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FIELD DAYS: MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS IN DAHOMEY

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I

In recent years anthropologists and literary critics, most importantly George Stocking Jr. (1983), James Clifford and George E. Marcus (1986), and Clifford Geertz (1987), have led the way to a closer reading of the writings of early anthropologists and a fuller exploration of the intellectual climates in which they were working.¹ As the founder of African studies in this country, Melville J. Herskovits is of considerable importance in terms of related scholarship in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Although an anthropologist by training, Herskovits had a major impact on the development of African scholarship in many other disciplines—from the history of art to folklore to political and economic history. Herskovits' field research methodologies and orientations thus potentially are of considerable significance. Despite Herskovits' critical role in African studies, there has been relatively little scholarly interest to date in his African research methodologies.²

Herskovits' unpublished field notes of his Dahomey research provide us with an inside look at the principal field strategies and orientations of this important African scholar. These field materials today are housed in the archives of three different research institutions: The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City; the library of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois; and the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.³ The largest grouping of Herskovits' Dahomey field materials (journals, financial records, artifact collection, photographs, correspondence) are at the Schomburg Center. At Northwestern University are found various diary extracts, song transcriptions, and the bulk of Herskovits' early and later correspondence. Recordings that Herskovits made in the course of the Dahomey research are located at Indiana University.

These field materials, it will be suggested, offer important insight into Herskovits' African research. Although Herskovits was later to emphasize to

his own students the need to take great care in field work documentation, his notes suggest that he was considerably less careful in his own research. Nearly all the information is taken down in what might be called ethnographic shorthand rather than in verbatim transcripts. The field notes also suggest that the amount of time Herskovits' spent in the course of active Dahomey research—about 3 1/2 months—was remarkably brief considering the amount of material on Dahomey that he would later publish. These field materials document as well the fact (already noted in the published works of later Dahomey scholars)³ that Herskovits relied almost exclusively on information provided by a single source, Prince René Aho. Finally, while Herskovits stresses in his published writing that his work is primarily descriptive, his field notes indicate that he attended few ceremonies or related events. Much of the published material is thus based on secondary information and descriptions from other observers. The following discussion of Herskovits' Dahomey research is organized around four subject areas: the format of the Dahomey field notes; the research schedule and time in the field; the selection of people who were interviewed; and the research program and principal orientations.

II

The Dahomey Field Notes: Format and Features

The Dahomey field notes now in the Schomburg Center (Box 10, 11, see Appendix I) are contained in a series of eleven small handwritten notebooks 8 1/2 by 7 1/2 inches high and wide. A twelfth notebook having the same format contains field data from the Asante portion of the trip. Each of these field notebooks (which will be referred to below as the Field Journals) is about 1/4" thick and contains around 46 sheets. An additional notebook (referred to below as the Accounts Book) has information on expenditures and personnel. Two separate notebooks (called here the Bibliographic Journals) contain bibliographic notes and quotations from published sources (mostly from a short stay in Paris.)⁴ Typed Diary Sheets (Box 9) consisting of 134 (8 x 10") pages incorporate dated entries from February 24 to June 29. Typed summary files ordered by theme (Box 12) are also at Schomburg.

The Field Journals for Dahomey are roughly chronological. Field Journal One appears to date from 9 April to 26 April 1931. Field Journal Two dates from around 26 April to 6 May 1931. Field Journals Three to Five were written from approximately 6 May to 16 May 1931 and seem to have been filled concurrently. Field Journal Six dates from about 16 May to 20 May 1931, while Field Journals Seven and Eight were completed from about 20 May to 3 June 1931 and, like Field Journals Three to Five, they appear to have been written concurrently. Field Journals Nine, Ten, and Eleven were completed roughly between 4 June and 18 July 1931. Again these journals appear to have been filled in simultaneously. Field Journal Twelve covers 18 July through 17 August 1931. Because there are few indications of dates in the Field Journals, the above dating sys-

tem is only approximate. Since place names are also rare, the location of Melville and Frances Herskovits when completing the various notebooks is also not certain. However, Books One through Nine appear primarily to cover the Abomey research period. Books Ten and Eleven seem to deal especially with information from Allada and Whydah and, as noted, Book Twelve is exclusively dedicated to the Asante research.

Nearly all the information in the Field Journals is taken down in what might be called ethnographic shorthand (short notes) rather than in verbatim transcripts. Like dates and places, the interviewees' names are for the most part not included. Some of this information, however, does appear in the Diary Sheets. The notebooks are all written in English, with a very new notations of Fon or other local language terms.⁵ The writing is in two different hands. A notation in Book Three (p. 30) "continued on typewriter" apparently refers to the typed Diary Sheets at Schomburg. This notation also coincides with the typed Diary Excerpts that are located today in the Northwestern University library.⁶ Four separate notebooks (here called Recording Journals) of the same size as the main Field Journals contain transcriptions of songs that were recorded by the Herskovitses on photographic records. There are several references in the notes to the use of these records. For instance, Field Journal One (p. 2) refers to "song, record #35," and similar notations follow. Such records are discussed by the Herskovitses in *Dahomean Narrative*. A fifth notebook contains record transcriptions from the Asante leg of the trip.⁷

Outside of the field materials at the Schomburg Library, the largest corpus of the Herskovits' Dahomey field materials is that which is today housed in the Special Collection section of Northwestern University Library (Box 163, bundle 4). Both the library label of this material ("Diary Excerpts") and their contents suggest that they were typed in the course of fieldwork. These field materials (referred to here as Dairy Excerpts: see Appendix II) consist of a series of typed 4 x 6 cards which are each labeled with sequential digits running from 39 to 134. For many of the cards there are duplicates. A few of these notecards are dated; their numerical order appears to be chronological as well.

