

A PRELIMINARY TEST OF HERSKOVITS' HYPOTHESIS OF CULTURAL FOCUS IN RELATION TO CULTURAL CHANGE

JOE BEN WHEAT*

Much of the progress in recent years in the social sciences has resulted from the formulation of adequate concepts with which to investigate certain aspects of cultural dynamics. That perception and appreciation of the processes of culture growth and change have been matters of increasing concern may be verified by examining the professional journals, monographs, and publishers' lists of the last two decades. There has been a shift from logico-hypothetical formulations, based on distributions, similarities, and posited reconstructions, to concepts derived from objective observations of change in process. From these studies has come segregation of separate processes where previously had been recognized only one. Increasing refinement of concepts and the sharpening of our basic tools of analysis have resulted.

One of the basic concepts which have received much attention is the recognition of some form of selective organization of unit whole cultures which gives them character configuration or orientation. It is not my intention to explore the origin and development of this idea, but a few remarks on some of the formulations of the concept may not be amiss.

Although anthropologists had previously used the concept of cultural patterning, the first intensive study of the phenomenon was made by Ruth Benedict in her *Patterns of Culture*. Her formulation was simple. "The cultural pattern of any civilization makes use of a certain segment of the great arc of potential human purposes and motivations." (Benedict, 1934, p. 237). Goldenweiser (1936, p. 100) phrased it, "The customary or prescribed routine does not weigh evenly over the whole expanse of the cultural scene." Also, in 1936 Du Bois, in speaking of the Tolowa and the Tututni, says, "Emphasis on wealth . . . permeates and shapes a large part of social behaviour; . . . by such integrative emphases traits may be lent intensity and nuances which are lacking in other areas . . . (and) combine with, or produce, related attitudes which embrace the bulk of the cultural behaviour." And Linton (1936, p. 87) writes that "each society has been content to allow certain phases of its culture to remain at what we might call the necessity level, while it has developed others far beyond this point. No society has been content to leave the whole of its culture at the necessity level, and no culture has elaborated all phases of its culture equally." But "Not every culture integrates its social behaviour to a few dominating attitudes, nor need every aspect, even of

* Assistant Professor of Natural History and Curator of Anthropology in the University Museum.

a relatively integrated culture, necessarily be aligned with major social preoccupations." (Du Bois, 1936, p. 49).

Recognition of cultural patterning or foci raised the question of its meaning in terms of culture change. Goldenweiser (1936, pp. 101-102) believed that "we may conceive of pattern as two-faceted: one facet faces the outside, the world of other actual or potential patterns, and vetoes it. This aspect of pattern is negative and limited The other facet . . . faces the individual . . . it is . . . (a) positive program. The primary effect of patterning is . . . to check development, or at least to limit it. As soon as the pattern form is reached further change is inhibited by the tenacity of the pattern. . . . But there are also other instances where pattern merely sets a limit, a frame, as it were, within which further change is permitted, if not invited. . . . The inevitable result is progressive complication, variety within uniformity, virtuosity within monotony. This is *involution*." He considered the Toda dairies, the Plains Sun Dance, and the Australian *intichiums* as cases of involution of pattern.

Working with Abram Kardiner, Linton wrote in 1939 that "although some cultures show an integration which is sharply focused upon a single attitude or value, in others such foci are difficult to determine. Many cultures seem to include a considerable series of attitudes and values all of which are significant and each of which serves as a focal point for the integration of a different sector of the total culture. The real problem here is whether the extreme stressing of a single attitude or value at the expense of the rest is a typical or atypical feature of culture organization . . . but even if such stressing proves to be typical, a considerable number of culture configurations will remain to be accounted for." (Linton, 1939, p. ix.)

From this general milieu of ideas Herskovits began developing his formulation of cultural focus. The essential ideas of selection and reinterpretation in terms of the focus were expressed in his *Life in a Haitian Valley* (Herskovits, 1937, p. 297). In 1941 he defined cultural focus as follows: ". . . conscious drives, directed toward a certain segment of the entire body of tradition, determine that area of culture wherein the greatest elaboration of basic traditions is to be found at a given period in the history of a people; and under acculturation these interests come to be those held to with the greatest tenacity possible." (Herskovits, 1941, p. 136.) It is a ". . . significant mechanism operative in inducing and encouraging, but also in regulating, cultural change." (Herskovits, 1945, p. 168.) The differential effects of cultural focus under variant stresses were most clearly expressed in 1947 (Herskovits, M. J. and F. S., p. 6). "In a stable culture, innovations are most readily accepted (in the area of cultural focus). . . . Under contact, however, especially where pressures are applied to force change, resistance is greater in the focal area; or, if resistance is futile, the psychological resilience afforded by the process of reinterpretation comes into play."

