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FORUM: DECOLONIZING ANTHROPOLOGY: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Facing the flames

The Herskovitses, Trinidad, and the anthropological imagination

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Abstract

In June 1939, Melville Herskovits arrived in Trinidad. Already committed to his eponymous thesis of African cultural survivals, he identified the rural municipality of Toco as a site to observe "African ways of life … in greatest purity." The oil field strikes that gripped the island just two years earlier received only a passing mention in his monograph, *Trinidad Village*. This essay meditates on Herskovits's field notes to consider how a Boasian cultural paradigm compelled Herskovits to exclude the oil field labor from his study. Still, he is aggravated throughout by oil troubles of his own. Vexed by a faulty gasoline generator, Herskovits used his field diary to document his frustrated efforts to record audio of Shango songs in Toco. Engaging in a counterfactual thought experiment in which Herskovits pursued the aftermath of the oil field strikes as his object of study, this essay considers how Herskovits could have charted a distinct ontological ground for discipline of anthropology.

KEYWORDS

African diaspora, Caribbean, epistemology, history of anthropology, Melville Herskovits

"The boundaries of anthropology have always been problematic. … Never, however, so problematic as they are today" (Stocking, 1995, p. 933). It may surprise some readers that the lines that open this article are not my own, nor are they from today. In 1995, George Stocking penned these words on the crisis and reinvention of anthropology in response to the discipline's fragmentation into subfields and specialties. Stocking, however, insisted that it is not anthropology's disintegration but its boundaries that are especially problematic. Retracing the formalization of anthropology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Stocking regarded anthropology as a discipline ridden with quarrels and "boundary tensions" (p. 944) between national traditions, schools, and their corresponding patriarchs.

The unity of anthropology would not hold in an embattled intellectual field. But the aspiration to institutional permanence demanded that anthropology mark its boundaries in the sciences and their bureaucratic arrangement in the university. For Stocking, this consolidation of anthropological practice resembled a process of "fusion rather than fission" (p. 936). In other words, the development of anthropology emerged out of the boundaries and limits of the other human sciences. Anthropology did not adhere to definite approaches or methodological conventions. Instead, anthropology took shape as an experimental genre to resolve a problem that Wolf (1982) later glossed as "the people without history." We should recall that this is not a problem inherent to the people themselves; it is a problem of the profession of history and its colonialist hubris: "The peoples who became the primary subject matter of anthropology dropped through the boundary spaces between gradually separating disciplines" (Stocking, 1995, p. 940).

The heroic construction of anthropology—an effort to plumb this rift valley in the human sciences—soon gave way to generational anxieties over the valley's disappearance. The people without history, no longer the exclusive province of mythology and oral tradition, began to command the attention of professional historians. From the valley's crevasse, the people without history persisted in "gazing and talking back" through intellectual traditions that a North Atlantic geography of reason had long submerged (Jacobs-Huey, 2002). What role would anthropology play as the tectonic plates hovering

above this rift converged? If anthropology were to continue, it would need to locate another object as the conditions that prompted its development—instead of the people without history themselves—disappeared.

In my earlier call to let anthropology burn, I suggested that the practice of anthropology adopt this experimental register to "imagine a future for the discipline unmoored from its classical objects and referents" (Jobson, 2020, p. 261). In doing so, I contended that the attachment to relativism and cultural critique are relics of an epistemological problem no longer our own. The "boundaries of this boundless discipline," as Stocking astutely put it, cannot be taken for granted. As a discipline forged by fusion rather than fission, the contours of our practice must locate the new boundary spaces that are cast open between disciplines set adrift in the present.

This does not mean, however, that the boundary spaces easily reveal themselves to us. In taking a detour through the archive of anthropology—namely, the field notes and personal effects of Melville and Frances Herskovits—I am concerned with moments when the classical objects and referents of anthropology have stood in the way of the experimental tendency that birthed the discipline. As anthropology seeks its object and purpose in a time of climate change, civil conflict, and coronaviruses, we might consider how our own dilemmas were presaged by those facing the Herskovitses in a similarly troubled period.

