, since the impression I had as a student was that in America Herskovits was largely alone in his African and Afro-America endeavors. I believe that some other students did as well, until we became interested in a certain aspect of culture or a geographic area and began investigating it for our own purpose, as I discovered Hambly's monograph on *Culture Areas of Nigeria* when I became interested in research there. Admittedly, for Haiti the need to know French well and for South American Spanish and Portuguese were barriers. As for Africa, as I will discuss below, Herskovits was not keen on the exposing us to British social anthropology, no less the anthropology of the French. There was the sense in our training that the focus was strongly on Herskovits and his ideas, most clearly presented in his text *Man and His Works* and his required key course Theories of Culture, and supplemented by concepts of Bascom and Waterman, rather than viewing the Northwestern African Program as a part of a larger growing interest in Africa. (And I have not mentioned the African-Americans interests, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and his book on Africa⁶⁴ and Locke's enthusiasm for African art). We were never encouraged to look at African-American writing on Africa, slim as it was at that time. The whole focus of the program was on the ideas and theories of Herskovits, with the exception of those of Professor Hsu. Perhaps it was too much to expect in a two-year course to do much more, but I felt at the time, and even more so now that there was a certain narrowness in the program.

⁶⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois 1947. *The World and Africa: an Inquiry into the Part Which Africa has Played in World History*. New York: Viking Press, 1947.

Herskovits and Boasian Anthropology

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of Herskovits's training with Boas and others at Columbia, who studied Native Americans.⁶⁵ This set Herskovits's intellectual agenda for Africa, particularly through Franz Boas, of whom he wrote a small, admiring biography.⁶⁶ He extended Boasian anthropology to Africa, but with his own interpretations and some innovations. Herskovits was less keen on Ruth Benedict, as we learned in his course on the History of Anthropology, but seemed to take to Margaret Mead's work and person.⁶⁷ As students we studied his culture areas of Africa, a sterile endeavor coming directly from Native American studies, particularly from Clark Wissler and A. L. Kroeber. Herskovits employed the concept of *cultural focus*, each culture and culture area having central cultural features of dynamic interest and behavior. For West Africa it was religion, for East Africa the cattle complex.⁶⁸ Cultural focus was not unlike Ruth Benedict's patterns of culture, Clyde Kluckhohn's and Evon Z. Vogt's values and value orientations and John J. Honigmann's cultural ethos,⁶⁹ all attempts by American anthropologists to characterize the essential element of cultures, the basic organizing element of each..

⁶⁵ Simon Ottenberg 1988. The American Anthropological Background to Herskovits's Scholarship. A paper presented at the annual African Studies Association meetings, Chicago, Oct. 27-31, 1988.

⁶⁶ Melville J. Herskovits 1953. *Franz Boas: the Science of Man in the Making*. New York: Scribner.

⁶⁷ I had already taken a course on the history of anthropology at Wisconsin and tried to duck out of Herskovits's but he said: "You have not taken *my* course on the history of anthropology." I took it and he was right: it was quite a different course, worthwhile to have signed up for.

⁶⁸ In 1926 Herskovits published his library Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia on *The Cattle Complex in East Africa*, in four parts that year in the *American Anthropologist*, vol. 28. At that time publishing was a requirement at Columbia University in order to attain the Ph.D. degree.

⁶⁹ Ruth Benedict 1934. *Patterns of Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; Clyde Kluckhohn. 1951. "Values and Value Orientations." In Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, eds. *Toward a General Theory of Action*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 388-433; Evon Z. Vogt 1951. *Navaho Veterans: a Study of Changing Values*. Cambridge: Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 41:1 John J. Honigmann 1949. *Culture and Ethos of Kaska Society*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Drawing from Boas, Herskovits considered anthropology to be a *science*: his *Man and His Works* was subtitled *The Science of Cultural Anthropology*. This was the positivist world of American anthropology, where data was out there to be collected, without too much questioning of how the researcher's background and personality influenced his research, although Herskovits, and of course, Bascom were sensitive to some problems of field research.

There was the tracing of the movements of Native Americans and their cultural traits in American anthropology, as Herskovits attempted to follow the movements of Africans into the New World. There were differences, however; Native American tracings largely depended on linguistics and archaeology, while the Afro-American ones had richer historical records.

Another parallel with general American anthropology was Herskovits's interest in race and the condemnation of racism, going back to his racial studies at Columbia.⁷⁰ Herskovits lectured on race and we read and discussed Boas on it.⁷¹ The information largely confirmed our existing anti-racist views. Yet we never discussed the implications of well-off white students often studying poorer blacks in Africa and the Americas.

Herskovits took the concept of culture from American anthropology, elaborating it in logical ways. Out of it came his ideas on enculturation, the learning of a culture. In the pre-genetic and pre-social biology period of scholarship he believed that the new infant was like an empty vessel, which through learning became filled with culture.

⁷⁰ Herskovits 1964 (1928); 1927.

⁷¹ We either read Franz Boas.1938, *The Mind of Primitive Man*. New York, Macmillan, or Franz Boas 1949. *Race, Language and Culture*. New York: Macmillan I don't remember which one.

There was discussion by the students with Herskovits on his concept of cultural relativism both in and outside of class.⁷² Numerous views on it existed in American anthropology at the time, and Herskovits took upon himself to develop this difficult concept. He loved to explain his views on it; for him it was a key concept in anthropology. But it raised questions, such as what to do if people in one culture aggress against those in another, which is what most of history seems to be about. And are not cultures with superior technological skills in some ways better places to live in, as well as cultures which were internally peaceful? What seemed important about his cultural relativism was respect for other cultures and their peoples, the avoidance of judgments on them, and the need to treasure cultural creativity, beliefs and what we would today call agency. Fellow-student David W. Ames suggests to me that he wanted to emphasize how important it was that the researcher not bring in his own values.⁷³ He was fighting against ethnocentrism, particularly strong with regard to Africans and African-Americans. In today's world of globalism cultural relativism is difficult to maintain; it was a product of his time.

Herskovits's position on cultural relativism led him to be skeptical of applied anthropology, unless done with sensitivity and the agreement of those it was to be applied.⁷⁴ He saw this as outsiders meddling in a people's life-way, unless done with care

⁷² Melville J. Herskovits 1948. *Man and His Works: the Science of Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Knopf, 61-78.; Melville J. Herskovits, ed. Frances Herskovits 1972. *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism*. New York: Random House.

⁷³ Telephone conversation with David W. Ames, Nov. 2, 2008.

⁷⁴ In *Man and His Works* Herskovits gives a somewhat more generous view of "practical" or applied anthropology, 645--655. Also see Melville J. Herskovits 1936. "Applied Anthropology and the American Anthropologist." *Science* 83, 215-222. Here he argues for the usefulness of applied anthropology, using Native American as an example. "The opportunity to aid those on whose side we should be ranged in the conflicts arising from the clash of cultures of unequal strength happens to make it advisable at the moment for us to grasp the opportunity to give direction to those who have the power as well as the will to better the conditions of Indian life" (222).

to ameliorate conditions of culture contact, quite different from *studying* change, in which he was interested. But I was curious about questions of application, and I subscribed to the journal *Applied Anthropology*.⁷⁵ Once Herskovits noticed this when I came to pick up the latest issue in the mail room, and gave me an eye, as if to say, you should know better. Towards the end of colonialism he moved more to the side of anthropologists offering assistance, although arguing that anthropologists doing applied work must keep their independence and objectivity. In 1969 the Nigerian anthropologist, Victor C. Uchendu, wrote:⁷⁶ “If there are anthropologists who still subscribe to the view that their African subjects are happy with poverty, poor health, and ignorance, they have misread the trends in that continent.”