While relatively few in number and brief in content, these cards, like the Diary Sheets, provide additional information on the people interviewed and sources of information collected by Melville and Frances Herskovits in the field. The Diary Excerpts also tend to contain more personal perspectives than the Field Journals provide. Additional notecards in the Northwestern Herskovits archives on the Dahomey research include typed transcriptions from the publications of earlier writers on Dahomey (Bosman, Dalzel, Duncan, Foa, Forbes, M'Leod, Norris, Skertchly, Smith, and Snelgrave, among others). Also included in the Dahomey file (number 163, Bundle 2) are a series of Fon lexicon cards and a set of cards with translations of Suriname songs. The typing of these cards appears all to have been done by Frances Herskovits, since there are various references to the activities of "Mel."

The Dahomey field materials at Indiana University consist of 241 recording cylinders made at Abomey, Allada, and Whydah (as well as in Nigeria and Ghana). These appear to constitute the bulk of the recordings made by the

Herskovitses in the course of their African research. Approximately twenty cylinders appear to be missing if the numbering system was accurate. Records 17-46 and 49-118 were made in Abomey; numbers 119-164 were recorded in Allada; numbers 165-188 in Whydah. The waulity of the recordings is described in the archive notes as being generally poor with low volume and high machine noise. Materials consisted primarily of songs: marriage songs, death songs, songs noting rites of passage fro children, songs of ridicule and insult, women's work songs, ancestral cult songs; and flute songs, among others. Transcriptions of the songs are included in the archives. These are written with Fon phrasing and English subtexts.

III

The Research Schedule: The Factor of Time

The Field Journals now at the Schomburg Center provide us with in-depth information on the Herskovits' program of research in Dahomey. These suggest that from the outset they intended to do the Dahomey field work in a very efficient way. It was not the first field experience for them, having previously undertaken research in Suriname, and perhaps bolstered by this prior experience and the knowledge that they would be working together, they set out to spend a total of five months in Africa. The Diary Sheets indicate that they arrived in Cotonou on March 30, 1931, after visiting various cities in Nigeria. Their departure at the end of the fieldwork period was from Ghana and took place on or about August 17.

The Herskovitses appear to have left the commercial center of Cotonou for Abomey on or about 4 April. They began research on April 9 the Diary Sheets indicate. A dated entry in the Diary Excerpt cards (number 45) for this date discusses palace bas-reliefs and thus confirms their presence in Abomey at this time. (The only earlier Diary Excerpt cards in the group [numbers 39-40] discuss an eclipse which the Herskovitses observed while in Cotonou.) The Herskovits' last listed Cotonou expense for this period is the payment of duty suggesting that they may have had to wait fro the unloading of their bags. A letter from A. K. Johnson of Abomey and dated 9 April found in the Accounts Book discusses the lease of a car. The first kilometer listed for the car is on this same date. A bicycle was purchased on 10 April. Miscellaneous supplies were acuquired on 12 April at French and Company in Abomey. These supplies are the first clearly documented expenses incurred in Abomey.

From 12 April through 17 June they appear to have been by and large in residence in Abomey, and this was the main period of their research in that center. Various expense entires are listed in the Accounts book during this time, ranging from food expenditures and collection purchases (artifacts) to salaries, "gifts," stamps, and telephone costs. (Between 13 April and 17 May all the collection purchases were made.) On 4 June Melville Herskovits appears to have returned to Cotonou. A mileage entry of around 120 km. is listed in the Accounts book on

this date and a notation "Mel got back" is typed on a Diary Excerpt card (number 128) shortly after a dated 6 June entry (number 126). In the Accounts Book another lengthy care trip is recorded on 8 June, and Melville Herskovits' return trip to Abomey probably occurred that day. The Diary Sheets indicate that Melville and René Aho went to "Adja" at this time. From 8-17 June there are no Diary Sheets. June 5 and 6 in turn are the last dated entries in the Diary Excerpts. Although research was clearly continued by them after 6 June, the Diary Excerpt cards stop at number 134. Evidence in the Field Journals indicates that they both left Abomey on 15 June. On 7 June rent is paid for one week (the amount, 37.50F is one quarter of the monthly Abomey rental fee of 150F). This amount would have taken them through the 15th. The last salary payment to René Aho, their Abomey translator, is also listed on 15 June. Supporting this departure date as well is the fact that the last listing for supplies purchased at French & Company in Abomey is noted on 13 June.

On 15 June, the field materials suggest that Melville and Frances Herskovits traveled from Abomey to Allada, the ancient Aizo capital midway between Abomey and Cotonou. On this date the Accounts Book indicates that they paid rent of 10F, probably for lodging in Allada. The amount of time that this rent covers is not clear, but it was most likely for a week—one-third the weekly rent in Abomey. There is a listing in the same book on 17 June for a truck to Allada suggesting that their personal effects were transported soon after the move. The notation "Allada" is written beside an entry for 17 June in the Diary Sheets. On 19 June there is a note in the Accounts Book for purchases at FAO in Atagon (Atiagon), a town just north of Allada. On 22 June they must have voyaged to Cotonou, for there is an entry for expenses in Cotonou on that date. In addition, there is a mileage listing on that day for 100 km; since Allada is 58 km. from the coast they may have made a subsidiary trip along the way. From 22 June to 11 July they stayed in Cotonou, traveling periodically up to Allada, as well as to Porto Novo, Nigeria, and southern Togo. Purchases at FAO in Cotonou are noted for 22 June. Two entries for Atagon purchases on 25 June and 2 July illustrate that they were back on Allada on these two dates. They probably also were in Allada on 29 June for in Book Eleven (p. 24) there is a reference to Allada just before a 29 June interview with Michael, one of the Allada interviewees. Entries for duty on 5 and 8 July suggest that on these dates they were back in Cotonou. An interview with Hwegbe on 5 July was also apparently undertaken in Cotonou since a later 11 July interview recorded in Book Nine with Hwegbe has "Cotonou" written at the top of the page. A (Cotonou) hotel bill (for 35F) is also paid by them on 11 July.

