INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND ENGLISH EDITION

*by Sidney W. Mintz**

In 1948–49, while Alfred Métraux was engaged in anthropological fieldwork in the Republic of Haiti, some of Professor Julian Steward's students (this writer included) were making a series of community studies in nearby Puerto Rico. It was our good fortune that Professor John V. Murra, then of the University of Puerto Rico and an intimate friend of Métraux's, should have received all of us one night in his apartment, while Métraux was visiting. During the day Métraux had visited one of us—Eric Wolf—in the field and had displayed the energy, single-mindedness, and enthusiasm for which he was so justly famous. After an exhausting trip to and from that community (where, to everyone's amazement, including Wolf's, he had sprung from his horse in order to begin eliciting data, matter-of-factly and in excellent Spanish, on house types and house construction, from some of Wolf's startled informants), he received us on Murra's terrace, beneath a brilliant Antillean sky. Sitting at ease in a lounge chair, drink in hand, Métraux began to talk about anthropology and about what it meant to be an anthropologist.

Tributes to Métraux have been written by the score, and by those close to him; this writer has no proper part in adding to what has already been said. But that starlit evening had its impact on those of us for whom anthropology possessed a magic it is now rapidly losing. We who were its students might not only look forward to living among strange and remote peoples someday but might also learn in the presence of those whose lives were given

* Dr. Simone Dreyfus-Gamelon and Professors John V. Murra and Richard Price kindly read and criticized very usefully an early draft of this introduction. I am grateful to them all, but they do not share my responsibility for interpretations I have made here.

over to doing just that. Can one borrow a more contemporary image? Moonwalkers fill us with awe because they have been brave, and they have experienced somewhere alien and distant. Anthropology finds its beginnings in a related awe, the wonder of unknown worlds, and the educated wonder of our teachers, who have seen and continue to question.

But the anthropologist's unknown world, unlike the astronaut's, is really an interior world, a world that is strange because of the way it is perceived. A good ethnographer, no matter how unrelativistic, always recognizes that reality is, among other things, what people have learned to see. And while the outer world may seem bizarre, exotic, and remote, it is to the relationship between that outer world and the perceptions and intents of men that anthropology directs its attention. Métraux exemplified that concern and the puzzlement that all good ethnographers are commonly prey to. What he had seen had become part of what he saw with, but only after the lenses provided by his own culture had themselves been clearly seen.

Métraux apparently viewed each society in terms of its uniqueness, its special character; Haiti was such a society, though he talked relatively little about it that night. He was not—it seemed—interested in problems of the evolutionary succession of societies, in their ecological fit, in their range of variation. In fact, Métraux's concern with "grand theory" was faint. Progression, retardation, the study of society on a cosmic scale, these did not appear to be matters in which he was much interested. The sometime student of Nordenskiöld and Rivet, Métraux had become a field anthropologist *par excellence*. But he did not follow closely or with great interest the theoretical advances of his British and North American colleagues. Inevitably, then, it was for his ethnography that he was known. Such an assertion, however, is neither defense nor criticism: it merely suggests that Métraux was as Métraux did, a fieldworker's fieldworker, an ethnographer's ethnographer, who left most of the theorizing to others. Herein, perhaps, one perceives the poignance of Claude Tardits' piercing posthumous evaluation of him: "One might almost say that Métraux, after having been the student of his Indians, wanted nothing more than to be the Indian of his students" (Tardits 1964: 18–19).

Métraux's ethnographic skill was famous among anthropologists, and it rested on diverse talents: a great gift for languages, the strength and endurance of two ordinary men, an ability (doubtless sometimes distressing and perhaps even an obstacle) to forget all else while pursuing the slightest snippet of data, and a genuine consecration to the field. Until he began his work in Haiti, Métraux had usually worked among peoples better described as "primitive" than as "peasant," to use two of the descriptive terms anthropologists are fond of. Though he had a very substantial familiarity with Andean Indians—among his other accomplishments, Métraux had written on the Uru-Chipaya (e.g., Métraux 1934, 1935) and other Andean peoples—the bulk of his publications before Haiti concerned South American Indians of the tropical lowland. Even this much-qualified assertion is imprecise; yet it is probably correct to claim that the Haitian people represented a different—and doubtless far more western—cultural variant than any that had concerned Métraux previously.