By my time Herskovits had stopped employing the term “primitive” for non-western peoples, using nonliterate instead,⁷⁷ a less value-laden one, but not of much use today as the level of literacy has grown in Africa and elsewhere. I don’t use any term but refer to specific peoples or countries.

Acculturation, the term Herskovits employed for culture change, also used by American anthropologists, was coming into prominence.⁷⁸ Herskovits’s book on it details his views; all of his Afro-American studies and of his students were concerned with it.

⁷⁵ *Applied Anthropology* 1941-1948. Society for Applied Anthropology, replaced by *Human Organization, Journal of the Society of Applied Anthropology*, 1948-.

⁷⁶ Victor C. Uchendu. 1969. “Priority Issues for Social Anthropological Research in Africa in the Next Two Decades.” In Gwendolen M. Carter and Ann Paden, eds. *Expanding Horizons in African Studies: Program of African Studies Northwestern University*, 15. Uchendu, of Nigerian Igbo background, did his M.A. at Northwestern on Igbo culture in 1963 and his Ph.D. in 1966 on Navaho Native American seasonal migrations. For his biography see Simon Ottenberg 2007. “Two Renowned Nigerian Scholars: Ikenna Nzimiro and Victor Chikesie Uchendu.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 32, 11-43. Other African students who took an M.A. degree in anthropology at Northwestern up to 1968 included Augustus J. Addico (Ghana, 1964), Augustus Caine (1959, Liberia), Mrs. Iris White (Liberia, date uncertain), Ernest M. Nauru (Kenya, date uncertain) Collins M. Ramose (South Africa, 1974, all listed in *Northwestern University Alumni from African Countries 1948-1968*, pp. 51-55, in Northwestern University c. 1968. *Program of African Studies; the First Twenty Years 1948-1958*, unpublished manuscript.

⁷⁷ Herskovits 1948. *Man and His Works*, 75.

⁷⁸ Melville J. Herskovits 1958. *Acculturation: the Study of Culture Contact*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.

While he and some of his graduate students were not strong in the description of social organization, as was true of much of American anthropology, if they did it at all those studying acculturation were necessarily concerned with changes in social forms.

Herskovits used general West African culture as a base line⁷⁹ to trace changes in the cultures of Afro-Americans in the New World. This failed, as there were many different West African cultures and he also underestimated influences from the Congo and Angola in the New World. He had the idea that one could develop a comparative analysis, showing how African culture led to different experiences in different parts of the New World. Out of this knowledge one could develop a grand theory to encompass all cases. At the time of Herskovits's death, it was probably too early to do so and he had anyway become more involved in African and other affairs. The failure to do a great deal of comparative work has always been a weakness of anthropology.⁸⁰

Herskovits and Bascom focused strongly on folklore, visual arts and music in Africa and among Afro-Americans,⁸¹ subjects important to American anthropology.

⁷⁹ The idea of a *base line* from which changes occur was a favorite one of Herskovits.

⁸⁰ Yet Robert Plant Armstrong's Ph.D. dissertation on the folklore of the Dakota post-doctoral dissertation, and Afro-Americans of Suriname was comparative. David W. Ames post-Ph.D. research on Hausa and Igbo musicians had a comparative aspect, S. Joshua L. Zake's dissertation was on comparative law of non-western societies, Justine Cordwell's dissertation on Yoruba and Benin art had comparative aspects, so perhaps there was more comparative work done than I had realized. Telephone conversation with David W. Ames, Nov. 2, 2008.

⁸¹ Melville and his wife Frances kept extensive folklore records from most of their field researches, and also made musical recordings. See Merriam 1964, 89-90. They also collected African and Suriname art. See Noann Nagel Shaw, Melville J. Herskovits, Frances S. Herskovits 1973. *African Art from Two Continents Selected from the Herskovits Collection*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Deering Library. Also see Melville J. Herskovits 1959. "Art and Value." In Robert Redfield, Melville J. Herskovits and Gordon F. Ekholm. *Aspects of Primitive Art*. New York: Museum of Primitive Art, 41-68; Melville J. Herskovits 1945 (1957). *The Backgrounds of African Art*. Denver: Denver Art Museum. But Herskovits wrote in *Man and His Works*: "The dance, however, is an art-form impossible even to discuss in a work such as this, until a systematic approach to it has been devised and applied on a comparative basis." 437-438. On Herskovits's views on aesthetics, art, music, tales and dance see Simpson 1973, 42-58. Simpson, an anthropologist/sociologist who briefly studied with Herskovits in 1936 and taught anthropology at Northwestern in the summer of 1956 was a good colleague of his who researched in the Caribbean and among the Yoruba of Nigeria. On Herskovits's publications in music, art, and oral literature see Merriam 1964. 79-82.

Several graduate students had musical interests, some eventually were to write on music: Merriam, Ames, Ottenberg, Ricks;⁸² in visual art: Crowley, d'Azevedo, Schneider, Cordwell, Armstrong, Messenger and Ottenberg: on folklore: Crowley, Merriam, Christensen.⁸³

Freudian psychology in American anthropology was popular among some anthropologists on the east coast of the United States, notably Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, but also other “culture and personality” scholars of the time. Herskovits had at one time an interest in Freudian anthropology, which he never projected into my classes with him, writing by himself a general article on Freudian psychology and the Negro and another with his wife, Frances, on sibling rivalry.⁸⁴ The early Northwestern anthropology Ph.D., Erika Bourguignon, with long-standing interests in psychological anthropology and in Haiti, points out that Herskovits, in his Haitian researches,⁸⁵ developed a psychological concept he called “socialized ambivalence,” although he never applied it elsewhere.⁸⁶ By this he meant that the African and the European elements in the individual Haitian were not fully merged, leaving the person with a tendency toward

⁸² But only Merriam, Ricks, and of course Waterman had technical musical skills: Ames and Ottenberg wrote on the lives of musicians and on the social aspects of their musical performances.

⁸³ Northwestern University. c. 1968. Ph.Ds in the Program of African Studies 1948-1968, with Current Position, Dissertation Topic and a Selection of Bibliography of Major Publications on Africa. Evanston, IL: Program of African Studies, unpublished list; Northwestern University, 19-15, in Northwestern University, Program of African Studies: the First Twenty Years 1948-1968. Evanston: Northwestern University, 55 leaves.. Ph.Ds. Program of African Studies, Northwestern University. Evanston: IL, covering 1939-1979, unpublished list, n.d.; Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University, c. 1983. Anthropology of Ph.D.'s by Year. Evanston, IL: Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University. NU Archive File, WCAS Anthropology Dept. faculty, unpublished, three leaves.

⁸⁴ Melville J. Herskovits 1934. “Freudian Mechanism in Primitive Negro Psychology.” In E. Evans Pritchard, et al. 1934. *Essays Presented to C.G. Seligman*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 75-84; Merriam 1964, 89; Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits 1959. “Sibling Rivalry, the Oedipus Complex and Myth.” *Journal of American Folklore* 71: 1959, 1-15

⁸⁵ Melville J. Herskovits 1937. *Life in a Haitian Valley*. New York: Knopf.