A trip to Porto Novo, the administrative capital of Dahomey, seems to have been undertaken during this Cotonou-Allada period. An undated notation for Porto Novo appears in Field Journal Ten (p. 37). The Field Journals also indicate that they visited western Togo during this time, as an undated entry in Field Journal Ten (p. 43) for a "trip to Adja" suggests, although where they visited is not clear. Interestingly, payment dates in the Accounts Book for the Abomey household staff suggest that the cook and "boy" may have travelled with

them for the above Allada and Cotonou segments of the trip. The cook, Hwegbe, was paid on 2 May, 3 June, and 2 July. The "boy" Ahasogbwe was paid on 9 May, 10 June, and 10 July. They may have helped to translate phonographic records on songs and tales collected earlier.

11 July appears to mark the end of this segment of the research. On this day they seem to have moved to Whydah where they stayed until 18 July. References to Whydah appear in Field Journal Eleven (on the last pages of the Dahomean Field Journals). An entry in the Accounts Book for 18 July regarding a truck to Cotonou on that date indicates that they returned from Whydah to Cotonou at this time. At any rate, by 20 July Melville and Frances Herskovits were in Ghana, as an Accra stamp in the passport indicates. In the Accounts Book there are also entries for food purchases on 25 July, the sums listed in pounds. This latter Ghana leg of the research trip appears to have lasted until 17 August, when the last of the charges for food was entered into the Accounts Book. The final Asokoni "dashes" are listed on 14 August. To my knowledge information on this Ghanaian segment of their field research has never been published.

As we have seen, the itinerary of their research in Africa includes stays at a number of different centers, most importantly Abomey, Allada, Whydah, and Asokoni? (Asante). The probable dates and places of their itinerary are as follows:

30 March 1931		Arrival in Cotonou
4 April	to 15 June 1931	Abomey
15 June	to 22 June 1931	Allada
22 June	to 11 July 1931	Cotonou and Allada, with occasional trips to Proto Novo/Southern Togo
11 July	to 18 July 1931	Whydah
18 July	to 20 July 1931	Cotonou
20 July	to 17 August 1931	Ghana

On page 10 of the Accounts Book is a listing of *anticipated* departure dates: Allada—8 July; Cotonou—10 July; Whydah—18 July. These dates roughly conform with the suggested itinerary above. The evidence does not indicate that Melville and Frances separated during the latter period (she staying in Abomey or Allada and he going on to Cotonou or Whydah, for example) for there are no separate entries for rent, purchases, or other expenses.

The general program of research appears to have been established by the Herskovitses early, for on the first page of their Accounts Book there is a notation of likely research costs and the schedule for the research period.

House	3 mo.	(around 200F)
Cooks	3 mo.	(around 200F)
Boy	3 mo.	(around 100F)
Small Boy	3 mo.	(around 50F)

Interpreter	3 mo.	(around 250F)
Food	3-1/2 mo.	(around 6000F)
Gifts	3-1/2 mo.	(around 1500F)

The three-and-a-half month research period noted here conforms with data in the Accounts Book and field Journals with respect of the time they spent on the Dahomey segment of research after they had left Cotonou to begin the Abomey/Allada/Whydah research.⁸

Melville Herskovits writes in the Preface (1938 I [ii]) to *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom* that "Research in the field was carried on by Mrs. Herskovits and myself from March to August, 1931." The Field Journals reaffirm this. The research periods at the various Dahomey centers noted in the Field Journals, however, differ somewhat from those cited by them in the Preface to *Dahomey*. He writes (1938 I [ii]) that "Most of this period [from March to August] was spent in Abomey... Four weeks of the available time were spent in Allada and Whydah." The Field Journals and Accounts Book suggest, however, that they were in Abomey for only about two and a half months rather than four months as they implied, roughly 73 days as the fieldnotes indicate. The Allada research period is more difficult to determine. They spent a full week here between 15 and 22 June, and then traveled periodically to this center during a 17-day period, but this also included trips to Porto-Novo, southern Togo, and perhaps Nigeria. The Whydah research period had a duration of about seven days.

IV

The Selection of People to be Interviewed

Notations in the Accounts Book for salaries and gifts provide a glimpse of the principal individuals interviewed by Melville and Frances Herskovits in the course of their Dahomey research. There are six persons whose names appear in the Accounts Book for the Abomey segment of the research. The translator (and undoubtedly the principal person interviewed) was Prince René Aho (listed in the notes simply as René). He was paid on 22 April, 7 May, 6 June, and 15 June. A listing of René's hours appears for the period between 6 May and 15 June. Of René,⁹ Melville Herskovits writes in *Dahomey* (1938 I iv)

My principal interpreter in Abomey was as interesting for the personality conflicts that marked his life as for his philosophical insight into the values of his own culture. Unstable and emotional though he was, when his imagination was fired by the "Dahomey" of the Guiana bush, he could draw tellingly on the advantages of his social position to bring to us significant information, and would work with a patience and tenacity of purpose that might have taxed a more phlegmatic person.