ANTHROPOLOGY HESITANT

In June 1939, Melville and Frances Herskovits arrived in Trinidad armed with a Sound Scriber Junior recording machine, a Western Electric "Saltshaker" microphone, a Kato gasoline generator, and 200 12-inch acetate recording discs. Poised to make the most of the summer recess from his faculty post at Northwestern University, Melville set off in hot pursuit of his research object. By now already committed to the theory of African cultural survivals that would become synonymous with the Herskovits name after the publication of *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Herskovits, 1990), he arrived in Trinidad eager to gather further evidence for his "scale of intensity of Africanisms" in the form of Shouter Baptist faith and the Shango songs of its Trinidadian adherents.

On June 14, Herskovits caught his first glance of Trinidad through the porthole of his passenger ship. Yet he had already plotted his final destination beyond the initial port of call. His daily diary entry confirmed his itinerary: "Everyone seems to feel that the region I had felt was good for work, the northeastern part of the island is good, and all recommended the town called Toco."[1] Later, when Melville and Frances published the findings from this field trip in the volume *Trinidad Village*, they doubled down on Toco as best suited to the historical particularist directive of their Caribbean research.

> Because Shango worship was so near the capital, we thought it evident that this cult, and the African ways of life we assumed to be associated with it, would be met in greatest purity in the districts remote from this center of European contact. The choice of a community removed from Port-of-Spain was thus the first requisite. (Herskovits & Herskovits, 1976, p. v)

Charting a course informed by (but distinct from) his Boasian training, Herskovits documented African diasporic expressive forms across the Americas to dispel the myth of African cultural discontinuity and resolve domestic racial antagonisms in the United States. As a graduate student at Columbia University, Herskovits followed Franz Boas in adopting a four-field approach. In his studies of the anthropometry of the "American Negro," Herskovits observed skeletal and phenotypic variation that compelled him to question the existence of "pure" races altogether (Herskovits, 1934, p. 540; see also Watkins, 2012).

Culture, therefore, provided an outlet for Herskovits to inquire into the "New World Negro" while shedding the racialist pretensions of his predecessors. His pursuit of culture presented its own problems, however. Trinidad, in particular, would not be passively incorporated into his schema of cultural survivals. As Rocklin (2012, p. 57) details in his own critical survey of Herskovits's Trinidad field notes, Herskovits's desire to attribute Shouter Baptist religious practice to a conceptual baseline of African cultural origins led him to neglect the influence of other transoceanic circuits that included "European magic, fraternal organizations, Hinduism, and Islam." His curiosity about this "cult" of Shango worship is less an indulgence of "pristine survivals from a timeless past" (Wolf, 1982, p. 385) than an effort to extract culture as a stable object from a colonial field of significance. Whereas Trouillot (1992, p. 22) warns us that the Caribbean does not easily yield to the culture concept given the assiduous historical "mess" of colonial plantation societies, the Herskovitses sought a fix in the remote field site of Toco. Despite their best efforts, Toco did not submit to a linear model of acculturation. Herskovits threaded Trinidad into his scale with an added conceptual stitch. In *Trinidad Village*, Melville and Frances introduced the framework of "cultural focus," under which diasporic communities retain those features of an originary culture "which hold greatest interest for them" (Herskovits & Herskovits, 1976, p. 6).

Herskovits championed Toco as an exemplary locus of cultural continuity under conditions of contact and change, which "form a representative segment of the range of New World Negro cultures that together give us a veritable historical and social laboratory" (Herskovits & Herskovits, 1976, p. 5). The purification of a cultural laboratory in Toco cohered at the expense of other promising directions for his Trinidad research. The remaining sentences of his diary entry on June 14, 1939, however, reveal his awareness of Trinidad's fragile incorporation into his calculus of African retentions: "The south should be difficult, if only because of the labor troubles that they have been having there the past two or three years because of its intense industrialization."[2] The exact source of this difficulty remains unspecified. Is it the oil fields and their modern tempo of waged industrial work or the anthropological attachment to the culture concept that inspired the Herskovitses' flight to Toco?