⁸⁶ Erika Bourguignon 2000. “Relativism and Ambivalence in the Work of M.J. Herskovits.” *Ethos* 28:1, 103-114. This paper returned to the topic of her 1951 Ph.D. anthropology degree at Northwestern, Syncretism and Ambivalence: an Ethnohistorical Study.

contradictory view at the same time, with rapid changes in attitudes as a result of inner conflict. Herskovits believed that the ambivalence was socialized in the community as a whole, the consequence of collective experience in Haitian history and experience. This differed from Herskovits's general tendency to write in terms of syncretism, reinterpretation, acculturation, integration, and assimilation and other processes that were more conflict-free. He was interested, as was much of American anthropology, in tracing the passage of cultural traits through time, in his case Africanisms, particularly in social groups rather than in individuals. As Bourguignon wrote,⁸⁷ Herskovits preferred to stress "harmony rather than conflict" and not "the intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict that is central to a concept of socialized ambivalence." He was interested in continuity not cultural conflict and ambivalence in his Afro-American work, where he did not appear to find it. Bourguignon discusses theories as to whether Haiti was, perhaps a special case due to its history or that it has been studied by Francophone scholars.⁸⁸

Herskovits's interest in psychological anthropology probably led to the hiring of L. K. Hsu, into the Anthropology Department, although Hsu was neither a Freudian nor a positivist, nor did any of the students of my time draw a great deal from Herskovits's ideas in their research. They were little interested in psychology, though Philip Leis wrote on enculturation among the Ijaw of Nigeria, and I later wrote a book on boys' growing up among the Afikpo Igbo in Nigeria and on psychology and art.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Bourguignon 2000, 106.

⁸⁸ Bourguignon 2000 107-108.

⁸⁹ Philip E. Leis 1972. *Enculturation and Socialization in an Ijaw Village*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston; Marida Hollos and Philip Leis 1989. *Becoming Nigerian in Ijo Society*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; Simon Ottenberg 1989. *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society: an Interpretation*. Seattle: University of Washington Press; Simon Ottenberg. 1982. "Illusion, Communication, and Psychology in West African Masquerades." *Ethos* 10:2, 149-185.

Shortly after my classroom years at Northwestern, Herskovits argued that visual perception could be molded by culture. But Donald Campbell, teaching social psychology at Northwestern, thought that individuals everywhere perceived in the same way, regardless of culture. Marshall Segal, a graduate student of Campbell's, who took his Ph.D. in psychology in the African Program, became involved in resolving the matter. Perception testing was carried out by a number of researchers who were working on their own projects in the field, mostly in Africa, including some anthropologists.⁹⁰ The conclusions indicated that Herskovits's view prevailed: differences in visual perception in various cultures were not due to racial differences but to differences in cultural experience. The comparative approach was in line with Boas's rigorous scientific outlook and positivist science, and with Herskovits's interest in cross-cultural comparisons. His view was a logical outgrowth of his concept of culture as the all-powerful factor in human life.

Although we read Boas, our understanding of American anthropology was largely funneled through our teachers and Herskovits's course on the history of anthropology. We were aware that he had studied with and admired Boas and that his anthropology was close to that of Boas. Yet paradoxically, while we students were taught a Boasian program, as budding Africanists and Afro-Americanists we were isolated from mainstream American anthropology, as we also felt distinct from the people of Evanston and the undergraduate students. There was a probably apocryphal tale that when Herskovits presented a paper at national meetings on an African or Afro-American topic

⁹⁰ Marshall H. Sewall, Donald T. Campbell and Melville J. Herskovits 1966. *The Influence of Culture on Visual Perception*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, iv. Segal went on to explore cross-cultural psychology in cognition, motives, beliefs and values. Marshall H. Segal 1979. *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Human Behavior in Global Perspective*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; Marshall H. Segal. "The Growth of Psychology in African Studies." In Carter and Paden 1969, 47-65.

his colleagues would pat him on the back saying: “That’s very nice, Mel,” and go on talking about Native Americans.⁹¹ We had a sense of distance from the rest of American anthropology. We were pioneers in African studies and we knew it, leading to a feeling of excitement. We were receiving funding for research while anthropology students and faculty in Native American studies rarely did; their students and faculty carried out their research on their own, usually in the summer, or faculty did so on sabbatical leave. Our overseas projects seemed more exotic as well.

American anthropology grew up through the study of supposedly dying Native American cultures. Field research was for short periods as a rule, mostly in the summer, since there were few grants available and most researchers were teaching. In fact, much of the research that the Herskovits’s carried out was short term. We were at the start of a new era in anthropology, of a minimum of year-long research as funds were beginning to become available and for research overseas, leading to a disparity of resources depending on where one studied. In contrast to the Native American situation, the Northwestern faculty and students took pride in studying what they considered to be fully living cultures in Africa and the New World, requiring different field techniques than work with Native Americans. Early in my teaching career at the University of Washington, I traveled to the coast of Washington State, stopping at La Push, a little community of commercial fishermen and Native Americans. I observed an existing, if poor, Native American reservation community. Returning to Seattle I thought: “Why not study the people on the reservation as they are now!” I mentioned this to a well-known senior

⁹¹ d’Azevedo 2009, 20-21, writes that while at Berkeley as a student his interest in African-American studies under Herskovits was not shared by some faculty members there, Herskovits being “dismissed as something of an heretic whose scholarship and relations with colleagues were problematic.” However, David Mandlebaum held a more favorable view of Herskovits.

specialist on Native American culture. He responded: "there is nothing to do there now. Mary died last year." By that he meant that Mary was the last individual who knew the language and the "old culture." As if that meant there was nothing to study there. Discouraged, I never followed up on plans for research there.⁹² This was, of course less true in the American southwest where Native American communities more fully survived.

Research Planning

Herskovits did not encourage graduate students to do preliminary research to gain experience before their Ph.D. research, although he did not discourage it. We were to go in cold, except for a useful course on field methods that he sometimes taught.⁹³ I wanted some preliminary field experience, and with Bascom's advice, and that of Lorenzo Turner at Roosevelt College in Chicago, in the summer of 1950 I studied a Geechee coastal community in Georgia (called Gullah in South Carolina), for which Herskovits kindly drew fifty dollars from the African Studies funds, a helpful amount in those days.⁹⁴ This early experience helped me immensely when in carrying out my Nigerian research. David M. Ames carried out research in Cuba along with Waterman and Bascom in 1948, previous to his Ph.D. research, with a project involving the analysis family relationships with families and between them, studying persons of white, black and of

⁹² The first full study of a Native American reservation in Washington State was: by an American anthropologist. See Elizabeth Colson 1953. *The Makah Indians; a Study of an Indian Tribe in Modern American Society*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. She saw the reservation as a society. This is probably why she later became a distinguished social anthropologist of the British kind, based on her African researches, albeit teaching in the United States.

⁹³ Simpson 1973, 101.