Melville Herskovits explains in *Dahomey* (1938 I [iii]) that twenty-six

"informants" were used in Abomey plus "numerous persons whose names I do not know, since my contacts with them were of the casual sort inevitable when one is living in a populous center..." He goes on to note that (1938 I [iv])

Besides our household staff, the other informants comprised two groups; one consisting of specialists—artisans, diviners, and priests—brought by our interpreters...or visited in their homes; the other of individuals drawn from the body of commoners and supplied us by members of our household to discuss these same matters from a more humble point of view. We found the middle-class diviner of one of these members of the household perhaps the most valuable of this second group...Whenever possible the points of view of priests, devotees and laymen were sought on religious questions, while in matters of social organisation and political life, opinions and attitudes of the chiefly families, commoners and descendants of slaves were gathered.

The Accounts Book and the Field Journals, however, refer to only a very few informants. They include René (the translator; multiple entires), the cook Hwegbe, and the "house boy?" Ahasogbwe as well as "FSS women" (twice), François, and Paduna (twice). In the typed Diary Excerpts, where more information on individuals interviewed is given, the name René (or R.) appears on more than forty cards; the name François (or F.) appears five times. On card 82 of the Diary Excerpts François is referred to as "the kid François," suggesting that he was someone quite youthful. Hwegbe is mentioned in the Diary Excerpts as providing information on four occasions. The initialed names F.S.S. and A., along with the fuller names—Djena man, Gbo man, Ahasogbwe, Jerome, Da Suza, and Tedo—appear in these Diary Excerpt cards once, or in a few cases twice. Undoubtedly other persons were also approached either directly or indirectly by the Herskovitses, but their identifies are not revealed in the notes or typed Diary Excerpts. The Diary Sheets reaffirm the important place of Prince René Aho, "the kid" François, and the cook Hwegbe in providing the majority of the subsidiary information.

The few entries in the Field Journals that include the name of the interviewee indicate that René Aho provided some information on agriculture and Dokpwegan (rural chiefs) (26 April) and on the principal families (4 May). Information in the typed Diary Excerpts suggest that Aho also gave considerable information on religion, ceremonies, marriage, children, pottery making, wood carvers, cloth sewers, and ironworkers. François was interviewed on history (Field Journal Two, p. 45), religion (Field Journal Two, p. 52) and agriculture (Field Journal Nine, p. 57). Mention also is made of François in the typed Diary Excerpts with respect to history (numbers 96-97, 100, 101-02) and ceremonies (number 100). Ahasogbwe the "house boy" discussed the Adji game in the Field Journals (Seven, p. 4); in the Diary Excerpts (numbers 110 and 132) he also is credited with information on calabash carving and *Vodun* inheritance. According to the Diary Excerpts (numbers 128, 131) it was Hwegbe who supplied the bulk of the information on chiefs under the French regime and the appropriation of taxes by the king. The Diary Sheets provide greater detail on their con-

tributions.

A listing for the "FSS Women" in the Accounts Book between 25 May and 6 June, a period conforming with Field Journals Seven and Eight, suggest that it was they who provided information on puberty, marriage, child development, birth, abortion, twins, woman's work, cicatrization, body parts, circumcision, names, adultery, etc. Of the female informants, Melville Herskovits writes in *Dahomey* (p. iv) that:

In order to obtain information from women, it was necessary because of the difficulty of finding those who could speak French to conduct work initially with a group of four. Two of them, hospital nurses, were interpreters, the other two were natives of Abomey.

The "FSS women" may have included these nurses. The Diary Excerpt notes also indicate (number 112) that René Aho provided substantial information on marriage and divorce. In these Diary Excerpt cards the notation FSS is found only once (cards numbers 92-94 dated 27 April), in reference to the *Dokpwe* work groups.

For the Allada portion of the research, additional individuals are cited in the Accounts Book and Field Journals. These include Michel (9 June, 7 July), "brother of informant" (21 June, 24 June) and "priest" (31? June). Melville Herskovits in *Dahomey* (pp. iii-iv) lists twelve informants for Allada and describes his chief interpreter as "a steady, conscientious man, though also one who showed insight..." Whydah individuals cited in the Field Journals include an interpreter, Pascal, as well as "chauffeur" and a person named Hwegbe (the Abomey cook?). No dates appear for them. For Cotonou, there is a listing in the Accounts Book for de Surgy on 8 July. In Ghana three persons are listed in the Accounts Book: Mosi (3 August), Yao (5 August), and Joe (7 August). In addition between 25 July and 14 August various "dashes" are listed to persons such as chiefs, singers, dancers, bearers, etc. These persons may also have been interviewed informally.

V

The Research Program and its Aims

The Field Journals contain references to various ceremonies that were observed by Melville and Frances Herskovits in the course of their research. In *Dahomey* (I: 212-228) a rather lengthy description of a *Newsuhwe* (royal ancestor memorial ceremony) is provided along with photographs (Plates 32-37). This is undoubtedly the "Aiza" ceremony mentioned in Field Journal Four (pp. 75-80). A new *ayizan* is traditionally built and dedicated in the course of *Nesuhwe* (*Nesuxwe*) ceremonies. In Melville Herskovits' published discussion of this ceremony in *Dahomey* (1938 1:213) the importance of the *ayizan* shrine is mentioned. *Dahomey* also contains a lengthy description of a funeral (1938 1:368-394) with associated photos (Plates 47-48). This is discussed in Field

Journal Five (pp. 5-21); and transcriptions are continued in the subsequent Field Journal volumes. A *Fa* (divination) rite, in turn, is discussed in Field Journal Seven. In the typed Diary Excerpts there are brief mentions of about ten ceremonies which were attended, ranging from several royal *Nesuhwe* ceremonies to a *Tohwiyo* dance, an *Egu* dance, a *Loko* dance (in Tendji), an ancestral ceremony and Agasu rite (in Zadou [Zado]), a Tovodun ceremony, a sacrifice for locusts, and part of a funeral (in Djidja).