On June 19,1937, oil field workers began a sit-down strike in the south Trinidad village of Forest Reserve, triggering an island-wide general strike. Expelled by management when they refused to work, the strikers were joined by unemployed and "hooligan" elements as they marched to a nearby town, Fyzabad Junction (Forster, 1938, p. 38). The strikers exchanged blows with police after the latter failed to apprehend the charismatic labor leader Uriah Butler. Black smoke billowed above the forest after saboteurs set a pumpjack ablaze on the nearby Apex Oilfield. The colonial governor summoned the Royal Marines to disperse the mob, but not before strike fever had pervaded the entire island—its oil fields, sugar estates, harbor fronts, markets, and public works.

Two years later, when Herskovits arrived, he remained firm in his methods. The fiery milieu that pervaded the sugar plantations and oil fields stood outside of his culturalist preoccupations. But still, oil frustrated his inquiry into Shango worship. After arriving in Toco, Herskovits took inventory of his cargo. While the Kato generator survived the journey to Trinidad's rural Northeast intact, the start of his field recordings was delayed because he was compelled to "wait until the right kind of oil" was "obtained from Sangre Grande."[3]

Herskovits passed the time by continuing his review of relevant scholarly literature with annotations cataloged on three-by-five-inch index cards. W. M. MacMillan's (1938) *Warning from the West Indies: A Tract for the Empire* gripped his attention for a moment. MacMillan, a Scottish historian best known as a liberal critic of British colonial rule in Africa and the Caribbean, updated the preface to the 1938 edition of *Warning from the West Indies* with the urgent tenor sounded by militant Caribbean workers: "The 'warning' of this book's title was originally an appeal and looked to the future. Already the tense has changed" (MacMillan, 1938, p. 13). But it was the "Negro past," rather than the political present, that concerned Herskovits. Herskovits equivocated in his appraisal of *Warning from the West Indies* before settling on an agnostic reading of his Aberdonian colleague:

> There is no question that the economic situation is very serious, and that his predictions of unrest, exemplified in the strikes a couple of years ago in the oilfields here, were shrewdly made. Certainly study in any West Indian community, even such a one as this, must be projected against the general economic situation in its particular manifestation, since this cannot but affect the ethnographic picture.[4]

In the end, Herskovits dismissed the book in his notes as "somewhat superficial and very socialworky [*sic*]."[5] Herskovits relegated the labor troubles of the colonial West Indies to the background, deeming the political philosophy of working people in the postemancipation Caribbean outside his delineated field of study. This was not the stuff of his anthropology. After three more days of patient anticipation, his salvation arrived: "The oil for my generator finally came, and though at first it looked as though something was fundamentally wrong, the machine finally worked."[6]

For the Trinidadian polymath C. L. R. James (1981, p. 22), the general strike marked the formative expression of a Caribbean political consciousness against the colonial plantation economy:

> The burning of canefields is as plain as ever, as stated before, the rejection of the whole society based upon the plantation system. … When we look at oilfield workers we enter another world, rejecting in a similar fashion a society based on the plantation system.

This change in tense from an anticipated future to the political present would enrapture a generation of Caribbean intellectuals as they distilled the imminent philosophy of the uprisings that swept the region in the 1930s. In 1937, Trinidad workers mobilized race consciousness and Ethiopianism against the entrenched racial stratification of oil field management and the persistence of Crown colony rule in their demands for living wages, food security, and self-government.