In 1941, while Métraux was visiting the Ile à Tortue off Haiti's north coast in the company of Jacques Roumain, the idea of creating a Bureau of Ethnology for that country was born—an idea that Roumain was later able to convert into a proud reality. Métraux's awareness of Haiti's cultural richness was stimulated—as he tells us in *Voodoo*—by an intense campaign by the Church against the local religion, during which untold artistic riches were savagely destroyed in the name of a higher faith. Once awakened, Métraux's interest in Haiti never ceased; in an article in *Afroamérica* (Métraux 1945), long before he began his Haitian fieldwork, he wrote glowingly of the Bureau d'Ethnologie and its collections, taking justifiable pride in his part in the Bureau's creation. Between that time and his death, he published scores of articles and several books on Haiti, of which this, originally *Le vaudou haïtien*, is the best known.

Métraux had worked on Easter Island before becoming a specialist on Haiti (e.g., Métraux 1940). In later years, when he found himself fascinated by Haiti's folk religion, he wondered out loud whether he had been consecrated to the study of insular enigmas. Yet he had not gone to Haiti for this purpose, and his genuine interest in *vaudou* matured only after he had developed

a commanding knowledge of Haitian culture in general. He had begun his investigations in Marbial Valley in 1948 at the behest of UNESCO, to provide "educators, doctors, agronomists who made up the team charged with the completion of the project, with concrete data on the life and beliefs of the peasantry." And he continues, "It was hence during the course of a general sociological study treating nutrition, life circumstances, social organization, in short all the aspects of social life, that I found myself in the presence of *vaudou*. Thus I was able to take account of what it meant for these people" (Bing 1964).*

Without a serious reading of Métraux's Haitian ethnography, written as his interest in *vaudou* grew, however, it is not easy to see the skill with which his study of Haitian religion was invested. For instance, *Making a Living in the Marbial Valley, Haiti,* which he wrote with some of the Haitian scholars who made up his Marbial team and which is still little known today, even to many Haiti enthusiasts, was published in 1951; it remains one of the most useful single sources available on Haitian peasant culture (Métraux 1951a). Also in 1951, Métraux published the best paper ever done on Haitian rural house-types (Métraux 1951b) in a relatively unknown French geographical journal; and yet another, on inheritance, in a Belgian africanist review (Métraux 1951c). In 1953, again, Métraux was able to help Robert Hall in his preparation of the linguistic monograph *Haitian Creole* (Hall 1953). Thus Métraux came to *vaudou* while steeping himself in the study of Haitian culture generally—and toward the end of an intensely active field career that had given him an ethnographic breadth and perspective rarely equalled.

"*Vaudou,*" he told Madame Fernande Bing in a 1961 interview,

> is an extremely vast universe, an African religion indeed, but also a European religion: in a word, a syncretic religion that has blended together not only different African cults but also certain beliefs from European folklore. One finds here Norman and Breton traditions, carried by the French colonists and adopted by the Blacks; one even finds masonic rites. In short, this is a sort of conglomeration of elements of all kinds, dominated by African traditions. This religion is practiced by ninety per cent of the Haitian people. . . . At the same time these people consider themselves Catholic, and while I affirm that nine-tenths of the population practice *vaudou,* I do not mean that they are not Christian. All *vaudou* believers are in effect excellent Catholics, extremely pious. In their belief, there is no sharp break between the religion that they practice and in which they believe, and the Catholicism to which they are bound. Thus *vaudou* does not reveal itself as a religion opposed to Catholicism. Haitian peasants all, I repeat, are good Catholics, and really perceive no contradiction, no opposition, between the official religion of their country and the particular faith that they have inherited from their ancestors. *Vaudou* took on its character in Haiti in the absence of a Church. The slaves, imported from Africa in the eighteenth century, were baptized, forced to go to church, but they received no religious education. Thus they remained faithful to the one possession they had been able to bring with them, that is, their beliefs. They remained even more attached since they were thus able to guard some hope and, in spite of the reality, to give to their lives some meaning, thanks to certain values that these beliefs preserved. The life of the slaves was horrible, abominable—and *vaudou* brought to them that which it brings to Haiti's poor today: the grounds for hope, for confidence, and above all, a way of distracting oneself, of escaping from reality.
> (BING 1964: 28–29)