It seems likely that other ceremonies were observed briefly by the Herskovitses but were not recorded in the Field Journals or Diary Excerpts. Some of these are discussed in the Diary Sheets, including a ceremony for the emergence of Hevioso novices, an ancestral rite for the late king Behanzin, a private training ritual for Mawu-Lisa novitiates, a rite for the emergence of the same novices, a small sacrifice for Sagbata, and several memorial ceremonies for the royal ancestors. In addition to these rites, they apparently saw cult member soccasionally on parade in Abomey. Melville Herskovits mentions one case in which members were in the market (next to where he lived) making purchases for memorial ceremonies and they appear to have witnessed an *Egu* dance in Whydah since a photograph of an *Egu* masker in Whydah appears in the first volume of *Dahomey* (Plate 49) and a notation of this dance appears in the typed Diary Excerpts (number 128). The material in the Field Journals and Diary Excerpts thus suggest a relatively small number of ceremonies or rituals observed by the Herskovitses. Mention of such rites in the field notes are fewer than two dozen although some additional religious events were clearly glimpsed in passing.

Because the Field Journals are not completely chronological and the typed Diary Excerpts are only sporadically dated, it is impossible to get a firm grasp of research strategies.¹⁰ Among the earliest entries in Field Journal One is information on songs, myths, social organization, relationship terms, and history. Cards 45 through 92 of the typed Diary Excerpts, which correspond roughly with this Field Journal, include entires on twin figures, *gbo* (*bo*—power objects), Mawu-Lisa categories, ancestral ceremonies, pottery making, building, cloth working, and various dances. Field Journal Two shows an increasing interest in work and related associations, as well as in pottery production, local record-keeping, history, families, clans and passage rites (marriage and funerals especially). There is also some information on gods and *gbo*. In the Diary Excerpts which relate to this period (numbers 92-106) discussion varies from Dokpwe at work, to an account of monkeys and their link to twins, notes on Dahomey history, divination, rules of cloth sewers and attitudes of wood carvers. Field Journals Three to Five include information on marriage, divorce, pregnancy, birth, twins, nursing, women's roles and the family. In the related typed Diary Excerpts (beginning at p. 107) notations are made on wood carving, calabash carving, marriage, divorce, and the deity Legba.

Field Journal Six incorporates transcripts of an earlier viewed funeral as well as additional information on women, circumcision, cicatrization, and death rites. Field Journals Seven and Eight continue earlier concerns with

women and the family, but also show increasing interest in religion, priests, and history. Because there are no dated entries in the Diary Excerpts between 9 May and 5 June (card numbers 111 through 125) it is difficult to correlate information between the two sources during this period. Carving, marriage, names, diviners, funerals, wealth, forecasting, building, cloth workers, and village chiefs are among the many subjects covered.

Religion is an important concern in Field Journal Nine. In this same book is found information on *gbo*, stool iconography, death, dreams, and children. After 6 June in the Diary Excerpts (number 126-131) are references to Vodun, priests, rulership, taxes, kin relations, slaves, inheritance of Vodun, royal burials, and temples. Field Journals Ten and Eleven, which appear to include the bulk of the material from Allada, Whydah, Porto Novo, and Cotonou, continue with many of these themes, but religion acquires increasing importance in these latter two books. Other subjects include inheritance, debts, status, statistics on kingship, kinship, friendship, occupations, language, and the harvest. There do not appear to be correlated typed cards for this period of research in the Diary Excerpts.

As explained, the Ghana material is included in a separate Asante Field Journal. The research interests in Asante, like those in Dahomey are somewhat eclectic and range from games to twins, to the family, kerchief patterns, word teasers, *kra* (soul), skin colors, the queen mother, sex education, circumcision, motherhood, dances, burial, and divinity. The primary aims and strategies of research suggested by the field notes for both Ghana and Dahomey thus indicate an overall concern with the acquisition of general background information of the sort needed for a "classical" ethnography. Melville Herskovits' two volume *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom* is just such an ethnography and one which served as a model for a whole generation of scholars researching in the Africa in the decades which followed.

IV

Conclusions

The Dahomey Field Journals of Melville and Frances Herskovits provide considerable insight into the methodologies and research aims of their African research. The field materials indicate that as with many early anthropological couples, Melville and Frances Herskovits worked as a close-knit team. Frances played a critical part throughout. Her active participation in the project in everything from interviewing to the transcribing of Dahomey information in secondary sources is much in evidence. The Diary Excerpts suggest furthermore that her observations were often among the most frank and personal and that one of her particular interests was art, a subject that would be treated in considerable detail in their later writings.¹¹

The field notes also give clear evidence that their research period in Abo-
moy, the Dahomean royal capital, was more compressed than had been thought

in the past. Anthropological conventions at this time, it should be noted, did not insist on a lengthy field research period and Melville Herskovits would later break with this tradition by insisting that his own students spend substantial time in the field. The field notes suggest in addition that the two continued the common anthropological practice of the period by interviewing relatively few people, a tradition also followed by Franz Boas, Melville Herskovits' teacher. Herskovits remarks in the preface of *Dahomey*, however, imply that by 1938 he had become aware of the need to exploit a diversity of sources.