Butler, remembered principally as a labor organizer and advocate for colonial self-governance, rallied workers in a distinctly evangelical register. Rarely seen without a Bible in hand, Butler likened his organization to the Old Testament Israelites and himself to the prophet Moses. As the Butlerite MacDonald Stanley (1986) later put it, Butler assumed he was "sent by God to save the workers of Trinidad from the exploitation of the colonial powers under the British imperial system." Unbeknownst to the Herskovitses, Butler had expanded his party base through the proselytism of his Moravian Baptist Church to Spiritual (Shouter) Baptist congregations of workers and peasants in southern Trinidad (Reddock, 1994, p. 141). Indeed, his contemporaries regarded Butler as a "fanatic" and "lunatic" in contrast to the bourgeois labor leaders of Port of Spain (Rocklin, 2021, p. 209). While the Fabian socialist Trinidad Labour Party sang "The Internationale" at its gatherings, Butler convened his British Empire Citizens' and Workers' Home Rule Party with a Baptist hymn in the form of a revival meeting (Reddock, 1994, p. 141).

After resurfacing to offer testimony to the Royal Commission of Enquiry in September 1937, Butler was charged with sedition and jailed for two years. Although Butler remained incarcerated on Nelson Island during the Herskovitses' fieldwork in 1939, his evangelical following did not disappear in his absence. While the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union formed and achieved legal recognition under the guardianship of middle-class leadership, Butler loyalists and members of his British Empire Citizens' and Workers' Home Rule Party flouted the restraint of the union bureaucracy as they ventured from "village to village, estate to estate, oilfield to oilfield" to cultivate the popular base of a mass party (Harvey, 1974, p. 21).

Herskovits, indeed, could have looked to the oil fields as a vibrant archive of Africanisms. Yet the culture concept would not suffice to describe this landscape of anti-colonial agitation and song. Rather than the formal linguistic and kinesthetic elements of folklore, song, and dance, these Africanisms required a careful study of Baptist revival songs alongside the circum-Atlantic print culture of newspapers such as *The Negro Worker*

and Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*, the militant labor organizing of the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association under the direction of Elma Francois and Jim Headley, and squatters' "counter-plantation system" of subsistence cultivation on Crown lands and oil company estates (Casimir, 2020).

Songs remained at the center of the Herskovitses' Trinidad field trip. The gas generator, however, continued to frustrate Herskovits throughout the summer months. His diary entries convey his struggles with temperamental equipment.

> July 26: In the afternoon we were all set to get some Shango songs and some good Baptists, but for some reason the machine wouldn't function. I think it is likely that the trouble is in the generator, and a man is coming from the village tomorrow morning to repair it. I hope my diagnosis is correct, since otherwise it means a trip into Port-of-Spain, which I most certainly do not anticipate with any pleasure.

> July 31: In the afternoon our best singers turned up ready to sing, but the machine balked again, and this time it is serious. Apparently it is not the generator, but in the motor that turns the turntable or in some connection there, and is thus beyond the help of local talent. It is most irritating—we changed all the tubes with no result, and did what we could, but the thing still balks. It will mean a trip to Port-of-Spain, and even there it is a question if it can be repaired.

> August 3: Up early, and off to town before seven, arriving shortly after nine. Alston's, where I took the apparatus, found the trouble at once—in the generator, which had accumulated so much moisture that the brushes wouldn't work.

> August 4: I started the motor as soon as I got there, but, alas, the trip yesterday has been nullified apparently by the heavy downpour, plus the fact that I trusted Alston's men to load the machine with the tarpaulin about it to protect it, which they didn't. So I've run the thing four hours today, and am going on doing that in the hope that the brushes will evenly bake out, as Claudie suggests. If it doesn't come back over the weekend, I'll have the thing gone over again or borrow some batteries! It's really terribly negligent of everyone concerned—here I've been remembering the advice about moisture and protecting the recording apparatus for all I'm worth, and no one said anything about the generator except that I could forget it, since it would work under any conditions.