As most recently defined by Herskovits (1949, p. 542), "*Cultural focus* designates the tendency of every culture to exhibit greater complexity, greater variations of some of its aspects than in others." It comprises the emphases and motivating drives of the culture bearers, the sanctions, values, and goals which they hold. It is "... a people's dominant concern ... ; that area of activity or belief where the greatest awareness of form exists, the most discussion of values is heard, the widest difference in structure is to be discerned." (Herskovits, 1945, pp. 164-165.) Usually, also, the greatest number of institutions will center about it.

In contrast, the larger part of the content of any culture is taken for granted; that is to say, it is routine, little discussed and little pondered. Reaction to stimulus is more nearly a conditioned response, even when the stimulus is of a kind seldom met in ordinary living. Should the occasion demand, however, these routine elements in the culture can be expressed articulately. "It is apparent that a suggestion of change in a phase of life that is taken for granted and seldom discussed will meet with greater resistance than in one where the phenomenon is under common discussion. . . ." (Herskovits, 1949, p. 544.)

Inherent in the nature of the cultural focus, then, is the dominance of the focal interests over all related aspects of culture. Should the focus be in terms of religion, then economic and political organization, technology, and the like will be relegated to supporting roles. They will be shaped by, and controlled by, religious activity, and any innovation in the culture would first have to be reconciled to the focal interest. Because of this interest in the cultural focus, a great proportion of the active thought and talk of the people centers around it, and individual variations or "alternatives" show the widest latitude. Such activity brings in its wake increased possibilities of change, "for at a given moment, these variations are the expression of change in process." (Herskovits, 1949, p. 484.) As new variations of form or function are considered, resistance to novel ideas will decrease. "Therefore, we can state that the greatest variation in custom, manifest in the greatest complexity of form, can be looked for in the focal aspects of a culture, and that this represents either potential or achieved cultural change." (Herskovits, 1949, p. 544.)

A cultural focus may be conceived as a sort of selective channel through which cultural change flows and by which it is directed. It is operative both when change arises from internal causes, such as variation, invention, or discovery, and when change is stimulated by external forces, such as diffusion, acculturation, or historic accident. Internally induced change is affected in two ways. First, because of the greater number of variations apparent in focal activity, cultural drift has more chance to operate; and second, most, if not all, innovations would be accepted or rejected in terms of the cultural focus. Similarly, incipient change impinging from an external source would first be accepted or rejected in terms of the cultural focus. "In such cases, we find that where cultures are in free contact, the focal

aspect will be likely to be the one where the new elements are most hospitably received. On the other hand, in situations where one people is dominated by another, and pressure is brought against customs lying in the focal aspect, retention will be achieved by devious ways. . . ." (Herskovits, 1949, p. 550.)

We may briefly examine these ideas. It has already been noted that the widest individual variation in thought, overt action, and custom centers in and about the focal interest of a culture. Each variant has the potentiality of becoming accepted as an alternative, of partly or wholly displacing a previous mode of thought or action, or, most often, of ending with the death of the deviant. The extent of acceptance may be great or small, may be limited to a family, a clan, or a tribe. But accepted changes give rise to further changes. These additions, alterations, and losses are, for the most part, minute, but in aggregate they constitute the dynamic cultural drift. This is a process of internal growth. Invention and discovery, although internal forces, are acted upon much as are external forces of change. They are accepted or rejected largely in terms of cultural focus. However, since most internal innovations will occur in the focal area, they are most likely to be received favorably.

It is a frequently stated axiom that inter-cultural borrowing is selective in its nature; that is, of the corpus of elements available through contact, some will be refused, some partly and others completely absorbed by the recipient culture. The fate of these elements is largely governed by the focal interest of the people. Where the contact situation is free, innovations are likely to be accepted with greater frequency. When it is forced or dominated, the greatest effort of a people will be to retain *in toto*, if possible, or, if necessary, to reinterpret, the focal areas so that they are continued. The concepts of cultural focus and reinterpretation "reorient the approach to the fundamental problem of cultural change. . . . This approach . . . is essential if the motivations that cause a people to accept or reject a possible innovation are to be comprehended, and the process of cultural change is really to be understood." (Herskovits, 1949, p. 560.) Cultural focus can thus be seen as a powerful mechanism acting to induce internal change through individual variation and cultural drift and to integrate externally wrought change.

If the hypothesis of cultural focus as formulated by Herskovits could be substantiated in detail,¹ then we, as social scientists, would be in a position to determine with greater precision the factors which have controlled cultural change in the past. Ethnologists and archaeologists could, by ascertaining the area of greatest variation, structural complexity, proliferation of institutions and cultural traits, reconstruct the cultural foci of past peoples. Moreover, sociologists and applied anthropologists could, by aligning needed reforms to the cultural focus

¹ It is to be understood that Herskovits does not believe this concept of cultural focus is the answer to all of our questions nor to the how and why of culture change. Nevertheless, the stress which he places upon it demands that it be tested in terms of wider usage than he has given it.

of a people undergoing acculturation, devise methods for introducing them in a manner compatible with central ideas of that focus, thereby increasing the likelihood of their acceptance without conflict.