The field notes indicate in turn that Herskovits' research results are to some extent marred by less than adequate care in terms of documentation. Other than the songs, and perhaps some of the narratives, the rest of the field data were not transcribed verbatim. Indeed, considering the amount of information published by Melville and Frances Herskovits, the field notes are remarkable for their sketchiness and brevity. And, because there are few indications as to the sources of the information, it is for the most part impossible today to separate out what was said by one source (say, René Aho) and compare it with what was said by another source.

The Dahomey field materials suggest in addition that Melville and Frances Herskovits themselves made little attempt to "test" their sources or to validate the information acquired by asking several different individuals the same questions. The fact that René Aho also served as their principal translator in the course of the Abomey research would have impeded attempts to get valid reaffirmation in any event. Related to this lack of secondary validation in the field notes is a general dearth of firsthand ceremonial observation. Such observations also could have served as an important means of testing what was said in the course of interviews.

Notwithstanding these methodological problems, there is considerable information in the Dahomey field notes. Their shortcomings, however, suggest that care should be taken with respect to some of the findings. This said, one should stress that Melville Herskovits still remains a scholar of remarkable vision, energy, and character. The fact that he (and Frances) preserved the Dahomey field materials, knowing full well that one day another scholar would seek them out to study them in detail, is evidence of their scholarly commitment. Ultimately it is this trait that should be stressed in assessing Melville Herskovits' overall contributions, along with both his courage and perseverance in fighting prejudices of the day, and his (and Frances') selfless dedication to building a program of African Studies and a core of students. As Simon Ottenberg, one of these students, has observed with respect to Herskovits "he was a man in a hurry, never in his books was he much of a careful scholar, except perhaps in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (personal communication, 5 February 1987). The Dahomey field notes certainly reveal this side of Herskovits' personality. His interests seem to have been more with ideas and large historical and social issues, than with extensive and detailed field research. In many respects Herskovits' most important African research contributions can be seen in the work

that was carried out by his students—William Bascom, Justine Cordwell, Daniel Crowley, Warren d'Azevedo, James Fernandez, Paul Gebauer, John Messenger, Alan Merriam, and Simon Ottenberg.

NOTES

1. The original draft of this essay was presented on a panel titled "Re-evaluating our Predecessors: Ethnographic Art Historians Look Back" organized by Janet Berlo for the College Art Association annual meeting in 1985. In 1984 at the time the announcement of his panel was made I was preparing to leave for a short research stay in Abomey, where the Herskovitses had done their primary research. I later returned for a more lengthy research trip in 1986/87 supported by a Fulbright-Hays Senior Research Fellowship and a Social Science Research Council Fellowship. The earlier summer research trip to Abomey in 1984 was supported by a grant from the Institute of African Studies and the Council for Research in the Humanities at Columbia University.

In the course of writing this essay, I also traveled to Washington D.C. to analyze Herskovits' unpublished Dahomey field notebooks which were then on loan to the National Museum of African Art. As noted in the text, today these materials are housed in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York. I also consulted the unpublished Diary Extracts from the Herskovits' field research period in Dahomey at Northwestern University, as well as the transcripts of Herskovits' recorded materials at Indiana University. I thank Bryna Freyer, Jean Herskovits, Patrick McNaughton, Robert Morris, Hans Panofsky, Sule Greg Wilson, Roy Sieber, and Ruth Stone for their help in locating and studying these materials. This paper also has benefited from the close reading and critical comments of Simon Ottenberg and Edna Bay. Conversations with Ivan Karp, James Fernandez, and Patrick Manning also were useful.

2. For a discussion of Herskovits' scholarship orientations see Walter Jackson (1986) and the biographical overview of Herskovits by Joseph H. Greenberg (1971). See also G. Simpson (1973) and J. Fernandez [1988]. None of these studies, however, has dealt with Herskovits' African field materials. My "Melville J. Herskovits and the Arts of Ancient Dahomey," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 1988, explores some of the methodological questions in Herskovits' reading of Fon art traditions.

3. Maurice Ahanhanzo Glélé (1974:25) writes that "...the work of Herskovits...contains good elements but must be studied with a lot of critical spirit, in regard to his principal informant, the professional [guide] Rene Aho." See also Blier, "Arts," n36.

4. Handwritten citations from a number of sources were made by Frances Herskovits in these two books. The works consulted by them include the following: Baudin/Beechan/Bosman/Bouche/Brunet/Gielthiers/Ellis/Labat/Christaller/Dalzel/Dapper/Le Herissé/Snelgrave.

5. The Fon lexicon cards in the library of Northwestern University (see text below) nonetheless indicate that care was taken to gain information on the local language. And Simon Ottenberg (personal communication, 5 February 1987) notes that language "...was something that Mel stressed very much during my time at Northwestern..."

6. It is also possible, of course, that additional typed transcripts from this research trip were made but have since been lost. The Summary Files may contain some verbatim transcripts as well.

7. As noted in the text above, both the Asante and the Dahomey recorded materials are now in the Archive of Traditional Music at Indiana University. To my knowledge, Herskovits never published any materials from this segment of his trip.

8. See Blier, 1988, notes 33 and 34.
9. For an analysis of some of the problems posed by René Aho see Blier 1988. The Diary Sheets treat other problems.
10. A better sense of these strategies is conveyed in the Diary Sheets.
11. See M. Herskovits (1938, 1941, 1945, 1959) and M. and F. Herskovits (1934).