> August 16: Allan and his team came to sing while we were at the pool. The results when we got to work with them weren't very happy, for the motor is running unevenly, which affects the speed of the turntable and gives a terrific variation in pitch that gives me my latest headache with the apparatus.[7]

Herskovits's persistence paid dividends in the form of hundreds of field recordings on acetate discs. But the specter of the oil fields continued to haunt his study. In the throes of his generator troubles, Herskovits documented a chance encounter:

> August 14: Brierly turned up late in the afternoon, and we had him work for dinner and the night, since tomorrow is payday. We talked for a long time after dinner; his attitude toward the blacks is of the best, and I can understand how he is liked. As a Creole (his father came to this island from Ireland) he has little patience with the attitude of some of the imported officials, and the way he told of the 1937 riots, how not only the economic element was important but the attitude of resentment against the way in which many of the oil field officials would call a man "You nigger!" in ordering him about, showed a highly realistic point of view.[8]

In a brief aside, his jottings gesture at another framing of his inquiry that is less preoccupied with the tense of the cultural past than the urgent tenor of the political present. The oil fields represented the grounds of simmering West Indian national consciousness, where the ordinary workers' desires for a life beyond the plantation clashed violently with British and South African company overseers.

Herskovits arrived in Trinidad against this backdrop. It is not inconceivable, then, that he could have pursued his Toco interlocutors' anecdotes toward a study of anti-colonial agitation at this critical period when war in Europe appeared inevitable and Trinidad remained the largest supplier of oil in the British Empire. If not for his commitments to the Boasian culture concept as the raison d'être of US anthropology, Herskovits could indeed have faced the fires of workers' insurgency through an ethnographic inquiry into the rise of a mass party out of the embers of plantation slavery and indenture in the Caribbean.

What might his study have become if not for the fortuitous arrival of gas to fuel his generator? His research could not have continued as planned without the cooperation of a delicate assembly of recording technologies and gasoline distribution works. Would the failure to secure gas supplies have inspired Herskovits to venture further south to confront the source of his frustration?

On September 9, as Melville and Frances prepared for their return to Evanston, they made their maiden voyage to the oil belt.

> September 9: We took a long ride through the rain to see the southern part of the island, and though one only got a superficial look, it was

> worth it, as it gave some conception of the industrial, sugar-raising part. We went down through Point-a-Pierre, where there are refineries, through San Fernando, a very important and busy city, to Fyzabad where the oil-fields commence.[9]

In the end, this counterfactual course of Herskovitsian anthropology would not come to pass. His field notes afford us just a "superficial look."

ANTHROPOLOGY UNBOUND

At this point, I must admit my own flight of fancy. In November 2017, I went looking for Trinidad in the Melville Herskovits papers at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. I arrived in Harlem as a newly minted PhD in anthropology and African American studies. Having recently completed a dissertation on oil and gas politics in Trinidad, I requested his papers not to trace the history of anthropology but to reconstruct the pivotal period of Caribbean working-class consciousness in the 1930s.

My previous knowledge of Herskovits did temper my expectations. After all, my introduction to anthropology had come through Herskovits and his corpus of writings on the "Negro in the New World" (Herskovits, 1930). I had read *Trinidad Village* on several occasions and understood well the narrow focus of his research in Toco. Yet I still hoped to gather a fuller portrait of the world that the Trinidadian working class had made. Even if Herskovits neglected these elements in his published works, perhaps his field notes would provide evidence that stretched beyond the scope of his study.

I am not the first to engage in a thought experiment of this sort when it comes to Herskovits. Scott (2014, p. 38), for instance, looks to Herskovits's research in Haiti during the twilight of the US military occupation as a missed opportunity in which "he might well have constructed Haiti as a political problem about sovereignty rather than a cultural problem about Africa in the Americas." Indeed, for anthropologists of the African Americas, the return to Herskovits has become something of a "customary, if not mandatory" obligation (Apter, 2004, p. 160; see also Mintz, 1964; Palmié, 2002, 2022; Price & Price, 2003; Rocklin, 2012; Scott, 1991; Slocum & Thomas, 2003). Ultimately, my archival reverie did not yield what I had hoped. There was no "shadow archive" where I would encounter "hidden identities, affiliations, and political ambivalences and fantasies," following the literary historian Jean-Christophe Cloutier (2019, p. 9). Refusing a fickle impulse to dispense with the classics of the anthropological archive, I sought to locate my own anthropology at the fringes of Herskovits's own—in a path not taken by Melville and Frances in the summer of 1939.