We may turn now to a consideration of the concept of culture focus as it has been applied to a number of actual cases of culture change. First, however, there is a primary question concerning the formulation of the concept, itself — namely, the method of determination of the cultural focus of a people. It is objectively derived on the basis of greatest individual variation, largest number of institutions, more thought about and discussion of values, the emphasis placed by the people of a culture on one or more of its aspects in contrast to others. We may make an immediate test of this formulation by considering one of the biologically based activities that functions within the cultural framework. One such is sexual activity. It is certainly a matter of great interest to the people of a culture, in fact, fundamental to its continuance. Many institutions center around it, such as puberty rites, courting customs, marriage rites, marriage itself. A considerable amount of thought and discussion is concerned with the subject, and there are, within any culture, many individual variations from the accepted norm of behaviour. Sexual activity, therefore, meets the requirements for a cultural focus as formulated by Herskovits. Since it is a focal area, it should, according to the hypothesis, have undergone greater changes than other aspects under free contact conditions and to have resisted change or have been reinterpreted under directed change. However, it would seem that, by and large, relatively little change occurs within this focal area, although under forced culture contact moral codes may break down, intermarriage may increase variation, and the central stability be shaken. It is clear that we are dealing here with a cultural focus, universal in nature and context. I do not mean that there are no significant pattern differences between different cultures, but rather, that because it appears as a universally stressed focal area, it must be regarded as a constant in studies of culture change.

If the hypothesis of cultural focus as an agent of cultural change is valid as formulated by Herskovits, then a number of postulates logically follow. Some of these are as follows: 1) Under conditions of internally induced culture growth, changes are most likely to occur in the area of cultural focus and, conversely, least likely in non-focal areas. 2) Under free contact, changes should a) occur more rapidly in the focal area than in non-focal areas, as in internal change; b) show the most change in the respective cultural foci of *each* of the groups involved in the contact, inasmuch as cultural transfer is never a "one-way" process; c) be adopted in order, according to their nearness to the focal area. 3) Under forced or directed contact, changes a) are least likely to occur in the focal area because it forms a rally point of resistance, or, b) if necessary, will undergo reinterpretation in order to bring them into line with the cultural focus.

With these postulates as points of evaluation, we may now analyze some examples of cultural change. Several such cases have been chosen more or less at random; the only attempt at selection has been to insure a wide variety of examples. Inasmuch as the hypothesis of cultural focus was crystallized from the study of Afro-American cultures (Herskovits, 1948, p. 1), we may first direct our attention to some of the material bearing on these.

Most of the Negro slaves brought to the New World derived from the highly developed West African peoples. In their homelands religion was the cultural focus. It formed the integrating factor of their complex political and social organization, advanced technology, and economic structure. Art, music, and folklore, all highly developed, were primarily expressions or extensions of religion.

The slave trade uprooted these peoples, tore them out of context, and placed them in new surroundings. Because they had been enculturated in their own cultures, they inevitably reacted to their new environment in terms of old patterns — to the extent that they were permitted to do so by their masters. This latter factor was extremely variable, as Herskovits has clearly demonstrated. Among the more important of these variables of what may be called the contact continuum are 1) nationality of slave owner, 2) presence of other ethnic groups, 3) prevailing religion of the different countries, 4) rural or urban residence, 5) the Negro-White ratio, and 6) the nature of the work performed. Thus a general division into two major acculturative groups may be recognized: that of Latin America — Catholic, with a large Negro to White ratio, and that of the Southern United States — generally Protestant, with a nearly equal Negro to White ratio. One of the effects of these relationships is that Latin American Negroes were enabled to retain, with less change and reinterpretation, many more Africanisms than were North American Negroes. This appears to be almost directly correlated with the amount of actual face-to-face contact maintained, Negro to White, and Negro to Negro. Where there was more direct contact, as in the Southern United States, Africanisms tended to become more displaced. "It soon becomes apparent that, while Africanisms in material aspects of life are almost lacking, and in political organization are so warped that resemblances are discernible only on close analysis, African religious practices and magical beliefs are everywhere to be found in some measure as recognizable survivals, and in every region more numerous than survivals in the other realms of culture." (Herskovits, 1941, p. 111.) However, "... the efforts directed toward effecting change caused a premium to be placed by the Whites on the overt acceptance of Christian religious beliefs and practices, and thus accelerated the disappearance of the African forms." (Herskovits, 1941, p. 141.) Many survivals in social custom, grammar, and so on, are also to be found. (Herskovits, 1949, pp. 554-555.)