⁹⁴ Simon Ottenberg 1959. "Leadership and Change in a Coastal Georgia Negro Community." *Phylon* 20:1, 7-18. It was a community study, rather than an attempt to locate Africanisms, although they were evident.

mixed race in a large Havana tenement.⁹⁵ The summer of 1960, the year before finishing his library dissertation on Afro-American songs from Bahia, Merriam and his wife carried out research on Flathead Native American music and they did again in 1958. He published a full report in 1967.⁹⁶ Warren L. d'Azevedo carried out field work among the Washoe of Nevada while a student at Berkeley, before coming to Northwestern. Bypassing the M.A. degree and the lack of preliminary research work for most students made me think that Herskovits was in a hurry to get his students trained and out into the world.

The anthropology faculty was not demanding as to where students went for their Ph.D. research, though I think that Herskovits wanted them to go everywhere South of the Sahara, and they did. Ours was not the kind of anthropology department where your major professor told you where to go, usually somewhere connected with his own project. Herskovits did not push anyone to restudy the areas where he had been, though several of them used his Bahaian and Caribbean folklore and musical collections for their dissertations when they failed to obtain grants, particularly a problem for students in Afro-American studies. Students decided where to go through consultation with one or more faculty members. The aim in Africa seemed to be to research a culture that had been little or never studied before, which I call exploration anthropology. Today this is virtually impossible. My wife and I saw the advantage of building on past research and being brash, we decided to restudy Abomey where Melville and Frances had earlier worked, whose culture had greatly changed. But Herskovits was uneasy about this and

⁹⁵ David W. Ames 1950. "Negro Family Types in a Cuban Solar." *Phylon* 11:2, 159-163.

⁹⁶ Alan P. and Barbara Merriam 1950. Flathead Indian Music; Report on Field Research, summer 1950. Unpublished manuscript; Alan P. Merriam 1967. *The Ethnomusicology of the Flathead Indians*. Chicago: Aldine, Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology 44.

wisely turned us down, suggesting we consult with Bascom. We came to realize that there might be problems if we criticized Herskovits's work, and as inexperienced students there was no guarantee we would do it well. Bascom suggested that we go to Igbo country in southeastern Nigeria and we did in 1952-1953 to the previously unstudied people of Afikpo, carrying out our project under colonial conditions as other Northwestern students did at the time, quite different from post-colonial situations as I discovered on later returns to the Igbo.

In the early African Program there were problems in studying a language before fieldwork due to the lack of African speakers in the Chicago area, although Messenger was granted funds by a foundation to carry out several months of interviewing an Anang member of the group he was planning to research in Nigeria who was in the United States, to gain cultural and linguistic knowledge.⁹⁷ But for most of us there were no Africans or Afro-Americans that we knew in the Chicago area to help us learn the language, to provide contacts in our research area and with which to discuss their culture. No courses existed to assist students in rapidly learning a language until the ethnolinguist David Olmsted came between 1950 and 1952, although his field was Native America. Helen Hause, in the English Department between 1950 and 1953 had done research on African linguistics⁹⁸ and worked with some students. While some of us had natural linguistic skills, others, including myself and my wife, had to rely on interpreters, with the problems they created, no matter how helpful they were.⁹⁹ On our

⁹⁷ Messenger 1994, 8-9.

⁹⁸ Her Ph.D. in 1947 in Oriental Studies from the University of Pennsylvania was on "Terms for Musical Instruments in the Sudanic Languages: a Lexicographical Inquiry." See http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/fghij/hause_helen.html

⁹⁹ Herskovits was aware of the problems with interpreters, I believe from his own experience. See Herskovits 1948, 91-92. I hid the matter by calling my interpreters field guides or research assistants, which they were as they were more than just interpreters, suggesting persons and events to visit, and so on.

first trip I had a knowledgeable interpreter on Afikpo language and the culture, but he was involved in politics and that was a problem.

Messenger writes of his Ph.D proposal:¹⁰⁰ “I must mention an unbelievable fact: my proposal for the fellowship that sent Betty and me to Nigeria was two-pages long – one page outlining the research project and the other the budget.” The proposals of my wife and I were just as brief. As with Messenger we were told to put the proposal on one page and the budget on the other. Neither were they very realistic, and they were not theoretical at all. The proposal, merely describes studying social change among the Igbo in a very general way. Times have changed! I believe that there was only an informal mechanism for judging proposals at that time and for African research being a student of Herskovits carried great weight. The year my wife and I went out we each received a SSRC fellowship and Daniel McCall at Columbia University did so as well, although he was required to come to Northwestern and take African courses for a quarter.

Before each student went for their research the Herskovitses had him or her and their spouse to their home for tea and a discussion of the niceties of dealing with colonial official and living in the field. In my wife and my case we were to have calling cards, to be sure to give them to a messenger of the local colonial official when we arrived at a station, the card turned up at one corner for some reason. Then we were to wait for a call from the administrator. I was to take a tuxedo and Phoebe formal dress, though we never used them.¹⁰¹ The Herskovitses rightly did not want their students to cause trouble in colonial Africa and I know none that did. Curiously, as Warren d’Azevedo points out,¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Messenger 1994, 5.

¹⁰¹ However, Warren and Cathy d’Azevedo in Liberia had the occasional to wear formal clothes for a reception with President Tubman. Letter to Ottenberg, Oct. 29, 2008, 4.

¹⁰² D’Azevedo 2009, 97..

while we received detailed and helpful instructions on entering in the field we were told nothing about how to leave it or about maintaining relations with our “people” afterwards. Our mentors were anxious, in a fatherly way, over the progress of our fieldwork. Phoebe and I, and other students of our time, were required to send copies of our field notes to them for comments, which I resented; not finding the replies to be helpful, though they were prompt.¹⁰³ However Messenger, studying the Anang of Nigeria thought that the responses were helpful.¹⁰⁴ I believe that at least some comments to us came from Frances Herskovits. A number of students had the occasion of a visit from the Herskovitses while carrying out their Ph.D. field research, and we are fortunate to have two dramatic and somewhat humorous accounts of these meetings in the “bush,” encounters that which the Herskovitses clearly relished and exhibited a more relaxed side of their persons than they sometimes did in the formal academic settings.¹⁰⁵

Herskovits and British Social Anthropology

Herskovits wished his students, many of whom were heading for British colonial or post-colonial Africa, to move with care in the face of emerging British social anthropology there, represented by A.R. Radcliffe Brown, Meyer Fortes, E. E. Evans Pritchard, C. Daryll Forde, Phyllis Kaberry, Isaac Schapera and others. Because of their colonies (and later commonwealth countries) the British had a strong claim to anthropological work in Africa. Ours was weaker. The theoretical differences were considerable at that time. The British studied societies, the Americans cultures. The

¹⁰³ For a fuller discussion see Simon Ottenberg 1990, 139-160..

¹⁰⁴ In a letter to me, Jan. 24, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ D’Azevedo 2009, 60-90. The second one is by the wife of the anthropology graduate student, Alvin Wolfe, while the couple were in the Congo. Barbara B. Wolfe 1999. Visitors from Home. Unpublished manuscript.

British analyzed social organization and its more theoretical aspects, social structure, as well as political organization. They employed functional anthropology, using concepts such as unilineal descent, corporate groups, the fission or fusion of lineages and clans.¹⁰⁶ References to kinships and descent were everywhere, while we were largely concerned with acculturation, art, religion, economics, oral literature and music.