The interview from which this passage is taken was taped in 1961, three years after the first publication of *Voodoo* in French. In it, Métraux talked at greater length about the mysteries of *vaudou*—which is to say, those aspects of this complex religious system that were not, and are not, understood. The interview itself revealed him once again as an ethnographer who never stopped asking *himself,* as well as his informants, what things mean. In Haiti as elsewhere, he was consumed with a desire to determine what, indeed, was true, and his discussion of the priestess Lorgina Delorge shows well how carefully he sought to disentangle the loose ends of truth. More, perhaps—because Métraux found Haitians strange, it seems, in ways that the Indians of the forest were not strange—and his friendship with the Haitians apparently achieved a warmth and mutual sympathy that

* A close co-worker believes that Métraux hoped—at least in the beginning—that his work for UNESCO would ultimately benefit the Haitian people themselves, though he had no such optimism in the case of primitive peoples, whom he felt were doomed. Dreyfus-Gamelon, *in lit.*, November 25, 1971.

had not always been possible in the jungle (Dreyfus-Gamelon, *in lit.*, November 25, 1971).

This book gives us what is surely the most authoritative general account of that complex of belief and practice called *vaudou* available in the literature. Yet Métraux himself is careful to warn us that *vaudou* is difficult to study; that he was able to deal with only a part of it; that it is a cluster of different ceremonies, beliefs, practices, all changing and changeable. Métraux had been a fieldworker too long, had too much respect for human complexity, to suppose that cheerful positivism, careful work, and bounding energy were enough to guarantee the documentation of more than one segment of *vaudou's* reality. What is more, his unwillingness to handle "high-level theory" led him to discuss his subject piece by piece, and to devote relatively little attention to the wider (and more interior) perspectives from which *vaudou* might be viewed. This must surely be the major weakness of *Voodoo*. On the one hand, Métraux contributes relatively little to any comparative theory of religion, restricting himself largely to "the facts." On the other hand, he shows little ease with the elements of ecstasy and of mystery that contribute so much to the character of *vaudou* as a religious system. His approach is, in fact, empirical, rationalistic, and conservatively ethnographic. At the same time, it bears stressing that no other observer of *vaudou* has contributed to its study the exquisite documentation of detail that marks the works of Alfred Métraux.

Though anthropologists are often said to be driven by their liking for the bizarre and exotic, this assertion probably misses the point. Georges Condominas has suggested (Condominas 1965) how the exotic becomes everyday, once it is experienced that way; and some anthropologists might say that what excites them most is the process by which the apparently bizarre becomes ordinary. Therein the matter-of-factness of modern life finds its other nature, in the view of strangers: for is there doubt that the character of modern life is as bizarre and exotic as any other man has invented? Yet we who inhabit today's societies, while obediently living up to the value of social self-criticism so typical of that modernity, find our own societies far less bizarre (and far more agreeable in fact) than we care to admit. More—

we rush about the globe, encouraging our children to do likewise, in search of something "truly different," even while we relentlessly turn it all into something that is "the same"; that is, more like our own.

In its savage and repeated thrusts into the world outside, the West has gone very far in replacing difference with sameness, in supplanting other, contrasting modes of thought and act, in changing what had once been exotic for westerners into pale and tawdry reflections of itself. It may be that the day when the total history of European hegemony is finally written, the indictment that we made many societies resemble ours will count as heavily as that we destroyed many others altogether. Yet during the five centuries that we have been steamrolling others into poky simulacra of ourselves, we have been alternately amused and enraged by the consequences. Both those who imitate us too well and those who imitate us not quite well enough are threatening; perhaps we would like most a perfect mimicry of the flesh accompanied by a total emptiness of the spirit.