Herskovits has ably summed up the factors involved in suppression of African-

isms, the replacement of old technology by new, the inherent impossibility of continuance of their political and economic organization. (Herskovits, 1941, *passim*.) While recognizing these factors, Herskovits believes that the tenacity of the African cultural focus is primarily the cause of retention of religion as the dominating aspect in New World Negro culture. "It must therefore be assumed that not only in particular aspects of Negro life . . . but in the very foundation of Negro religion, the African past plays full part." (Herskovits, 1941, p. 207.) This position he has ably propounded and maintained, as have several of his students, notably Octavio Da Costa Eduardo (1948). There can be no question that religion continued to be an important cultural focus among the New World Negroes, but while Herskovits' explanation of this situation appears plausible, it is not the only possible one.

A brief examination of retained Africanisms proves them all to be of such character as to offer no threat to the vested interests of the slave owners. All those traits, such as highly developed political and economic organization, which constituted such a threat, were ruthlessly stamped out. The significant question is not whether religion remains a cultural focus among the New World Negroes, but whether it so remains because it was the old cultural focus, or because of historic factors which permitted its retention where other (in Africa, strongly supporting) interests were suppressed. Certainly this matter is not settled, but there is at least as much, if not more, reason to believe that permissive factors rather than resistance factors are involved in the retention of religious focus. Probably both were operative.

What seems more significant to the writer is the nature of the integration of African and Euro-American traits to form a new cultural unity still centering about religion. Once reintegration had begun, *internal growth* appears as the important cultural phenomenon. One has only to hear the multitudinous versions of some of the spirituals, or to count the various religious organizations and sects, to realize that cultural drift, channeled and induced by the cultural focus, is in progress.

Patai (1947) has recently given us a study of culture contact and change in modern Palestine. When the first European Jews came to Palestine, they took over from the Arabs and the culturally similar Palestine Jews most of the prevailing patterns of life. With greater numerical strength, which was achieved during the third decade of the 20th century, the Jews began to dominate the cultural scene and to develop their cultural focus of agriculture. Where previously they had adopted Arab agricultural patterns, they surpassed their teachers, and the current of borrowing flowed from Jew to Arab. Aside from agriculture, Palestine as a whole was being subjected to a process of westernization emanating from Europe and directed at the Near East generally.

Brief examination of the data in terms of the postulates for a free contact system shows that a change was indeed rapid in the Jewish focal area of agriculture, but that this change was the result of internal processes of innovation and *not* primarily due to the contact situation. Conversely, change should have been most rapid among the Arabs in their focal area. Here, however, we note that Arabs took over certain farming techniques in a non-focal area, but no specific information is given as to what traits they did adopt in their cultural focus. In fact, we are not even told what aspects of their local culture constitutes their focus of interests. Therefore, there is no immediate way of assessing this important question.

Rapid change is to be noted in a number of other aspects of Jewish culture. Building, clothing, technology, and new business methods (which were also adopted by the town and city dwelling Arabs) are a few emergent interests. Since not all of these aspects can be subsumed under the head of the agricultural focus, other factors making for intense change must be sought. As Patai points out in connection with cultural changes of the Palestinian Arabs, ". . . it is in most cases difficult to tell whether the change is due to Jewish or to general European influence." (Patai, 1947, p. 22.) It would appear that the most important effect of cultural focus in the present case is the intensified internal change in Jewish agriculture.

The ivory carvers of Little Diomed Island, Alaska, offer an interesting example of cultural focus developing because of free contact conditions. (Heinrich, 1950, pp. 235-242.) The Diomed group of Eskimos has adopted a considerable number of Euro-American traits ranging from clothing and staple foods to guns, knives, outboard motors and supplies for these. Because of the barren character of their island, they have turned ivory carving into an industry to provide the cash needed to purchase those elements which have now become necessities.

The forms carved by the Diomed Eskimos consist of bracelets, necklaces, paper knives, and figurines. The material used is locally derived walrus ivory and fossil mammoth ivory, much of which was traded from Siberia. The interest for us lies in the elevation of ivory carving, an old trait in the area, into a cultural focus. Moreover, the interest in this focus has led to a number of innovations. Some of these, such as the paper knives, were old forms to which new meanings were added. The harpoon paper knife combined two elements, a harpoon head and the ivory blade. Other innovations consist of bracelets modified to watch-bracelets, and ivory inlay. The variations in form, the constant experimenting, the interest which it engenders, mark it as a significant focus making for internal culture growth.

The Alkatcho Carrier Indians are an Athabaskan-speaking people living on the eastern slope of the Coast Range Mountains in central British Columbia. Because of isolation, they have not been overrun by white peoples. They have,

however, undergone two phases of acculturation. In the first of these phases the Carrier took over from the coastal Bella Coola the potlatch rank system. Because of the relatively lower economic status of the Carrier, changes were made in the potlatch system to adapt it: goods were not destroyed; neither was the quantity of goods nor the time involved so great as among the Bella Coola. Furthermore, religious and ceremonial activity was not strongly developed and so was not taken over with the potlatch. Little else was taken over from the Bella Coola.

