

Anastasia Elaine Dahl Smith. *Aspects of Bahamian Culture*. New York: Vantage Press, 1978.

*Aspects of Bahamian Culture* was written as a master's thesis and is thus plagued with all the ritualistic rigidity accompanying such a work. However, it could have been a significant contribution, given the paucity of literature addressing Bahamian culture, were it not for several dire weaknesses. Primarily, the research foci are so broad and general that the numerous "aspects of Bahamian culture" receive only superficial attention. Indeed, in the seventy-six pages of text, Smith attempts to examine Bahamian history, politics, race relations, the black movement, Bahamian society via tradition/modernity polarities, and Bahamian folklore.

Chapter I, only eight pages in length, addresses the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, method of data collection, the review of literature, and the method of data analysis and interpretation. Unfortunately, their broad treatment apparently obfuscates the entire study. "The problem of this study is to determine some aspects of Bahamian culture and indicate the forces and conditions which influenced these aspects of Bahamian culture during the period of colonial times and postcolonial times" (p. 3). The primary methods of data collection involved participant observation, personal experience, and "...the unstandardized means of interviewing in which the researcher was free to probe for answers" (p. 6). However, the book reveals so few informant interviews that the emphasis of data collection was apparently the author's "personal experience" and the secondary sources (i.e., the literature). Further, of the few interviews presented, most were conducted with informants of a professional status (e.g., minister of tourism, psychologist, author), indicating an "elitist" perspective of Bahamian culture. Indeed, the entire research design is addressed so superficially that the reader is left with serious questions and doubts.

Chapter II only briefly discusses Bahamian history, the Progressive Liberal Party, the rise of self-government, internal achievements, and the black movement in the Bahamas. As a British colony, Smith describes a dependency model but does not

refer to nor develop the concept as such, largely to the detriment of her efforts. Being Bahamian, the author is in a unique position to reveal, in depth, the black movement in the Bahamas. However, one suspects a western bias reflected by the author's emphasis upon "equal pay for equal work" and a failure to provide any insight into the phenomenology of the black Bahamian. Smith speaks of a "definite advance" and a "progressive" Bahamas, and the reader can only assume that the value attitude emulates a western ideology of progress. The author's positive embrace of modernity becomes more explicit throughout the remainder of the book. Smith attempts to lend a "sociological atmosphere" to the work by stating that "the relationship between two or more variables is our concern in the study"(p. 6). However, the "variables" are not identified as such but are presented much like a menu selection, and the relationships seem to be deduced rather than demonstrated.

The "sociological analysis" of Bahamian culture (Chapter III) juxtaposes tradition and modernity. Using Parsons' five pattern variables, Smith concludes that the "actors" in the Out Islands have a more traditional orientation, while those "actors" in the city are more oriented toward modernity. No other literature addressing tradition and modernity is employed, and, at least from this perspective, the "analysis" seems to be a rather scanty facade. Indeed, the analysis consisted of providing examples from Bahamian society to illustrate each of Parsons' five pattern variables, and one can only assume that the examples are something greater than speculation in that many of the examples are presented conjecturally.

The chapter addressing Bahamian folklore, on the whole, was again disappointing. Being Bahamian, Smith was in a position to provide for the folklorist a contextualist approach. However, like the rest of the book, she attempted to address too many genres of folklore, including *junkanoo* (a Bahamian festival), folk medicine, *obeah* (occult practices), stories, and folksongs. The result was only a superficial treatment of each. Much seemed to be but a review of previous Bahamian folklore research, and one senses that little preliminary review of folklore materials was conducted by

the author. Certainly, the "telling of old stories" is not uniquely Bahamian, as Smith speculates.

In sum, *Aspects of Bahamian Culture* is disappointingly shallow and is plagued with numerous platitudes. The reader finds the author's abundant use of the terms "modern" and "progressive" distressing and biased. Indeed, Peter Berger, in *Pyramids of Sacrifice*, notes that many people carry ". . . the myth of growth in the contemporary Third World" (p. 41). Finally, *Bahamian Culture* is riddled in places with contradictions. For example, Smith notes that much of Bahamian folklore is and will be disappearing, and yet she contends that ". . . modernization has not taken anything away from the indigenous culture, but it has added new forms to the traditional culture and opened up new alternatives for living. . . ." (p. 73). With many of the twenty-eight bibliographic entries being Bahamian newspapers, the references may be of only limited use to the student of Bahamian culture. However, given that ". . . many people seem to have negative conceptions of the culture of the Bahamian people. . .," Smith hopes ". . . that through this study, many people will learn about the Bahamas. . ." (p. 4). Thus, perhaps its greatest readership will be among tourists who care to learn a little about what they have seen.

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