If ever there were a society that ought to have ended up totally annihilated, materially and spiritually, by the trials of "modernization," it is Haiti. After the destruction of the aboriginal population and the early experiments in plantation production, Española (as the Spaniards called it), like its sister islands, was eclipsed in importance by the mainland from Mexico to the Andes, where a seemingly inexhaustible supply of mineral resources and of subjugated labor became the conquerors' special obsession. Between the Discovery, so-called, and the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the Caribbean was a Spanish sea; but the conquest of the highlands reduced it to a highway for the galleons.

Before the middle of the seventeenth century, however, the Ile à Tortue, off Española's north coast, and the northwest tip of Española itself, had become havens for anti-Spanish vagabonds, religious and political refugees, deserters, and runaways. Repeated Spanish attempts to dislodge these interlopers were never entirely successful; such buccaneers represented the first serious territorial challenge to Spain in the Greater Antilles. When the Treaty of Ryswick (1697) made the western third of Española

formally French, the groundwork was already laid for what would become for a time the single most lucrative colony in western colonial history: Saint Domingue.

No mystery here, since it had become perfectly clear that the plantation production of newly established proletarian and urban commodities—sugar, tobacco, coffee, rum, etc.—for the European markets would be good business for centuries to come. The capital to buy slaves, to furnish the plantations and to create a flourishing economy founded on human flesh as property was readily forthcoming. Curtin (1969: 84) in a careful estimate, probably conservative, supposes that Saint Domingue received slightly fewer than 900,000 slaves during its history as a plantation colony. Between 1739 and 1788, 317,300 slaves were imported; between 1779 and 1790—*twelve years*—313,200 slaves were imported (Curtin 1969:79). To grasp fully the scale of this commerce in human beings, one need imagine what transatlantic transportation was like, before the start of the nineteenth century.

In 1681, sixteen years before the Treaty of Ryswick, Española had 2,000 slaves. In 1739, 42 years after that Treaty, French Saint Domingue had 117,400 slaves; in 1791, on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, there were an estimated 480,000 slaves. Such figures, of course, tell us nothing by themselves about life expectancy on the plantations. But the record of cruelty in this most profitable of slave-based plantation colonies is very clear. One need only examine any of the exquisitely detailed studies of individual plantations by Gabriel Debien (1962) to grasp as much—at Sucrerie Cottineau, for instance, almost the entire slave contingent was replaced by "new stock" between 1766 and 1775, three-quarters freshly imported from Africa (Debien 1962: 50). Clear, too, is the way the ever-heightened importation of enslaved Africans limited the creolization of the slave population, keeping alive African traditions and an active resistance to *enslavement,* and not simply to *slavery*. When the Revolution began, only an estimated 36,000 Europeans and 28,000 freemen of mixed ancestry lived in the colony; indeed, it was the struggle between these groups that opened the way for a servile revolt. More than ten years of war followed; by any reasonable measure of the time, the Haitian Revolution was more important than the upheaval that had preceded it by only a few years in the thirteen British colonies to the north.

In 1804, when the Haitian Revolution ended, substantially all those who had held power in Saint Domingue were gone. The second independent republic of the New World had been born, and it was a black republic. What is little remembered by outsiders today is the hostile world within which the republic had to survive. If an independent white United States, even with its built-in slave economy, was once threatening to Europe, one may well imagine what an independent black Haiti must have meant to the powerful, in the United States as elsewhere. "Our policy with regard to Hayti is plain," intoned Sen. Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina in 1824, two decades after Haiti became free. "We never can acknowledge her independence . . . which the peace and safety of a large portion of our union forbids us even to discuss" (Schmidt 1971: 28).

At the same time that Haiti's leaders were justifiably suspicious of outsiders interested in establishing businesses or in acquiring land in Haiti, those same outsiders avoided the establishment of diplomatic relations on the basis of equality between nations. The behavior of the United States toward Castro's Cuba and Mao's China thus merely proves that there is not, after all, that much new under the sun, at least in American foreign policy: the United States did not recognize Haiti until 1862!