The potlatch rank system was, then, the cultural focus of the Carrier at the initiation of the second phase of acculturation by the Whites, at least for the upper class. Like the first phase, the second was primarily of the free contact sort. White traders were first to contact the Carrier, followed closely by Catholic missionaries. The Carrier were quickly converted to Catholicism, not a focal area of the culture. It must be noted that the intensity of participation in the church has remained low. Its ready acceptance may, in part, tie up with rank, since the nobles were made officers of the church. In another non-focal area, the Carrier have taken over clothing (except moccasins), arms, tobacco, flour, tea, sugar, canned milk, and have bought phonographs, accordions, and violins. Steel traps are of importance because trap-line inheritance is one of the prerogatives of rank and so ties into the cultural focus. Later, the acceptance of certain White goods became a symbol of social prestige, and to that extent it is aligned with a focal interest.

For our concern, the most important factor was the breakdown of potlatching, the cultural focus. The acceptance of better technological equipment from the Whites should have led to increasing complexity due to the concomitant increase in wealth and ability to potlatch. It remains only at funerals and is changed in function. Both Church and State condemned it but were in no position to force its abandonment. Rank likewise became blurred, lost its old basis, and is declining. The Church is also on its way out. The larger social groups necessary for potlatching have broken down, and the basic family is now the prevailing social unit. Trap lines became individual property.

In terms of cultural focus, the first items to be accepted should be near the focal area, but were not; and, by and large, those items taken over were not realigned in focal terms. Instead, they led to a general breakdown of the whole focal structure. The pressure exerted by Church and State to abandon the potlatch should have led them to retain it; but except for the innocuous funeral potlatch, it has gone. The only factor to remain from the focus is prestige, and it is much weakened. Here, then, it must be admitted that the cultural focus has had little to do with the changes which have occurred in Carrier culture.

For an early historic example, we may turn to the acculturation of the Natchez Indians by the French. (Albrecht, 1946, pp. 321-354). This important Indian

people was found by the French in 1682, in what is today the southwestern part of the state of Mississippi. Their culture was focused on the mutually supporting religion-rank system, actually a theocracy. For our purposes, the contact continuum may be divided into a free contact period from 1682 to 1716, and a directed contact phase lasting until about 1729, although Albrecht demonstrates six periods which can be recognized.

During the first phase, traders and missionaries were the chief agents of acculturation. There was, however, little or no change in the focal area of religion. There was no rancor between the native and the Catholic priests, and pressure in this matter, if it occurred at all, came from the French soldiery. On the other hand, they did adopt knives and other such equipment in the non-focal area of technology and economics. All in all, there was relatively little cultural interchange during this phase.

The second directed contact phase, incurred by destruction of the trading post by the Natchez, began with the construction of Fort Rosalie. Although generally peaceful, this period was marked by occasional friction between the French and the Natchez; in spite of French political control, the Natchez were far from being completely dominated. It is interesting to note here that the French frequently had access to native doctors. Again, there seems to have been little pressure applied by the French against the Natchez religious focus. In the non-focal area of technology, guns, pistols, ammunition, steel knives, hatchets, iron kettles, Limbourg cloth, shirts, and many trinkets of ornamental nature were accepted. Of these, guns and Limbourg cloth had secondary functions allied to the focal interest, in that they were used as burial offerings. The Natchez took over relatively few items of food and drink, although the French did add certain dishes to their menu. Chickens were rapidly taken over from the French; they had previously adopted peach and fig trees from the English. Here, again, we have acculturation markedly affecting non-focal areas of culture while the focal area remained fairly stable.

In his paper on culture change among the Nilgiri tribes of India, Mandelbaum (1941) gives us data on the Toda, Kota, and Badaga tribes. These will be considered in order, in relation to Herskovits' hypothesis of cultural focus.

The cultural focus of the Toda centers around the sacred buffalo dairies. All Toda life is permeated by the buffalo cult, and it integrates all parts of their culture into a strongly cohesive whole. The contact continuum is dominated by the British, but their policy has generally been protective rather than directive. A mission established over half a century ago has carried on intensive efforts since that time. Nevertheless, the Toda have not been acculturated toward the British culture nor toward the Indian. Contact should have produced many changes, but actually it has not had any appreciable effect. Indeed, the only change that could

be noted was the adoption of gaily colored neckcloths. Presumably, this change is not of focal concern. It is true that activity has been directed toward changing the religion centering around the buffalo dairies, but it is likewise true that the Toda were left free to accept or reject. As Herskovits points out (1949, pp. 546-547), the greatest variation occurs in this aspect of their culture. The important thing in this is that the variation appears to be the result of internal growth and not in any degree the result of culture contact.

One Toda village, however, has been moved to make room for a parade ground. Since this may be interpreted as a dominated contact condition, the fate of its focal interest may be examined. Theoretically, under these conditions the cultural focus should become more strongly entrenched, and if necessary, reinterpreted to meet the changed condition. In this instance, the fact that the sacred places are "one, inalienable, and irreplaceable" (Mandelbaum, 1941, p. 23), has collapsed the cultural focus. Now this village keeps cattle as well as buffalo, and also raises potatoes. Whether a new focal interest will arise is an academic question, but here, because of over-integration, it was impossible to maintain or re-interpret the old one.