We students, backed by our professors, were moving into British-speaking areas in Africa with an anthropology that the British did not like or understand. (This was true of those going into other colonial areas—French, Belgian or Portuguese—with their own anthropological styles.) British anthropologists did not study Native Americans and thought American anthropologists naïve and unsystematic. The British did not use or understand the concept of culture, although Edward B. Tylor had years before tried to develop it, but in a muddled way.¹⁰⁷ They were little interested in art, music, and dance.¹⁰⁸ Once in Ghana, I jokingly asked Meyer Fortes why he did not study Tallensi music and dance. He admitted that he did not know what to do with it. “You do something,” he told me. While Herskovits’s students studied folklore in its own right as a creative aspect of culture, British social anthropologists saw myths and tales as interpretations of and justifications for origins and claims of descent and political power within social structures. The British emphasized political aspects of the societies they studied, with good reason, since colonial officials were concerned with administering

¹⁰⁶ Their early African work was epitomized in two publications: Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard eds. 1940. *African Political Systems*. London: Oxford University Press for the International Institute of African Language & Cultures; A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and C. Daryll Forde eds. *African Political Systems*. 1950. London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Burnett Tylor 1889. *Primitive Culture*. New York: Holt.

¹⁰⁸ This began to change with the publication of J. Clyde Mitchell 1956. *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia*. Livingstone: Rhodes Livingstone Institute by the Manchester University Press. Here dance and song was linked to changing social relationships.

them. Herskovits was weary of applied anthropology, but some British did applied work, as Evans-Pritchard in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. However, reading British social anthropologists' publications, most of them seemed dense enough to be of little benefit to busy colonial officials: the most effective influences were probably through personal contacts between the anthropologist and the colonial officials. A good deal of British research in Africa was funded by the Colonial Social Science Research Council, while Herskovits's students, at least before the Fulbright program began, were supported by private foundations, although the United States' government encouraged them.

Rituals to the British were ways of marking and reinforcing social and political arrangements and changes to them, while Herskovits saw rituals as important aspects of religion, the acting out of religious beliefs. Herskovits was interested in acculturation; British anthropologists called it social change and except in southern Africa their researches little reflected this. Herskovits referred to enculturation, the British, little interested at the time, referred to childhood learning as socialization, British anthropology in Africa, except in Southern Africa, saw the societies they studied as relatively stable, studying them without time depth, while Herskovits and some of his students were fascinated by the acculturation process. The British ideal was a year in the field where language learning was major, followed by some three months at home working over notes and consulting scholars in their discipline, and then another year in the field. Herskovits's students usually had Ph.D. research money for only a year, sometimes stretched for a while longer.¹⁰⁹ We rarely learned the local language well, relying on interpreters. British scholars sometimes felt that American researchers did not

¹⁰⁹ Phoebe and I were in the field for fifteen months, Warren and Cathy d'Azevedo 18 months, and some students returned one or more times to their original site after finishing their dissertations.

fully understand the colonial or post-colonial situation, while some British anthropologists largely ignored the realities of colonial life in their work, for example in Fortes's Tallensi studies.¹¹⁰ Neither the British nor Herskovits's students spent much time, at least in their initial African research, on the impact of colonialism, something I much regret in my own work.

Herskovits had contacts with British anthropologists, who, while outwardly friendly to him and welcoming to his students, sometimes felt that they did not know how to carry out research in Africa. In 1951, on our way to Nigeria for our Ph.D. research my wife Phoebe and I went to London carrying letters of introduction from Herskovits. One was to C. Daryll Forde, at the International African Institute in London, where we also were joined by Phyllis Kaberry, who was visiting him in his office at the time. They told us outright that we were not prepared to carry out research in Africa as we were not properly trained in social organization and social structure. Although Professor Hsu taught a course on social organization in the anthropology program, alas our training in this field was poor, a general weakness in American anthropology at the time. We then carried a letter from Herskovits to Isaac Shapera at the London School of Economics, who said: "I have nothing to talk to you now until you return from the field, why don't you go out and watch the Lord Mayor's parade." We did and enjoyed it. It was G.I. Jones at Cambridge University, an ex-colonial officer whose scholarly field was southeastern Nigeria, who welcomed us.¹¹¹ Not a social anthropologist but an ethnographer and

¹¹⁰ Meyer Fortes 1945. *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*. London: Oxford University Press; Meyer Fortes 1949. *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*. London: Oxford University Press.

¹¹¹ Jones had earlier assisted Jack Sargent Harris, who was on his way to southeastern Nigeria for Igbo studies.

historian, he tutored the rare British student interested in Native Americans.¹¹² In the Cambridge social anthropology department he was out in left field—he did not have the proper theoretical perspective. On our return from research in Nigeria we only visited Jones.

The British were correct in that we never had training on colonialism in Africa, which did not exist at my time at Northwestern. Yet Herskovits had by the 1940s published comments on colonial problems in Africa suggesting his awareness of them, leading eventually to his 1952 book, *The Human Factor in Changing Africa*.¹¹³ As students we read the colonial history of the country we were heading for. Few of us included a deep study of the colonial situation in our fieldwork, rather writing about African cultures as if the colonials were hardly there.

After publishing my first two books on the Afikpo in the social anthropological style, to which I had temporarily converted,¹¹⁴ I became friends with Forde and Fortes and was accepted as a proper Africanist anthropologist, if not quite a proper social anthropologist.¹¹⁵ Distinctions between British and American anthropology, which

¹¹² David W. Ames informed me by telephone, October 29, 2009, that he too was positively received by Jones and also carried letters from Herskovits, some of which were to Senegalese officials since his Gambia work with the Wolof was to take him there as well..

¹¹³ New York: Knopf, 1962. Also “A Communication: Africa and the Colonial Problem.” 1944. *The New Republic* 110, 280-281, and “Naïve Self-Government.” 1944. *Foreign Affairs* 22:3, 413-423, where he argues that colonial official should take the natives point of view and that native peoples should be induced to change, it should not be imposed..

¹¹⁴ Simon Ottenberg 1968. *Double Descent in an African Society: the Afikpo Village-Group*. Seattle: University of Washington Press: Simon Ottenberg 1971. *Leadership and Authority in an African Society: the Afikpo-Village Group*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

¹¹⁵ Yet sometime in the 1980s a friendly British anthropologist, Kenneth Little, at the University of Edinburgh, on his own initiative, tried to nominate me to become a member of the Association of British Anthropologists, on the basis of my work in Africa, some of which was in social anthropology. This was denied, not because of my scholarship record, but though I had taught a three-month seminar at the University of Ghana and been for a year and a half a member of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Ibadan, that I had not taught for a year in Britain or in a Commonwealth county, necessary for membership. I felt that I was being kept out, as an American, from an exclusive post-Empire scholarly club.

seemed so important then, have now largely disappeared, though the British still refer with some frequency to Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, A.R. Radcliffe and Bronislaw Malinowski as their intellectual founders, more so I think than American anthropologists do to Boas, Kroeber and others.