The period following the declaration of Haitian independence in 1804 was immensely important for the shaping of Haitian culture and character, and the isolation of the people from the world outside, both by the world and by the majority of the country's leaders, helps to explain the highly distinctive quality of Haitian life today. Whereas the period before 1804 was marked by almost constant flux, due to the rapid economic growth of the colony and the incredibly massive importations of African slaves after 1697, the period following 1804 was typified by an almost total stasis of the society with relation to the outside world, particularly after the death of Christophe in the north, and the reconsolidation of Haiti as a single country.

The plantation system upon which Saint Domingue's immense profitability to France had rested began to deteriorate, first slowly, then with great rapidity. The national institutions of the

colony—particularly the Church—withdrew; the hinterland became truly Haitian, for the first time. But this is merely a summary account of a large number of different processes, all occurring at once: the breakdown of a system of ownership of men by men, and of all the means by which slavery was perpetuated; the dissolution of the master classes, and their substantial replacement, both by a different structure for the wielding of power and by largely different personnel; the breakup of the large estates, and of the system of control wielded over those who had manned them—not merely slavery, but the network of paternalism and the mass of custom in which it was embedded; the retreat of Catholicism and of its representatives from the countryside (the schism lasted from 1805 until 1860); the decline of the export economy and, accordingly, of the import economy as well; the rise of the small family property, its control vested in a senior male; and the concordant development of new religious forms and institutions, some either forbidden, or at best hidden, before the Revolution. Such a list barely suggests some of the ways by which Haiti stopped being what it had been, in order to become something else. The writer has attempted elsewhere (Mintz 1966a, 1966b) to suggest what some of the end-products of these processes have been, in a country which is today the most rural and agrarian, the most thoroughly peasant, and the poorest, in the New World. In terms of the substance of this book, however, only a few points require elaboration here.

The fundamental substance of the convulsion of 1791–1804 was the transformation of a lucrative slave-based plantation colony, dedicated to the creation of profit for European capitalist investors, and to the production of market commodities for European consumers, into a nominally independent country where men were no longer slaves, where the capitalistic system continued to function only on a much-simplified basis, where production for subsistence supplanted in good measure production for the market, and where the small agricultural enterprise based on family labor replaced the large plantation with its massed and coerced labor. Political and economic changes were at the base of the Revolution, but the Revolution expressed the genuine quality of the life of the Haitian people in every other sphere as well. "*1804 est issu du Vodou,*" the Haitian savant Dr. Jean

Price-Mars once wrote (Schmidt 1971: 23), and even the Haitian guerrillas who waged a valiant but doomed struggle against the North American invaders 125 years later are said to have worn *vaudou* amulets into battle (*ibid.*). The Haitian Revolution was in no sense a "religious war," but a revolution against an inhuman system. Its ideological overtones were not those of Africa against Europe, nor even entirely or consistently of black against white —certainly not of African religion against European religion. Yet *vaudou* surely played a critical role in the creation of viable armed resistance by the slaves against the master classes—and against the armies of other powers besides France, interested in resubjugating the once immensely profitable colony. Thus the ideological elements of slave life and of slave resistance formed part of the war the slaves fought for themselves and, inevitably, part of the life of the Haitian freeman, once the war was won. *Vaudou* cannot be interpreted apart from its significance for the Haitian people, and for Haitian history. Correspondingly, Haiti cannot be understood if, on the other hand, one chooses to ignore *vaudou*. But since it is with *vaudou* that Alfred Métraux's book is concerned, we need do little more than set his penetrating study into a slightly broader context.

