The importance of Suriname for the study of the origins of the Negro population of the area comprising the northern portion of South America (not including Brazil), the islands of the West Indies, and of the United States, has long been recognised. This is particularly true of the Bush-Negroes, who, of all the descendants of the original slaves, have alone maintained a civilisation of their own in which the influence of the original African cultures from which they came is immediately apparent. But the importance of the Suriname Negroes, both in the Bush and in contact with the White population for the study of cultural processes in general has not been so clearly understood.

In the Bush Negroes we have a people, who, attaining their freedom before the influence of European civilisation could blot out their African customs, and favored by an environment sufficiently similar to that they knew in Africa to be of material assistance to them in their struggle for independance, constitute the best material available on which to base conclusions as to the tribal origins of the whole Negro population of the New World. The urban Negroes, on the other hand, — those who have been in contact with the White civilisation as introduced in Suriname by the European element, — offer the possibility of gathering information which is to be regarded in the nature of control data; material against which the facts of the civilisation of the Bush Negroes may be projected so as to afford a measuring-rod to show the extent
to which elements of European culture have been adopted by the Negroes in the course of their historic association with Whites.

It was in order to gather material for studies of this nature that a research expedition, the preliminary results of which I wish to present here, was undertaken during the summer of 1928. The personnel of this expedition was Morton C. Kahn, representing the American Museum of Natural History, New York, and Cornell University Medical College, and Mrs. Herskovits and myself, representing Northwestern University and the Columbia University Research Council in the Social Sciences ¹), and the purposes of each of us was so arranged as to be integrated in such a way as to attack the problems mentioned above in the most efficient manner in the limited time at our disposal, and to obtain data and survey the field so as to afford the basis for future research along the same lines.

Mrs. Herskovits, working with the town Negroes of Paramaribo, gathered information of a nature which would, first, be available for comparative purposes with that gathered from the Bush-Negroes, and from other West Indian and North American Negro populations, and, second, which would be expected to show the manner in which the Negroes who remained in contact with the Whites were conditioned in their customary behavior by the European culture. Since the material culture of the people of Paramaribo is, of necessity, essentially European, her data are principally folk-loristic and religious in nature. Although some Anansi-tori were collected by her, the major portion of her material deals with those customs, traditions, and beliefs which tend to throw light both on the elements of African background retained by them, and also reflect the differences between these and similar beliefs held by the Bush-Negroes.

That the Negroes of the town and in the bush have

¹) The research of Dr. Kahn was made representing the Myron I. Granger expedition of the American Museum of Natural History, and that of Mrs. Herskovits and myself on a grant from Dr. E. C. Parsons to Columbia University, New York City.
much in common is apparent from her results. Many of
the spirits which have been mentioned by other writers,
aspects of the religio-ceremonial life in the town, such as
the use of the drums in the Winti-dance, the nature of the
spirit-possession which takes those who „get the Winti‟,
the realisation in the minds of the townspeople of the su-
perior magic and healing power at the command of the
Djukas, their use of obeahs, magic formulae and charms
for the accomplishment of given purposes, and the like,
all reflect this. All these were obtained in detail, and many
in textual form. At the same time, this resemblance can-
not be overstressed, for many important aspects of the
life of the town Negroes were found to be materially dif-
ferent from that of the Bush-Negroes. For example,
while the list of Tshi day-names recorded by de Goeje in
the bush 1) were found intact, used among the town Ne-
groes, and the „lobbi singi‟ of the town, many of which
Mrs. Herskovits recorded in detail, have their counter-
part in the bush, the development of the „koto jaki‟,
which has obviously come from an attempt to imitate the
traditional costume of the women of Holland, and head-
kerchiefs called „anjisa‟, an elaboration, in all probabil-
ity, of the lace caps worn in Holland, have nothing in
common with the people of the bush, and yet constitute
and important and fascinating example of the processes
of cultural change. This came out especially in Mrs.
Herskovits’ material, as she was able to get the names of
designs, methods of tying and names of the various forms
of tied kerchiefs, when it became apparent that the Afri-
can love for the proverb was manifest in this connection
through the fact that a given pattern of kerchief is in
many instances denoted by a proverb rather than by a
name.