Herskovits noted that as I prepared for Ph.D. research I was reading British social anthropology, which I found necessary. He jokingly called me a ‘sociologist,’ but I believe he realized that this reading was useful. After returning from our first field trip I taught for six months in the University of Chicago anthropology graduate program while working on my dissertation. I replaced Fred Eggan, teaching a quarter’s course on the ethnography of Africa, and the next quarter taught a theoretical course on Durkheim and Mauss, for which I had to do a good deal of quick catch-up, as the Northwestern anthropology program did not focus on these two scholars. Chicago was the center of British social anthropological thought in the United States, since A.R. Radcliffe-Brown had once taught there. It was a different scholarly world from Northwestern, for me a fascinating time. There was only rare communication among students at these two anthropological schools,¹¹⁶ though some of the Northwestern students, calling themselves the “Chicago subversion,” “determined to get another view,” attended lectures there “much to MJH’s chagrin.”¹¹⁷

Research Fulfillment

Some of us who went to Africa tended to study a “tribe” or aspects of a “tribe,” without much attention to influences coming from neighboring groups and those going

¹¹⁶ Yet Eggan wrote a letter of recommendation for me for my next position, as did Herskovits.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Ottenberg, Oct. 29, 2008, 5. On the same page he writes: “I never felt uncomfortable bearing the fruits of both traditions. Each had their value” a position I subscribe to.

out to others. Anthropology was still largely in its “tribal” stage; also true for work on Native Americans and much of British anthropology. We missed the extent of interactions across cultural groups in our research. Most of our Ph.D. dissertations were strong on descriptive ethnography with little theory, despite Herskovits’s emphasis in that direction. It was difficult to do deep analyses of research data using his concepts of cultural focus, enculturation and acculturation, which were broad ones in the grain of American anthropology at the time, though they did provide useful orientations.¹¹⁸ This was reflective of American anthropology in general. Boasian anthropology had been extended to Africa.

Some graduate students eventually went beyond Herskovits in theory. There was Armstrong’s project on Yoruba art, based not on field research, but on stylistic analysis employing Western aesthetics and phenomenology,¹¹⁹ the anthropology of Kopytoff on history and social organization,¹²⁰ Schneider on African economics,¹²¹ d’Azevedo edited a very fine book on African art and artists with a seminal article by him¹²² (though telling me that his Liberian work was on regional ethnic history, social organization and the

¹¹⁸ In a telephone conversation with me on October 29, 2008 David W. Ames felt the lack of training in theory and that he went to Gambia for his Ph.D. research to do ethnography.

¹¹⁹ Roy Sieber, in “Robert Plant Armstrong: A Memorial.” *African Arts* 20:1, 1986, 30; “Robert Plant Armstrong.” *Anthropology Newsletter {American Anthropological Association}*. 1984. 25:7, 3. Armstrong had been a professional editor before turning to anthropology. He taught at the University of Texas, Dallas in the years before his death. His best known work is *The Affecting Presence: an Essay in Humanistic Anthropology*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971.

¹²⁰ Suzanne Meiers and Igbo Kopytoff, eds. 1977. *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*. Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press; Igor Kopytoff, ed. 1987. *The African Frontier: the Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

¹²¹ Edward E. LeClair and Harold K. Schneider, eds. 1968. *Economic Anthropology: Readings in Theory and Analysis*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, a revision of Herskovits’s *Economic Anthropology: a Study in Comparative Economics*. 1952. New York: Knopf, itself revised by Herskovits from his *Economic Life of Primitive Peoples*. 1940. New York: Knopf. Harold K. Schneider 1974. *Economic Man: the Anthropology of Economics*. New York: Free Press. Schneider’s Ph.D. field research was in part a testing of Herskovits’s Ph.D. at Columbia University on the cattle complex in East Africa, See Melville J. Herskovits 1926. Also see Harold K. Schneider. 1970. *The Wahi Wanyaturu: Economics in an African Society* Chicago: Aldine.

¹²² Warren L. d’Azevedo, ed. 1973. *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

effects of nationalism”).¹²³ There were studies of Ijaw enculturation by Leis,¹²⁴ Merriam’s musical work,¹²⁵ Crowley’s wonderful articles on festivals all over the world,¹²⁶ and Phoebe, my former wife’s study of women at Afikpo, which was never published in full.¹²⁷ The most theoretically oriented student of all of us was and is probably James Fernandez, who has gone deeply into metaphor and various other forms of trope.¹²⁸

During the 1949-1962 period at Northwestern twenty one anthropology graduate students completed dissertations based on Africa and some ten in other departments.¹²⁹ For West Africa, David W. Ames went to the Gambia and Senegal (and later among the Hausa and Igbo of Nigeria), Vernon R. Dorjahn was in Sierra Leone, Warren L d’Azevedo in Liberia, Robert Lystad and James B. Christensen in Ghana, and Peter Hammond in the then Upper Volta. In Nigeria there were John C. Messenger, James H. Vaughan, Simon and Phoebe V. Ottenberg and Philip E. and Nancy B. Leis (the latter finishing her degree in 1964) and Justine M. Johnson Cordwell carried out research on Yoruba and Benin art before my time but finished during it, James W. Fernandez researched in Gabon, John H. Hamer went to Ethiopia, Harold K. Schneider was in Kenya, Charles E. Fuller in Mozambique, Alvin W. Wolfe, and Igor Kopytoff in Zaire,

¹²³ Letter from d’Azevedo to Ottenberg, Oct. 29. 2008, 5. See his “Tribe and Chiefdom on the Windward Coast.” *Liberian Studies Journal* 14:2, 1989, 90-116; “Some Historical Problems in the Delineation of a Central West Atlantic Region.” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 96:2, 512-536; “Tribal Reaction to Nationalism.: Parts 1-4.” *Liberian Studies Journal* 1:2, 1-21; 2:1, 43-63; 2:2, 99-115; 3:3, 1-19, 1969-1971.

¹²⁴ Leis 1972; Marida Hollos and Philip Leis. 1989..

¹²⁵ Alan P. Merriam. 1964. *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

¹²⁶ For example, “The Carnival of Guinea-Bissau.” 1989. *The Drama Review* 32:2, 74-86.

¹²⁷ Phoebe Ottenberg. 1958. Marriage Relationships in the Double Descent System of the Afikpo Ibo of Southeastern Nigeria. Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University.

¹²⁸ James W. Fernandez 1986. *Persuasions and Performances; the Play of Tropes in Culture*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; James W. Fernandez, ed. 1991. *Beyond Metaphor: the Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

¹²⁹ Northwestern University c. 1968; Northwestern University n. d.

Arthur Tuden in Northern Rhodesia and Norman A. Scotch studied hypertension in South Africa. S. Joshua L Zake wrote on legal systems in non-literate societies basing his analysis on twelve published cases. Only Scotch's dissertation was directly of an applied nature. Most students researched in English-speaking areas, seven going to non-English-speaking areas.