The Haitian Revolution freed not only the slaves but also their creative capacities: it was through modes of symbolic expression, including the religious, that this new-found freedom was able to mainfest itself. The new religious forms which grew up or were built upon during the nineteenth century found their roots principally in Africa, but these forms were not simple transfers, nor were they modified in any single (or clear-cut) fashion. Haitian horticulture is not African horticulture; Haitian domestic organization is not African domestic organization; and Haitian religion is not African religion. In fact, to ask whether some feature of Afro-American life is or is not "African" in origin is somehow to beg the question, since this circumvents the complex tribal heterogeneity of African peoples who played a role in the development of New World cultures (Mintz 1970a, 1970b, 1971). What holds for Haitian horticulture and Haitian domestic organization holds as well as for Haitian religion; to ask whether *vaudou* is "African" is to ignore serious questions of tribal-

specific origins for particular features of that religion, as well as the important related questions of how that religion, *as system,* took on its characteristic modern form. These latter questions are of great theoretical significance, since they have to do with the very nature of culture itself, and with the ways culture changes.

Throughout the history of African enslavement in prerevolutionary Saint Domingue, we suppose that the slaves sought to create religious traditions, building both upon their diverse pasts and upon the conditions of their enslavement. Knowing as we do that *vaudou* not only survived the Revolution but played a part in it, we also know that the changed conditions of life after freedom must have been reflected in the religion itself. That is, the character of this religious system must have accorded—and accords—intelligibly with the specific sociology of Haitian life, whether in rural or in urban settings, and in the past as in the present. But this is certainly not to say that *vaudou* is merely a reflection or a projection of other aspects of life. Now, as before, it remains a fundamental part of life for a very great many Haitians, and still plays an important role in the lives of many others.

Yet we properly expect an ideological subsystem to be highly responsive to changes in the sociology of local life, to economic pressures of all kinds, and even—at times—to fads, vogues, and new customer demands. For example, the family cult-practices that apparently typified *vaudou* a century ago have diminished sharply over time, to judge by all that we know, as the family compounds themselves have dissolved, under demographic, economic, and political pressure. Thus one expects to find a delicate interdigitation of belief and belief system, on the one hand, and of the specific character of social life, on the other. Though *vaudou* flourishes in the city, as Métraux points out, largely in response to tourism, more traditional cult centers continue to function there as well—each variant serving some purpose; in one case, the traditional sociological, psychological, and economic utility of the system persists, while in the other, economic considerations, perhaps, prevail over others. Yet this is not a matter of "genuineness" or "authenticity," so much as evidence of the plasticity of a complex institution, its manifold utility, and the very blurred line between the sacred and the secular. That believers can be possessed—as the writer has witnessed—in the

many forms
parts

midst of a secular dance in a deserted country marketplace attests to the vitality of *vaudou,* not to its feebleness.

Which is to say that *vaudou,* like any other complex of belief and practice, is a vital, living body of ideas and behaviors, carried in time by its practitioners, and responsive to the changing character of social life. Thus must have been true from its very beginning as a transatlantic system of faith, when African slaves from a score of different societies first attempted to implant their symbolic pasts in the hearts and minds of their children. It followed almost inevitably that *vaudou* would come to be associated with the endless struggles of the Haitian people against their condition; as we have seen, there is good evidence that the stirrings of revolt before 1791 were intermeshed with *vaudou* and its power. After the Revolution, *vaudou* must have grown like all else in the tropics—swiftly, and wildly. There is no national church, there never has been; there is no association of priesthood, no written dogma, no code, no missionization. In stark contrast to the proselytizing religions implanted in Haiti, *vaudou* has never had to fight for its own even when attacked (which has, indeed, been often enough), precisely because it *is* the popular religion of Haiti. And yet, beneath the apparent absence of any unified social or ideological superstructure, there is a body of basic beliefs and practices that typify *vaudou* throughout Haiti: the twin cult, the *loa* and their specific personifications, the phenomenon of possession, the role of the dead, the relationship between gods and the land, and much else, provide a core of belief—one might almost say a series of philosophical postulates about reality—that make a national church (complete with bingo, rock records, and basement ping-pong tables) unnecessary and irrelevant. While outsiders may say that the trouble with Haiti is that its people are so superstitious, the man who recognizes that one man's religion is another man's superstition might be more inclined to say that the trouble with Haiti is that its people are so religious.