In a moment of introspection, however, I might ask what my participation in this ritual suggests about the hold that classical anthropological idioms still have on our methodological and epistemological conventions. Here, the commandment to return to the classics is often taken to be a thinly veiled effort to plant the flag of ethnographic theory back in its proper ground against the shifting demographics of the academy and the location of theory production.[10] In this race for anthropological theory, the subject position of Melville Herskovits affords him pride of place in the anthropological archive of the African Americas—over and above the earlier acculturation paradigms of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz and Haitian ethnologist Jean Price-Mars (Yelvington, 2011). In the case of Herskovits's contemporary and fellow student of Franz Boas, Zora Neale Hurston, her work is read, assigned, and cited for her literary style and descriptive accounts of folklore in the Caribbean and US South rather than as a theoretical contribution to Black life par excellence.[11] That I went looking for Melville where Alice Walker (1983) went "looking for Zora" should indicate something about my own disciplining into the guild of anthropology and its oedipal attachments to canonical forefathers.

My entreaty to "let anthropology burn" arose out of an effort to shed my own tacit attachments to method and genre (Jobson, 2020). Against calls to expand an anthropological canon or diversify anthropology departments through token gestures of inclusion, the call to let anthropology burn is an appeal instead to resist the impulse to close ranks around what Mazzarella (2019) terms the "liberal settlement"—that is, an idealist domain of knowledge production that lives outside the existential threats of climate catastrophe and state violence. To face the reality of the political present demands that we forge an intellectual practice that is less committed to the reproduction of the discipline through its race for theory than the necessity to "evangelize the already existing capacities of working people to govern themselves" (Jobson, 2022).

To let anthropology burn, though, is not a demand to dispense with the classics but an invitation to encounter them anew.[12] My unfulfilled desire for Herskovits to unmoor himself from his closely held anthropological objects and referents sustains my intellectual waltz with his archive. But this need not be the end of our encounter with the Herskovitses. To read their archive as I have is to understand anthropology not as an already-settled history of intellectual movements but as a contingent and polyvalent tradition that reflected the preoccupations of the Herskovitses' time. Passing through Melville's field diaries, I wanted him to encounter his gas troubles not as an obstacle to his ethnography but as an opportunity to widen the boundaries of the discipline. I wanted him to conceive of Africanisms as matters of philosophy as well as form. I wanted Melville and Frances to rub shoulders with Butlerites as they cultivated the grassroots democracy of working people in their demands for land, wages, and self-government with Shouter songs and rhythms.

Of course, the Herskovitses did not; their anthropology is not our own. But to dwell with them is to consider how our own disciplinary training and attachments continue to inform how we assess what constitutes anthropology in the present. The Herskovitses were guided not simply by their independent preoccupations but by the demands of a field still pursuing institutional permanence.

Where Herskovits failed to face the flames of workers' agitation in south Trinidad in the name of anthropology, we should consider what anthropology permits and what we fail to confront in the name of disciplinary survival. When anthropology

finds itself on the chopping block as a casualty of university budget cuts—as many departments of anthropology have in recent years—it is not a classical investment in culture and relativism that will rescue us from bureaucratic retrenchment. Here, I am inviting us to be unabashed in our rejection of a stable object that we often adopt as a shorthand for our contributions to university curricula and the credentialing circuit of higher education.