"Kota religion and interest centered about the smithy." (Mandelbaum, 1941, p. 20.) The Kota are also the musicians to the Toda and the Badagas. Although they have had less contact with British or Indian peoples than the Toda, their culture has changed much more. The only apparent change within the focal area is the replacement of native ore by Chevrolet axles as raw material for the forge. On the other hand, tea and potatoes are replacing millet and barley as staple agricultural products. Tiled roofs are replacing thatched, and tailored jackets the native toga. But these matters are not of focal interest. However, in another matter of non-focal interest, change was strongly resisted in accord with the formulation of cultural focus. In this case, the British ordered the Kota to use a latrine, an order in conflict with native custom. As a result of this demand, the entire village was moved so that neither Kota gods nor British noses should be offended. Subsequent quarrels over the location of a new site led to a general weakening of the power and prestige of priesthood and native leadership.

The Badagas were focused on agriculture. In the symbiosis of Toda, Kota, and Badaga, they furnished agricultural products to the other tribes. Here there has been significant change in the focal area. Potatoes, raised as a cash crop, are replacing millet as a subsistence. Thus, there has been an expansion in the focal area as a result of contact. But even among the Badaga, more significant changes have occurred in non-focal areas. Culturally, they, of all the Nilgiri people, stand nearest the caste Hindu. There has been agitation by some Badagas to align themselves with Hinduism. Because musicians are low in the Hindu caste system, this group wants to eliminate the Kota musicians (who are carrion eaters, besides)

from participation in Badaga ritual. Conservative Badagas, however, want to maintain the old manner of life. As a result, factions have developed. Added to factional disputes, the reduction in power and prestige of the tribal leaders by the British assumption of final arbitration has generally weakened the entire social structure.

"The bare subsistence level, and the activities of these (White Knife) Shoshone to maintain it, is the focal point about which the rest of the culture is integrated." (Harris, 1940, pp. 39-118.) Harris does not use the term in the Herskovits sense, but the case deserves analysis because of its general bearing on the cultural focus concept.

The White Knife Shoshone, before establishment of their reservation, ranged a part of northeastern Nevada. This territory, part of the Great Basin, was drained by the Humboldt River and comprised high, semi-arid country with scattered mountain ranges and long valleys. The variety and quantity of food available in this environment was small. It consisted of pine nuts and the edible seeds and roots of a number of plants. All animal life was scarce, and the general lack of an adequate food supply kept the Indians at the lowest subsistence level. Even insects like crickets and ants contributed to the larder. Existence in this harsh environment was preserved only with the greatest difficulty. Technology was on a low level, as were, indeed, all aspects of their culture. Population was restricted both by the environment and by the Shoshone themselves. The economic and coterminous social unit was small. The shaman was the only specialist. Seasonal gatherings for dances, games, and prayers marked the only gathering larger than the subsistence group.

The details of the contact continuum need not concern us here. In general, increasing encroachment by Whites, traders, trail men, miners, and farmers reduced the availability of food. Horses were introduced in 1854, after the Indians had for a decade been stealing them to use for food. This innovation permitted some economic and social progress, but this situation was soon ended. The Indians, after having unsuccessfully tried farming, formed satellite communities around White settlements. Indian-White relations were not good, but economically the Shoshone were better off than in pre-contact days. Their reservation was established in 1877. The general trend since that time has been a gradual adoption of White traits in technology and economy. Social organization paralleled the White system in many ways and has been little changed, but there has been a tendency to move toward the individualism characteristic of American culture. Religion has changed the least, but active resistance is chiefly in political organization where progressive and conservative factions now exist. By and large, the change in the culture is an increase in content. This brings us to an important question, namely, the applicability of the concept of cultural focus in considering peoples

like the White Knife Shoshone. This question will be considered in detail in the next section.

DISCUSSION

We have now attempted to analyze a number of cases of culture change in terms of the hypothesis of cultural focus as formulated by Herskovits. Some of the postulates inherent in this concept have been tested as they seemed indicated in each specific culture examined. Throughout this paper, these postulates have been applied in a simplistic fashion because only by so doing can they, as postulates, be tested. We may now review some of the pertinent data and attempt an evaluation of the concept of cultural focus as it applies to culture change.

Postulate 1 is that under conditions of internally induced culture growth, changes are most likely to occur in the area of cultural focus. Granted the objective definition and characterization of cultural focus, then this postulate logically follows. We have seen that in the development of Afro-American culture, the focal area of religion has produced many responses. Syncretism, individual and institutional variation, and structural complexity demonstrate that within the focal area integration, culture drift, and innovation have operated to enrich that segment of American Negro culture. Under the spur of focal interest, the Palestinian Jews have, by conscious effort, increased the content of their agricultural focus. Similarly, the Eskimos of Little Diomed Island have produced a number of innovations in their cultural focus.