convert to another religion

There is no doubt that *vaudou* has lost ground among the Haitian people in the course of the last half-century. Quite aside from the powerful campaigns launched against it and its practitioners by the Church, the work of missionizing Protestant churches since the North American invasion has also made inroads. A

deepening poverty in the countryside has reduced the richness of ritual there (though not the intensity of belief), while the movement to the cities has much modified the nature of *vaudou* practice. Yet it has also been contended that the personal politico-religious ideology of the late President Duvalier, who was in power from 1957 until 1971, effected a renascence of *vaudou*, while charms and amulets entered as never before into the prosecution of political objectives. There is a naive chauvinism in such simplification. While it may be contended fairly that the Duvalier regime did nothing to weaken the meaning of *vaudou* for the Haitian masses, it is at least as important that it was Duvalier *père* who supplanted a foreign Catholic clergy with a Haitian Catholic clergy and got the Church to cooperate in the process. It is at least conceivable that a Haitian clergy will do more to wean the masses away from certain elements of *vaudou* belief than their Belgian, French-Canadian, and French predecessors ever did—though this was probably not in the late President's mind. If *vaudou* has received a new lease on life in the last two decades, it is probably as much the result of a deepening rural economic crisis, as of any emotional, political, or ideological predispositions of the regime in power. Assertions that treat *vaudou* as some kind of undifferentiated and homogeneous system of belief cannot possibly explain very much in any case, since it is *vaudou*'s peculiar strength to lack entirely any centralization of practice, priesthood, or power. This problem, among others, is dealt with by Métraux's analysis.

It is Métraux, in fact, more than any other student of Haiti's folk religion, who perceived its remarkable resiliency, the continuous input of new symbolic materials by those who practice and preach it, and the great degree to which it is a westernized religion, in spite of the massive African contributions to its form and contents. That the peoples and cultures of the Caribbean region should be among the most western of the modern world is not, in fact, mysterious: after all, they were among the first victims of the West. In the case of Haiti, they were also among the first to fight back successfully. That struggle was ideological as well as physical; *vaudou* was part of it. But let Alfred Métraux tell us.

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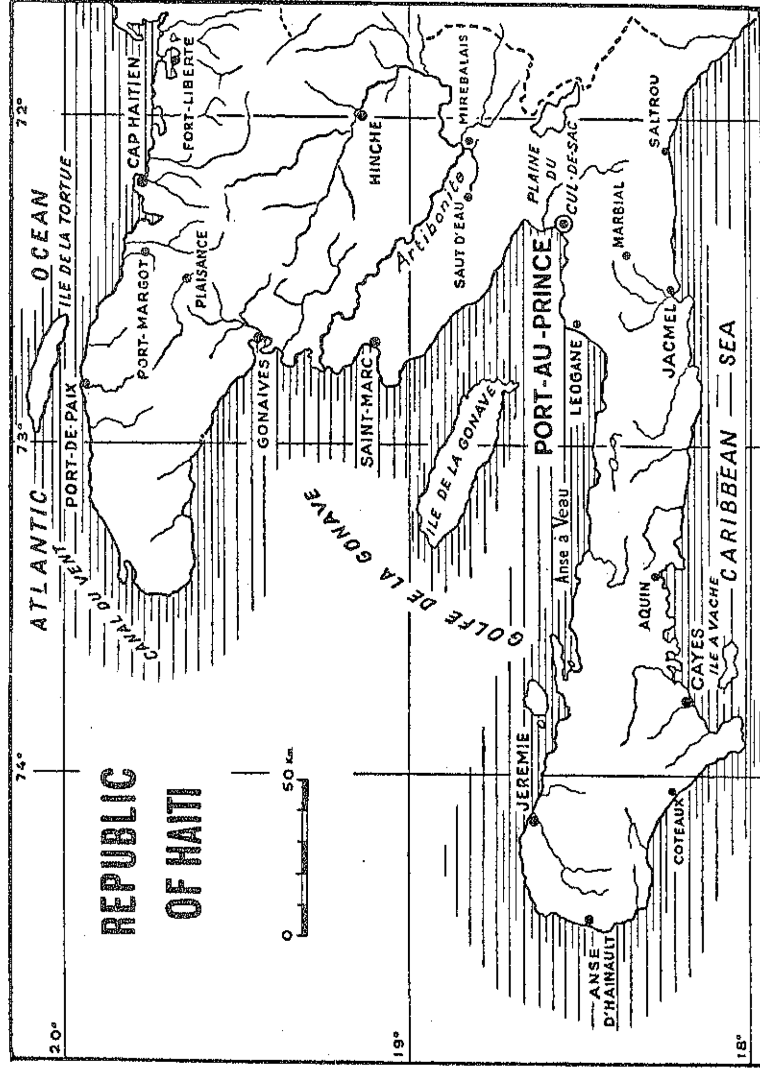