Ten students studied Afro-Americans during this same period, including George Robinson Ricks on gospel music in the United States. For South America, Alan P. Merriam wrote his dissertation on a selection of 45 songs out of some 325 melodies from Bahia recorded by the Herskovitses in 1939, followed by research in the Congo,¹³⁰ while Robert Plant Armstrong did a statistical and comparative library dissertation of patterning based on Afro-Guyanese folklore collected by the Herskovitses in 1929 and on American Dakota Native Americans from published materials collected by Ella Deloria.¹³¹ Armstrong was later editor and director of the Northwestern University Press, during which it published a number of works on phenomenology. Ruy Coehlo wrote on the Black Caribs of Honduras and Thomas J. Price on religion among Columbian Negro communities. In 1945, before my time at Northwestern, Octavio da Costa Eduardo wrote a dissertation on "The Negro in Northern Brazil: a Study in Acculturation." Four students researched in the Caribbean: Margaret Fisher Katzin and Father Joseph Moore in Jamaica, Daniel Crowley in the Bahamas and Erika Eichorn Bourguignon in Haiti

¹³⁰ Alan P. Merriam 1951 *Songs of the Afro-Bahian Cults: an Ethnomusicological Analysis*. Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University;. "Alan Parkhurst Merriam." *Anthropology Newsletter [American Anthropological Association]*. 1980. 21:5, 3

¹³¹ The Herskovits's impressive collection of music and folklore from all of their Afro-American expeditions allowed not only Merriam and Armstrong to base their dissertations on it, but earlier Waterman as well. -

Anthropology dissertation subjects were as disparate as the peoples studied--on acculturation, kinship, religion, ethnohistory, folktales, on ethnomusicology, on health, on visual art and on the United Nations. The wide geographic areas of research and range of subjects reflected Herskovits's' omnivorous interests in African cultures everywhere and his anthropological interest in almost every aspect of culture, fulfilling his dream of true African and Afro-American programs. However, I believe that his greatest interests concern was in West African religion and its ties to the New World Negro.

Only Cordwell wrote her dissertation on art among all of these students who researched in Africa and Afro-America and I do not remember there was a course on African art, yet Fernandez has thoughtfully written;¹³² "But very early on I became aware of how important art was in the atmosphere at Northwestern. Everybody had gone to the field and come back with their collections. They talked a lot about their collections. Bill and Berta Bascom made a very important collection. That was all part of our experience there." Herskovits never insisted that we collect but the suggestion was in the air. He and Frances had in Dahomey, and we were aware of some of this art.

After finishing their studies many of the students remained committed to Africa or Afro-America, some of them returning to their first site for further work as did d'Azevedo and the Ottenbergs. However Crowley went on to study festivals all over the world and Messenger carried out research in Ireland and on the Irish in Montserrat and New Zealand. Most students went on to teach at a wide range of post-secondary institutions in the United States.¹³³

¹³² Peek, ed., 1969, 14.

¹³³ It is interesting that at least four of the Northwestern anthropology graduates had an interest in Native Americans: Merriam, born in Missoula, Montana and a student at the University of Montana, before his Ph.D carried out research on Flathead Native Americans, d'Azevedo, at the University of Nevada, Reno,

Despite questions that Herskovits raised about the propriety and value of applied work, a few former students went in that direction, particularly Hugh Smythe, who went into the foreign service, Robert Lystad who for many years taught potential foreign service employees at the School of Advanced Studies, John Hopkins University, Sejjengo Josua Zake who held high level government administration in Uganda and Alan Merriam with a timely book explaining the background of the Congo conflict,¹³⁴ Norman Scotch continued in the field of medical anthropology, and Simon and Phoebe Ottenberg edited the report of the 8th National Conference of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO held in 1961,¹³⁵ but did not do any other applied work relating to Africa.

In 1959, to proudly publicize the African Program, Bascom and Herskovits edited *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*,¹³⁶ with fourteen papers based on Ph.D. research by its anthropology students. The papers reflected the editors increasing sensitivity to the changing African scene, something that Herskovits and some of his former students were to be much concerned with in future years. Shortly after Herskovits's death in 1963 Hsu and Merriam edited a series of papers by prominent anthropologists in Herskovits's memory.¹³⁷ Another collection of papers on Africa and

has had a long standing relationship with the Washoe of Nevada, beginning while he was still a student at Berkeley, David W. Ames, while teaching for eighteen months at the University of Wisconsin became deeply involved in applied anthropological work with the Menominee, and Ottenberg, teaching at the University of Washington in Seattle has maintained contacts with Salish artists in Washington State and British Columbia. In all four cases proximity of residence appears to have had something to do with contacts with Native Americans.

¹³⁴ Alan P. Merriam. 1961. *Congo, Background of Conflict*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

¹³⁵ Simon and Phoebe Ottenberg, eds., *Africa and the United States: Images and Realities. Final Report—8th National Conference of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, Boston, October 22-26, 1961*. Washington, D.C. UNESCO, 1962

¹³⁶ William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits 1959. *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹³⁷ In a series of issues of the journal *Current Anthropology* from 4:1 (February 1963) to 5:3 (June 1964). The writers were Richard M. Dorson, Margaret Mead, Max Gluckman, Fred Eggan, Irving Hallowell, Jacques J. Maquet, Edward P Dozier and Francis L. K. Hsu. Many were senior scholars in their fields,

Afro-American topics by thirteen of Bascom's former students at Northwestern and two at Berkeley appeared in 1982 as a *Festschrift* for him the year after he died, edited by myself. This collection had no theme other than to honor their teacher.¹³⁸

The Broadening of Anthropology and African Studies

Although Waterman left in 1956¹³⁹ for Wayne State University and Bascom for Berkeley in 1967, over time the anthropology department grew. Merriam, perhaps the closest disciple of Herskovits in thought and belief, taught from 1953 to 1962, Paul Bohannon, an American trained in British social anthropology who had worked among the Tiv of Nigeria, taught between 1959 and 1976 Edward P. Dozier, of Native American background, taught between 1953 and 1959, Daniel Crowley was an instructor in 1956-1957, W. Creighton Gabel, an archaeologist working in Africa taught in the department between 1956 and 1963, Robert A. Levine, who had researched in Nigeria and East Africa, taught between 1959 and 1962, and Herbert S Lewis, who worked in Ethiopia taught at Northwestern between 1961 and 1963.¹⁴⁰ Others came to teach for a summer session, such as Greenberg and George Easton Simpson. Herskovits was trying both to build both a well-rounded anthropology department and an African Program.¹⁴¹

Over time faculty and student interest in Africa at Northwestern developed in psychology, economics, political science, sociology, law, history, English, archaeology

publishing in a major anthropological journal, indicating the degree of recognition that Herskovits had achieved at the time of his death.

¹³⁸ Simon Ottenberg, ed. 1982. *African Religious Groups and Beliefs: Papers in Honor of William R. Bascom*. Berkeley, CA: Folklore Institute, and Meerut, India: Archana Publications.

¹³⁹ He died in 1971.

¹⁴⁰ I wish to thank Professor Caroline Bledsoe, Anthropology Department, Northwestern University, for locating a list of faculty in the Anthropology Department, which had been compiled by Jane C. Taylor, a departmental assistant in 1983.

¹⁴¹ Jane C Taylor, compiler 1983. Anthropology Faculty (Full-Time) – By Year 1938-1983. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, unpublished list.

and other departments, as a full-blown African interdisciplinary program rose out of the anthropological core, with anthropology no longer the central department, as political science, history and literature became the dominant Africanist fields nationally.¹⁴² By 1966 Northwestern's African Studies Program had nineteen faculty members in nine departments and some fifty five graduate students.¹⁴³ As both the anthropology and the African Studies Program grew at Northwestern, Herskovits himself grew, matured and enlarged as a person from the man who began teaching anthropology there in 1927 into a different figure.

