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PROFESSOR MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS, 1895-1963

MEMBERS of the International African Institute will have learned with deep regret that Professor Melville J. Herskovits, a member of its Executive Council since 1947 and the doyen of African Studies in the United States, died in February last at his home in Evanston, Illinois, after a short illness. He had returned shortly before from the December 1962 meeting of the First International Congress of Africanists at Ghana University where he had taken a leading part in the discussions and in framing the organization for this Congress. This was to be the last of his many journeys in Africa over recent years, during which he became so well known for his energetic and outspoken encouragement of African studies and realistic approaches to modern African development.

Professor Herskovits's interest in Africa grew out of his early studies in the twenties, at Columbia University, on the 'cattle-complex' in Africa and on the physical anthropology of the American Negro. From these he developed his life-long interest in the cultural history of negro peoples which led him to undertake, with his wife and co-worker, Frances Herskovits, a series of field studies in Trinidad, Dutch Guiana, Brazil, and West Africa. He published a general survey of Afro-American studies in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941). Their fieldwork in Dahomey in 1931 yielded a valuable body of new and detailed ethnographical material in *An Outline of Dahomean Religious Belief* (1933), *Dahomey* (2 vols., 1938) and *Dahomean Narrative* (1958). Alongside his deep concern for exposing the ethno-centrism and the confusion of physical with cultural factors in prejudiced attitudes towards other peoples, his theoretical interests included a comparative survey of the economic systems of pre-industrial societies (*Economic Anthropology*, 1949), and he had most recently contributed a Foreword to a large collection of studies on *Markets in Africa* (P. Bohannan and G. Dalton, eds., 1963) published in the African Studies Series of his University.

From his post at Northwestern University, where he was Professor of Anthropology from 1935 and Director of its Program of African Studies from 1951, Herskovits pioneered the development of African Studies in the United States. Although American missionaries, such as Harley and others, made valuable ethnographic

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contributions, he was until the forties the only professional anthropologist concentrating his own work and stimulating research in this field. In the post-war period, with command of greatly increased resources, he enabled a growing number of younger American anthropologists to carry out field studies under his direction and also promoted inter-disciplinary studies through the Seminar at Northwestern which many scholars from Africa and Europe also visited. His own interests extended over the whole field of modern development in Africa, on which he was widely consulted in Africa itself as well as in the United States, and more recently he fortunately had the leisure to complete and publish, before his death, his own appraisal of *The Human Factor in Changing Africa* (1962).

Professor Herskovits's counsel and support were greatly valued in the International African Institute for the catholicity of his outlook, his wide knowledge of conditions and opportunities for research, and not least for the international spirit in which he approached its activities and problems. He will be greatly missed and his many friends on its council and among its members will wish to express their recognition of the importance of his work and their sympathy with his family and his American colleagues in the loss of so outstanding a figure.

D. F.