FOREWORD

Certain exotic words are charged with evocative power. Voodoo is one. It usually conjures up visions of mysterious deaths, secret rites—or dark saturnalia celebrated by 'blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened' negroes. The picture of Voodoo which this book will give may seem pale beside such images.

In fact—what is Voodoo? Nothing more than a conglomeration of beliefs and rites of African origin, which, having been closely mixed with Catholic practice, has come to be the religion of the greater part of the peasants and the urban proletariat of the black republic of Haiti. Its devotees ask of it what men have always asked of religion: remedy for ills, satisfaction for needs and the hope of survival.

Seen from close, Voodoo has not got the morbid and hallucinatory character which books have given it. A talented but rather fanciful American writer, W. H. Seabrook, has given the most complete account of the black legend of Voodoo. But that legend belongs to the past. It belongs to the colonial period when it was the fruit of hatred and fear. Man is never cruel and unjust with impunity: the anxiety which grows in the minds of those who abuse power often takes the form of imaginary terrors and demented obsessions. The master maltreated his slave, but feared his hatred. He treated him like a beast of burden but dreaded the occult powers which he imputed to him. And the greater the subjugation of the Black, the more he inspired fear; that ubiquitous fear which shows in the records of the period and which solidified in that obsession with poison which, throughout the eighteenth century, was the cause of so many atrocities. Perhaps certain slaves did revenge themselves on their tyrants in this way—such a thing is possible and even probable—but the fear which reigned in the plantations had its source in deeper recesses of the soul: it was the witchcraft of remote and mysterious Africa which troubled the sleep of the people in 'the big house'.

Torture and branding were not merely reserved for 'poisoners'

but also for anyone suspected of belonging to the dreaded sect called 'The Voodoos'.

Even so, the few allusions to Voodoo which may be found in documents and books little known to the general public, could not have raised this rural paganism into the legendary terror it became, had not a British Consul, Spencer St John, written a book, *Haiti or the Black Republic* (published in 1884), in which he described the most blood-curdling crimes committed by the Voodoo sect. This work was widely read and for long has been regarded as the main authority. The degree of its influence may be judged from the fact that it inspired Gustave Aymard to write his adventure story *Les Vaudoux*—a book in which the sect is described as a lot of fanatics thirsting for blood and power.

Spencer St John's revelations of alleged cannibalism in Haiti provoked, according to his own admission, very strong feeling in Europe and the United States. Although faced with an outcry in Haiti he nevertheless thought good to repeat his allegations in the second edition (1886), and even to add new details. As a result several writers denounced Voodoo as a cannibal religion and from their writings Haiti came to be regarded as a savage country where, every year, children were sacrificed and devoured by the monstrous worshippers of the Serpent.

The occupation of Haiti by American Marines resulted, amongst other things, in a renewal of interest in this African religion which the White world saw in such a dark light. The rhythm of drums which echoed peacefully in the hills to stimulate the effort of workers became, for the occupying forces, the voice of Africa, barbaric and inhuman, asserting itself over a country which had been seized from the Whites and from their civilization.

I intend in this book to discuss Voodoo from the point of view of an anthropologist—that is to say with method and prudence. If I have been chary of the enthusiasm of those who, at first whiff of an exotic religion, are seized with a sort of sacred vertigo and end by sharing the gullibility of its devotees, I have also taken pains to avoid the attitude of those smalltime, niggardly Voltairians who never stop talking about pious fraud—with a good wink, of course.