According to Postulate 2, which states that under free contact, changes should (a) occur more rapidly in the focal area than in non-focal areas, (b) show the most change in the respective culture foci of each of the groups involved in the contact, and (c) be adopted in order according to their nearness to the focal area. Granting that more interest centers around the cultural focus, these postulates do not follow of necessity. They do not because many other mutually independent variables enter the equation. The range of the elements presented for selection, the prestige of the donor, the inherent communicability of the element, the inherent needs of the people in non-focal areas — these are all variables. Furthermore, cultural focus may sometimes be directed toward resisting change. Even though interest is high and institutions numerous, as among the Toda, alternatives are not permitted and even variation is at a minimum. Clearly we must reckon with foci of change and foci of conservatism.

Thus, cultural focus is, itself, an independent variable and may dominate the contact, blend with other factors, or not be a part at all in any particular situation. An examination of our test cases shows that this is true. The Carrier first accepted elements of material culture to raise their technology and subsistence level, although these elements could have been used in potlatching. Nothing di-

rectly in the focal area was offered, and so nothing could be accepted. Instead, those items that were taken over led directly to the collapse of the focus. Again, the elements taken over by the Natchez from the French were almost entirely in non-focal areas. Even though religious items were offered in the focal interest, they were not accepted, perhaps because of the highly integrated nature of Natchez theocracy. Among the Toda, nearly all traits offered were rejected. Here, almost certainly, the degree of integration was responsible for lack of change in the focal area, for as soon as the focal area was broken in one village, acceptance of several traits was rapid. The Kota accepted new subsistence products, not elements changing the focal area of blacksmithing to any degree, even though such things must have been available to them in the cultures and in the nature of the contact continuum. Significant change occurred in the agricultural focal interest of the Badaga, but perhaps greater changes took place in other aspects of their culture.

Postulate 3 states that under forced or directed contact, innovations (a) are least likely to occur in the focal area because it forms a rallying point of resistance, and (b) will, if necessary, undergo reinterpretation in order to bring them into line with the culture focus. As in Postulate 2, these do not inhere in the nature of the cultural focus. It is theoretically possible that under a dominated contact, the cultural foci of each group may coincide and therefore lead to greater development. Furthermore, if the attack on the focal area is sufficiently intense, a sharp break may occur and reintegration take place centering around a completely different focus. Reorientation of the Maori toward tribal betterment is a case in point. (Hawthorn, 1944, *passim*.) Our present data show that while Carrier contacts were primarily free, pressures, albeit ineffective, were directed against the focal rivalrous potlatching. It did not become a rallying point, nor was it reinterpreted; it disappeared. Non-rivalrous funeral potlatching only was retained. Nevertheless, this postulate seems more likely than Postulate 2.

From the foregoing it would appear that in dealing with change resulting from internal stimulation and that caused by external agents, whether under force or dominated conditions, we are concerned with different orders of process. Further, it would appear that cultural focus is a primary cause of change arising internally and that, therefore, we may use the concept as a constant for the analysis of internally induced change. On the other hand, it seems clear that in cases of change resulting from contact conditions, the cultural focus functions as an independent variable. When the causal factors for selectivity or retention under these conditions are sought, it must be considered only as one of several possibilities.

Herskovits explicitly states that the culture focus of a people may change through time. (Herskovits, 1949, p. 543.) Since this process may be significant in the analysis of certain cases of change, we may consider some of the possible ways

in which the shift may take place. One would be an increase in interest in one aspect of culture and a consequent or simultaneous decrease in activity centering around the former focal aspect. Such appears to be the case at San Ildefonso Pueblo where a focal interest in agriculture has been superseded by a cultural focus centering around the commercial aspects of pottery making. (Whitman, 1940, p. 457.) A change in the cultural focus may occur as the result of traumatic contact conditions causing the loss of an old focus and subsequent reorientation. The deviant Toda sub-village seems to be undergoing this process at the present time. New foci may originate as a result of faction development, as among the Badaga. Obsolescence may occur with the gradual removal of the basis of the focus. While not in a focal area, an illustration of this process is the sloughing off of the Catholic church and much of native belief by the Alkatcho Carrier because superior technological equipment relieved the necessity for supernatural intervention in their hunting and trapping.

An obstacle to the use of the hypothesis of cultural focus lies in the nature of the phenomenon itself — namely, the broadness of the focal base. We may examine in this respect the White Knife Shoshone, who are said to be "focused on bare subsistence". Regardless of the dramatic effect of the statement, the fact remains that people at that level are too busy seeking the least denominator of livelihood to devote much interest to any non-essential aspect of their culture. Consequently, everything in their culture is directed toward survival, and all aspects are equally focal. Considering the White Knife in terms of the relation of cultural focus to culture change, it is obvious that any change increasing the total content of their culture is likely to be in their cultural focus. In this case, then, the concept has no meaning. A point that might well repay investigation is the relationship of broadness or narrowness of focal base to focal intensity.