Dr. Kahn continued his observations of the preceding
year 2), when he also visited the Bush-Negroes, and was

1) C. H. de Goeje, Verslag der Toomoehoemak-Expeditie. Tijdschrift
van het Kon. Ned. Aardrijkskundig Gen., 2e Ser., dl. XXV, 1908, Afl. 5,
p. 55.
2) Morton C. Kahn, Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana, Natural History
entirely successful in obtaining a completely representative collection of the implements and art-forms. His collection includes not only stools, combs, trays, paddles, stirring-sticks, mortars and pestles, and other objects used by the Bush-Negroes in their everyday life, but also numerous specimens representing their non-material culture, such as obeahs (charms), several "gadus", drums, examples of medicine, games, and the like. Certain of the objects were exceedingly difficult to obtain, and were only to be had after delicate negotiations. Thus, Dr. Kahn was able to procure the seats of the Kaptein and Basia of the village of Lombe, and the latter bench, particularly, representing carving of several decades in age, is one, which, on close study, should throw light on the manner in which the Saramaccaner carving developed in recent years.

He was also able to acquire, along with specimens of the work of the Saramaccaners from the Middle and Upper Suriname river, a representative sample of the work of the Aukaners living on the Sara Kreek above Koffeekamp. These include benches, combs, paddles, drums, foodstirrers, and the like, and give an excellent basis for a further comparative study of the art-forms of the two Bush-Negro tribes. For the present, little more can be stated than the fact that, as far as this collection is concerned, the Auka carvings seem to be more elaborate than those of the Saramaccaners, but it is hoped that a detailed study of the motifs of the two peoples, and the manner in which they employ these in decorating the objects which they use in their everyday life can be made when the collection is available in the American Museum of Natural History. That the entire collection, added to the specimens which Dr. Kahn obtained last year on the Suriname River from the Bush-Negroes, will afford a fruitful field for later comparative study, especially with African data along the lines employed so profitably by Lindblom, there can be little doubt.

Dr. Kahn and I both employed small motion-picture cameras (using 16 mm. film) with which we were able to
obtain pictures of many processes in the life of the Saramaccaner Bush-Negroes. Pictures of the villages and the activities in them, of combing the hair, weaving the cassava-squeezers, chipping a canoe, playing adji-boto (the Bush-Negro equivalent of the African game of mankal’ah and of the game of Awari played by the town-Negroes) running the rapids of the Suriname, both up and down, and with both canoes and lumber-rafts, playing the drum, shooting bow-and-arrow, as well as scenes illustrating the life of the town-Negroes, were obtained, and should also prove of value for further detailed study. Still photographs were also taken of many of these scenes and processes.

My own work was confined to the Saramaccaner Bush-Negroes on the Middle and Upper Suriname, where I attempted to obtain a general picture of the Bush-Negro culture, and to ascertain the elements which had gone into its making. An intensive study of the social organisation and political life of the Bush-Negroes, together with a consideration of their linguistics and phonetics, marriage ceremonies, economic life and material culture, seemed to be particularly useful, as these had not, to my knowledge, been given the attention which the religious and ceremonial life of these people had been accorded. A reasonably complete account of the relationship and clan system obtained by me, — one which, in its aspect of maternal descent with recognition of the paternal side through inheritance of the „kina“ or food taboo from the father, is reminiscent of certain of the tribes of West Africa in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and elsewhere. The political organisation, again, with the legal system, which forms an integral part of it, gave much valuable material, which, when considered at leisure, should once more point to African origins. In the material culture of the people, on the other hand, there were found many traces of the influences which contact with the Indians and the Europeans have made for, and the strands of which, again, I hope to have opportunity to dissect when further consideration of field-notes makes this possible.
I was also able to make careful comparison of the Aukaner social and political organisation, and their marriage ceremonies, through conversation with Mr. F. W. van Lier, who has spent many years among these people, and who was most helpful in giving me these data which I might place beside like aspects of the civilisation of the Saramaccaners. I was also fortunate, while in Paramaribo, in being able to spend an afternoon with Somba, captain of the Auka village of Gododrai, on the Mapana creek (off the upper Commewyn River) when I was able further to check these data. It appears, from a preliminary comparison of such phases of the cultures of these two large groups of Bush-Negroes as I was able to study, and further comparison of the carvings and designs of the two which I was able to make from seeing Dr. Kahn's material, that the Bush-Negro culture may be regarded as essentially a unit, with minor variations in language, designs, beliefs, and the like, but with all of these fundamentally similar. This is not strange, of course, since the sources of the culture of all the Bush-Negro tribes is the same, they all having been in contact with the same cultural influences, and, in addition, there being frequent contact between individuals of the various tribes.

It is hoped that further field study, both of the town- and bush-Negroes will be possible in the future. It is felt that additional consideration of the data to be gathered from these people, and prosecution of our research along the lines which we have begun, will do much to make available information from a region which, both from the point of view of an insight into the nature of primary racial differences, of the discovery of the historical origins of the Negroes of the New World, and that of investigation into the general problem of processes of cultural change and adaptation, is of the first importance.

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