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Appendix I

Herskovits' Dahomean and Ashanti Field Journals

*refers to dated entries

Field Journal 1 = no dates [4/9 to 4/26?] , Abomey?

p. 1	field questions
p. 2	song, record #35
p. 7	transcription of song
p. 11	gods
p. 19	social organization
p. 29	mythology (1st humans)
p. 31	kinship terms
p. 50	flute song, record #19
p. 53	Legba myth
p. 65	historical account
p. 74	relationship terms
p. 77	account

Field Journal 2 = [4/26 to 5/6??] , Abomey?

p. 1	fetish
*p. 5	agriculture Sunday, 4/26/31, René [Glélé]
p. 9	Togo songs (transcriptions)
p. 15	ancestry table (chart)
p. 17	local associations (work, etc.)
p. 23	social organization
p. 29	local associations (work, etc.)
p. 31	pottery production
p. 34	other female associations
p. 38	gods
p. 40	statistics (local forms of record keeping)
p. 43	gbo - medicinal (power) figures
*p. 45	history, 5/3/31, François
*p. 52	colors, novices, 5/4/31, François
*p. 53	principal families, 5/4/31, René
p. 60	list of clans
p. 72	families
*p. 73	marriage, 5/6/31
p. 75-80	funerals, burials, marriage

Field Journal 3 [5/6 to 5/16?] , Abomey?

p. 1	marriage (continued from Field Journal 2, p. 80)
p. 11	pregnancy
p. 17	marriage, birth
p. 18	non-legitimate birth
p. 27	different categories of women
p. 30	Fa note on p. 43 "continued on typewriter"
p. 44	women, nursing, twins
p. 49	family
p. 50	calabash design meanings

Field Journal 4 (5/6 - 5/16), Abomey?

p. 1	family, proverbs
p. 15	song, record #56
p. 19	family, marriage, birth
*p.25	economics (note: May 6)
p. 31	pottery, smiths, weavers
p. 35	women, marriage, children, names
p. 62	divorce
p. 74	marriage
p. 75	religion
p. 78-80	description of Aiza ceremony

Field Journal 5 (5/6 - 5/16?), Abomey?

p. 1	description of Aiza ceremony, continued
p. 3	Fa, creation of world
*p. 5	inheritance, 5/13/31
p. 22	religion = list of gods
p. 24-92	funerary (memorial ceremony)

Field Journal 6 = [5/16 to 5/20] , Abomey?

p. 11	soul
p. 12	death, burial items (transcriptions of funerary songs from book 5, pp. 24-92)
p. 25	women
p. 26	circumcision
p. 28	transcriptions and analysis of book 5, pp. 24-92
*p. 41	coffin, 5/18/31
p. 42	song translations

- p. 63 death, funerary songs (continued from book 5)
 *p. 74-82 women, girls, circumcision, 5/30?/31 [date difficult to read]

Field Journal 7 [5/20 - 6/3] , Abomey?

- p. 1 Fa account and rite
 *p.4 Adji game, 5/15/31, Ahasoghwe
 p. 20 analysis of book 5, pp. 24-92
 p. 32 family names?
 p. 35 puberty
 p. 59 circumcision
 p. 61 religion
 p. 74 gbo - descriptions of types of charms

Field Journal 8 [5/20 to 6/3] , Abomey?

- p. 1 puberty, marriage, development of child
 p. 12 gbo (charms) - description of types
 p. 18 religion - Hevioso and related
 p. 35 abortion
 p. 37 twins
 p. 40 women's work
 p. 44 cicatrization
 p. 44 parts of the body
 p. 46 adultery
 p. 48 wives
 p. 51 history (continued in book 9, p. 25)
 p. 63 gbe and misc. religion
 p. 66 gbo (charms) (continued from page 17)
 p. 79 priests (vodunsi) and deaths of priests
 p. 86 gbo (continued from p. 78)

Field Journal 9 [6/4 to 7/11?] , Abomey? Cotonou?

- p. 1 religion
 p. 5 clans
 p. 8 religion/history
 p. 11 cicatrization
 p. 20 religion (Sagbata)
 p. 21 children of twins
 p. 23 religion
 p. 25 Dokpe (continued from book 8, p. 6)
 p. 27 religion
 p. 30 horn signals

p. 33	gbo (charms) description of types
p. 37	children
p. 41	stool (iconography)
p. 43	families
p. 47	children/birth
p. 53	dreams
p. 54	types of death
*p. 57	agriculture, 6/4/31, François
p. 56	Dokpe (from p. 26)
p. 78	religion, history
p. 81	soul
*p. 90	gods, dividing meat, 7/11/31, Hwegbe, Cotonou

Field Journal 10 [7/11 - 7/18] , Porto Novo?, Cotonou?, Togo?

p. 1	Gbo (continued from book 8, p. 91)
p. 9	priests' deaths (refers to René in text)
p. 25	pawns - individuals working for others
p. 31	gods, terms (Porto Novo)
p. 35	dances
p. 37	gods (Dan)
p. 43	trips to Adja
p. 45	myth, how Logogo brought fire
p. 46	Gbo (continued from p. 7)
p. 70	inheritance, debts
p. 72	vital statistics
p. 74	kinship
p. 75	statistics
p. 83	status
p. 88	convents

Field Journal 11 [6/19 - 7/15?] Allada? Whydah?

p. 1	statistics
p. 3	categories of friendship
p. 3	occupations (5 pages of typed inserts) --on p. 7: types note "never asked this in Abo- mey," suggesting this information was acquired elsewhere
p. 9	Gbo (charms) typed (continued)
p. 13	relatives in Guiana [sic]
p. 22	river gods
p. 24	religion, Aiza, note: Allada
*p. 26	families, 6/9/31, Michael
*p. 30	family religion, 6/31/31, priest