This fact brings us to a final point. When Herskovits formulated the hypothesis of cultural focus, he conceived it to be an attribute of every group. (cf. Herskovits, 1949, p. 542.) Whether this idea can be validated or not, there remains the difficulty of determining the focus of any specific culture. This difficulty arises from the variation in intensity of its expression in various groups. The degree of stress given a particular orientation of culture may vary from very little to very much; from freedom of action to complete dominance; from the intensity placed on gambling of the White Knife to the all-embracing concern of the Toda sacred dairies. A focal area may be so little stressed as to be impossible of discernment, or it may be strikingly obtrusive. The point is that stating that a society has a cultural focus actually imparts no concept of the degree to which it is developed. It seems clear that the usefulness of the concept would be increased if some means of designating the intensity of expression could be found. While it is obviously impossible, at least at present, to establish objective criteria for measuring in-

tensity, the subjective evaluation of the trained anthropologist who studies a group would be helpful. It would seem that three or four degrees of intensity of expression in the focal area could be recognized. By selecting terms which have been used in the literature and interpolating one which appears to fill a need, a scale of intensity may be set up. 1) *Necessity level* (Linton) could be used to designate such cultures as the White Knife Shoshone. 2) *Subsidiary level* may be suggested to designate foci of interests which are subservient to a central focus but are nevertheless more intensely developed than other parts of the culture. The role that political and social organization play in the religious cultural focus of West African cultures would be an example. 3) *Focal level* (Herskovits) as defined should be limited in application to those cultures displaying a marked intensity of expression in the focal area. 4) *Involution level* (Goldenweiser) clearly denotes the type of focal integration found among the Toda and perhaps the Natchez. It is the most intense development of a particular segment of the culture of a specific group.

By way of brief summation, we may note that Herskovits' hypothesis of cultural focus has been tested by application to a number of cases of cultural change. It was discovered to be of primary importance in the study of internally induced culture change. The concept constitutes a valuable tool in the analysis of such growth and in explaining the reasons why specific kinds of change occur. It also demonstrates the method whereby minute individual variations lead to abandonment of old traits and incorporation of new ones. However, its value in analyzing cultural change under contact conditions is distinctly secondary. It was found to function as an independent variable. While in specific cases it undoubtedly may be extremely important in directing change, it often plays no part.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALBRECHT, ANDREW C.

1946 "Indian-French Relations at Natchez," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 48, No. 3.

BENEDICT, RUTH

1934 *Patterns of Culture*. Boston.

DU BOIS, CORA

1936 "The Wealth Concept as an Integrative Factor in Tolowa-Tututni Culture," in *Essays in Anthropology* in Honor of Alfred Louis Kroeber. Berkeley.

EDUARDO, OCTAVIO DA COSTA

1948 "The Negro in Northern Brazil," *Monographs of the American Ethnological Society*, No. 15.

GOLDENWEISER, ALEXANDER A.

1936 "Loose Ends of Theory on the Individual, Pattern, and Involution in Primitive Society," in *Essays in Anthropology* in Honor of Alfred Louis Kroeber. Berkeley.

GOLDMAN, IRVING

1940 "The Alkatcho Carrier of British Columbia," in Linton (ed.), *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes*. New York.

HARRIS, JACK S.

1940 "The White Knife Shoshone of Nevada," in Linton (ed.), *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes*. New York.

HAWTHORN, H. B.

1944 "The Maori: A Study in Acculturation," *American Anthropological Association Memoir*, No. 64.

HEINRICH, ALBERT

1950 "Some Present-Day Acculturative Innovations in a Nonliterate Society," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 52, No. 2.

HERSKOVITS, MELVILLE J.

1937 *Life in a Haitian Valley*. New York.

1941 *The Myth of the Negro Past*. New York.

1945 "The Processes of Cultural Change," in Linton (ed.), *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*. New York.

1948 "The Contribution of Afroamerican Studies to Africanist Research," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 50, No. 1, Part 1.

1949 *Man and His Works*. New York.

HERSKOVITS, MELVILLE J. AND FRANCES S.

1947 *Trinidad Village*. New York.

KARDINER, ABRAM

1939 *The Individual and his Society*, with foreword and two ethnological reports by Ralph Linton. New York.

LINTON, RALPH

1936 *The Study of Man*. New York.

MANDELBAUM, DAVID G.

1941 "Culture Change Among the Nilgiri Tribes," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 43, No. 1.

PATAI, RAPHAEL

1947 "On Culture Contact and its Working in Modern Palestine," *American Anthropological Association Memoir* No. 67.

WHITMAN, WILLIAM

1940 "The San Ildefonso of New Mexico," in Linton (ed.), *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes*. New York.