Savannah Shange, once again, sets the record straight. There is much to praise in the work we do as anthropologists who toil toward liberation. As Shange (2022, p. 188) reasons, "There are also parts of the disciplinary toolkit that are useful for world-making: listening deeply, bearing witness, challenging the inevitability of the state, and building deep transnational and cross-diasporic relations." While anthropology and fieldwork offer a license to delight in such boundary-crossing acts of comradeship and solidarity, this is rarely credited as an essential, rather than incidental, feature of the guild.[13] This is less a proposal to tally political engagement for the purposes of tenure and promotion than to consider how the demands of anthropology—its dwindling grant and fellowship competitions, tenure-stream job opportunities, and flagship peer-reviewed publications—discourage us from engaging in critical work that is not already legible as anthropology.

Stocking (1995, p. 963) breaks it down clearly: "In the face of funding cuts … [anthropology,] despite its internal fragmentation, is strongly impelled to re-present itself in unified and scientific terms." As he reminds us, to close ranks around a liberal settlement will not insulate the discipline against an uncertain future. Letting anthropology burn permits us to step into an anthropology unbound, where moving further "toward an anthropology for liberation" requires us to fashion our objects and approaches anew rather than with passive recourse to the old (Harrison, 1997).

This, more than any indictment of personal or intellectual shortcomings, is the lesson of the Herskovitses in Trinidad. What other possible encounters evaporated under the pressure to collect Shango songs on an uncooperative recording device? Rather, in facing the flames, we may resist the impulse to close ranks around the classical objects of anthropology and instead authorize ourselves to pursue the paths not taken toward a "ruthless criticism of the existing order" that we have inherited (Marx, 1843). It would be an error to carelessly dispense with Melville and Frances Herskovits when their own predicament so closely resembles our reticence to face the flames of the present. Any remedy to this predicament will spring from the joys of "boundless energy of an unbounded discipline" (Stocking, 1995, p. 963), one that may or may not persist under the banner of something we call anthropology.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, June 14, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center).

[2] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, June 14, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[3] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, June 21, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[4] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, June 22, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[5] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, June 22, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[6] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, June 25, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[7] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, July 26–August 16, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[8] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, August 14, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[9] Trinidad Field Trip, Diary, September 9, 1939, box 15, folder 82, Herskovits Papers, Schomburg Center.

[10] Notable exceptions to this tendency include the following: Benton (2017); Bonilla (2017); Jackson (2017).

[11] Harrison (2008, p. 278) describes this dynamic at length, noting that it follows the incorporation of Hurston into not only disciplinary curricula but also the professional lives of Black women anthropologists under a "racial/gendered economy of knowledge." As she demonstrates, following Christian (1987), the race for theory unfolds at the expense of Black women scholars who, by dint of peer review and predatory "mentorship," find that "their writing, published primarily as descriptive accounts, has been denuded of much of the theoretical and metatheoretical content of earlier drafts" (Harrison, 2008, p. 278). How, and why, we engage the anthropological archive rests fundamentally on how we apprehend this "racial/gendered economy of knowledge" in our practices of citation and substantive theoretical engagement.

[12] I often think of my late colleague Marshall Sahlins's lament that classic anthropology titles had been emptied from the main stacks at the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago and condemned to a subbasement storage facility. In an "Emeritus Rant" posted to Facebook in August 2017, Sahlins (2017) frames this logistical injury as a worry for the future of his discipline: "Why is a century of the first hand ethnography of cultural diversity now ignored in the training and work of anthropologists?" This article should evince my own appreciation for this archive and that any disagreement with Sahlins lies not in substance but in form. Engaging this ethnographic archive is a matter less of preserving essential truths about the human condition than of making sense of how scholars have endeavored (often futilely) to chart a path beyond the existing order of things.

[13] Burton's (2021) expansive methodological toolkit of "epistolary" ethnography, conducted via letter exchanges with inmates in New York State prisons, offers a noteworthy exception to this rule. This, and Burton's forthcoming monograph on the Attica prison uprising, promise to chart the way forward for any anthropology worthy of practice in the 21st century.

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