The growing interdisciplinary nature of African studies was reflected nationally as African Programs arose at Boston, Indiana and Howard universities and the University of California, among others.¹⁴⁴ By 1966 David Brokensha listed 21 major African Studies centers in the United States, employing more than 250 faculty who had at least some interest in Africa, with some fifteen minor programs, both with approximately 600 graduate students focusing on Africa, studying either toward a certificate, an M.A. or a Ph.D, degree, generally through a department.¹⁴⁵ Virtually all of the faculty and students in the major and minor programs began their work after World War II. These are impressive numbers considering Northwestern's beginning in a very small way in 1948.

¹⁴² There is unfortunately no room to deal with these growth issues here, but the following references are helpful for the period of national expansion of African studies and its growth at Northwestern: African Studies Association 1958. "African Studies in the United States." *African Studies Bulletin* 1:1 6-20 and 1960, 3:1, 30-40; Gwendolen M. Carter 1976. "African Studies in the United States: 1955-1975." *Issue: a Journal of Opinion*. 6:2/3, 2-4; Gwendolen M. Carter and Ann Paden, eds. 1969. *Expanding Horizons in African Studies: Program of African Studies, Northwestern University*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. Northwestern University. c. 1968. Program of African Studies: the First Twenty Years 1948-1968. Evanston: Northwestern University, Northwestern University Archives, File PAS History. I thank Kevin Yelvington for supplying these references to me. Also see *African Studies Review* 26:3/4, 1983, and in that issue Aiden Southall, "The Contribution of Anthropology to African Studies," 63-76.

¹⁴³ David W. Brokensha. 1966. "African Studies in the United States" *African Studies Bulletin* 19:1, 59.

¹⁴⁴ Northwestern University c. 1968, 3, states that in 1968 that there were some forty African centers in the United States, twenty of them being major sites.

¹⁴⁵ Brokensha 1966, 38-80. A few of his major programs I would consider to be minor ones.

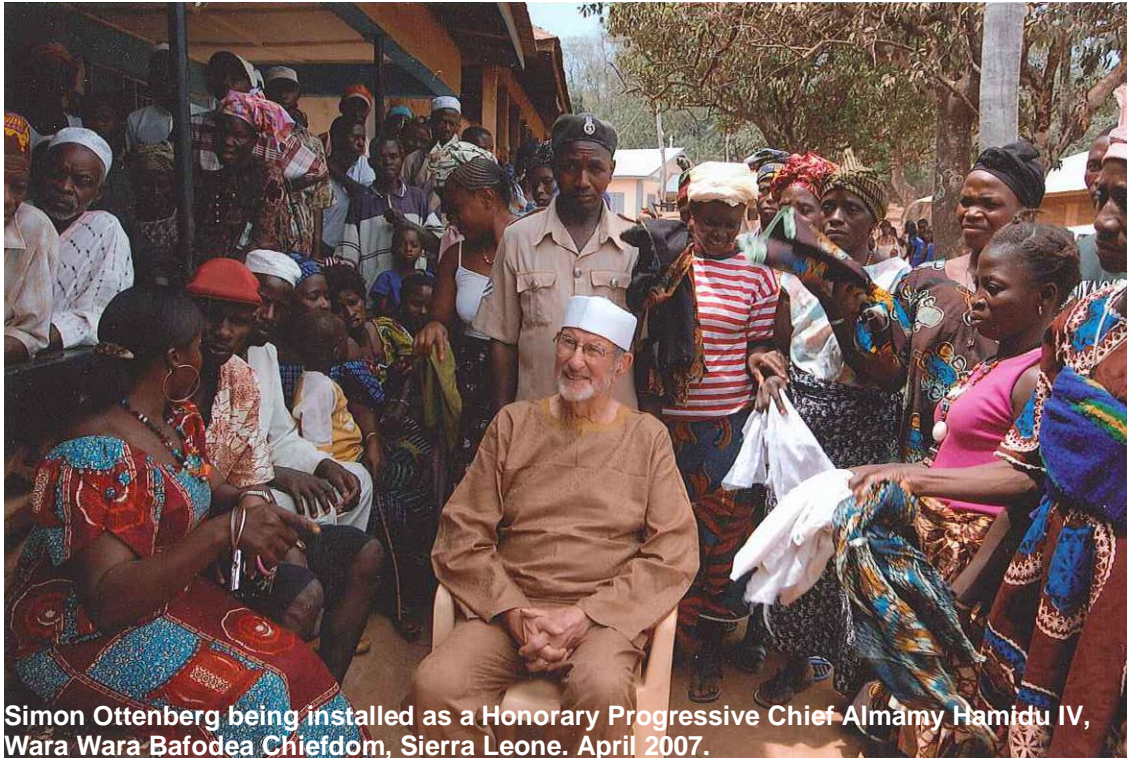
Of course, African Studies should be seen as a part of the general development of area studies programs that arose about the same time, Japanese, Chinese and Asian Studies in general, Latin America, European and Near and Middle Eastern Studies. African Studies has had its own special issues, particularly with Afro-Americans, as other programs have had with immigrants in the United States belonging to the people of their scholarly interest.

I do not know whether the Northwestern program has served as a model for any of the other African programs or those interested in other areas of the world, or whether each one simply evolved around specific geographic areas of Africa or particular topics due to who was there when they began and the nature of the institutional setting. It is also not clear to me what model for African Studies Herskovits had in mind when he began the African Program and how his conceptions of it evolved over time, other than that he had a broad interest both in a wide range of academic disciplines and also in all the regions of African south of the Sahara. The existence of both elements suggests that a wide-ranging program would develop, which also included Afro-American cultures. Despite criticisms of area studies as an educational form it has survived and prospered.

Among Herskovits's' contributions were his ideas on culture; the associated concepts of cultural dynamics, syncretism, retentions, reinterpretations, acculturation and enculturation have been further developed, by his students and others that came later. He himself made good use of them in his ethnographies interpretations of Africanisms in the New World. Although not the only scholar working on African culture in the New World, he was one of the founders of African diaspora studies in many fields, from music, art, oral literature and in the study of customs and forms of behavior. He proved right about

African influences in the New World, leaving other scholars to further explore the diaspora. He brought Boasian concepts to African and Afro-American studies and his students and others used, sharpened and modified these as anthropology itself changed. His openness in terms of allowing students to develop their own geographic regions of interest and topics of study, while leading to a lack of tight focus to the African Program other than around Herskovits's theories of culture, allowed students to experiment in going where they wished; thereby I believe that they did better work. His openness in seeing African studies as a truly interdisciplinary program at a time when departmental hegemony was dominant at Northwestern (as it was and generally still is elsewhere) showed early that an area program could live within Northwestern's strong academic departmental structure.

The graduate students I knew or knew of between 1949 and 1962 made substantial contribution to the study of African life and culture. They may be Herskovits's most significant legacy. As educational missionaries, wherever they taught or worked they spread the word on African and Afro-American culture. Their anthropologies were well done. These early scholars were pioneers, for which the Program of African Studies and Northwestern University should be proud.



Simon Ottenberg being installed as a Honorary Progressive Chief Almamy Hamidu IV, Wara Wara-Bafodea Chiefdom, Sierra Leone. April 2007.



Simon Ottenberg. Afikpo, Southeastern Nigeria, 1952