*p. 49	story 7/4/31
p. 50	harvest
p. 52	gods
p. 55	death of priests, gods
*p. 61	languages, languages of gods, 7/5/31, Hwegbe (Peda)
p. 65	categories of gods
p. 67	gods, Whydah (Pascal interpreter)
p. 69	gods, cowries, Whydah, driver
p. 70	gods, Whydah, Pascal

Ashanti Field Journal 1

p. 1	Wari game
p. 9	twins
p. 16	family
p. 27	Daphwe
p. 29	kra (soul)
p. 34	places
p. 37	kerchief patterns
p. 48	word teezers
p. 58	skin colors
p. 60	queen mother
p. 62	sex education
p. 63	circumcision
p. 68	motherhood, nursing
p. 75	Apo ceremony
p. 76	song
p. 77	days of week
p. 78	enlarging vagina
p. 82	dances
p. 86	burial, conception
p. 89	divinity

Appendix II

Summary Index
Herskovits' Diary Excerpts

*refers to dated entries

[] refers to citations with named "informants"

Card No.

39-40	Eclipse of the moon
*45	Tailor, bas-reliefs - 9 April [Abomey]
46	Palace
48	People at the market
52	Justin Aho and his wives
61	Child with a twin figure
62	René's explanation of Mawu-Lisa categories
62	Classes of gbo
65	Historical importance of Zadou
66	Reaction - Zadou chief to telling of Guiana Blacks
68	Procession of women to Dido
70	Children at ancestral ceremony [René]
71	Songs of allusion
75-77	Pottery making [René]
77-78	Making a wall
79	"another" Nesuhwe ceremony [René]
82	"replacing" an image
82	cloth worker's technique [mention of François]
82	Legba shrine
83	Loko shrine (on way to Tindji)
83-84	Earth shrine [René]
84-85	Tohwiyo dance [René]
85	Dance for son of Tindji chief [René]
86	Loko dance [end of first day; René]
87-88	Dahomey view of changing statues [René]
88-89	Loko Dance [René]
92	Legba
*92-94	Dokpwe at work - 27 April [René; FSS]
94-95	Ancestor ceremony and Agasu rite at Zadou [René]
95-96	Dokpwe and its place in Dahomey life
96	Dance of Legba at Agasu ceremony
96	Monkey being sacred to twins [René]

- *96-97 Dahomey history - Agaja - 29 April [F]
 98 An association with its flag at the market [René]
 99 Nesuxwe ceremony [René]
 100 Sacrifice to send away locusts [F]
 100 Captured enemy king not killed
 100 Divining with water
 100 Dahomey history [F]
 100-101 Selling princes and priests into slavery
 101 Nesuxwe ceremony
 101 Finding out who killed the deceased
 101-102 Dahomey history - Guezo - [F]
 102 Coming of Bokonon
 103 "Free" woman [R and Fann]
 103 Getting Legba and Fa [R]
 103-104 Dance at Tovodun ceremony [François]
 *105 Behavior of Agamasi - 4 May [R]
 106 Rotation of crops
 106 Compositional rules of cloth-sewers
 106b Attitudes towards wood-carvers [R]
 107 Storytelling
 107-108 More about wood carvers - René
 108 Death of Djena priestess' daughter
 *109 Zomadunu shrine and high priest - May 9
 109-110 Chief priestess after death of daughter
 110 Fa and Legba - why they can help mankind
 *110-111 Calabash carving - 9 May [Ahasogbwe]
 Hevioso shrine
 111 Sculptor's reluctance to come when called [René]
 112 Dahomey attitudes on marriage and divorce [René]
 112 Relationship of cults [René and Diena man]
 112-113 Origin of horse-sib; nature of aiza
 113 Why various people "go to the market" [René]
 114 Wood carver at work - trip to Sonu [René]
 115 Bokonon: description of - attitude towards [René]
 116 Fon names for Equ and Yehwe
 116-117 Iron workers - went to smiths quarter [René and Hwegbe]
 117-119 Description of Djidja - trip [René]
 118-119 Notes on funeral customs at Djidja
 119 Explanation of rain and weather forecasting [René]
 121 Irregularities in Mawu-Lisa priesthood [ceremony of resuscitation]

- 121-122 Dokpwegan at work [René]
 122 An Egu dance [A and René]
 124 Meaning of the word nenge [Hwegbe]
 124 Woodcarvers [René]
 124 Attitudes towards clothworkers' products
 125 Building wall around compound [René]
 *125 Position of village chief - 5 June [René]
 *126 Gbo [Gbo man]
 126-127 Vodunon vs king in trials of magic power [René]
 127 How kings made vodunon bring rain [R]
 127 Experience of vodunsi [René]
 128 An Egu dance in Abomey
 128 Chiefs under French regime [Hwegbe]
 128 Shrines to gbo in Adja [René]
 131 Taxes enacted from farmers by king [Hwegbe]
 131 Relationship between man and father's brother
 [Hwegbe]
 131 Right of mternal grandhcild to sacrifices
 131 Djikpla children - slave descendants [René]
 132 Inheritance of Vodun [Ahasogbwe]
 132 Why more women than men are vodunsi
 132 Entrance to cult-house
 133 Burial of royalty [Hwegbe and Jerome]
 133-134 Temple of agasu [Da Suza]
 134 Tale of founding of royal sib [not at Abomey]
 134 Why Agasu dance with Hevioso