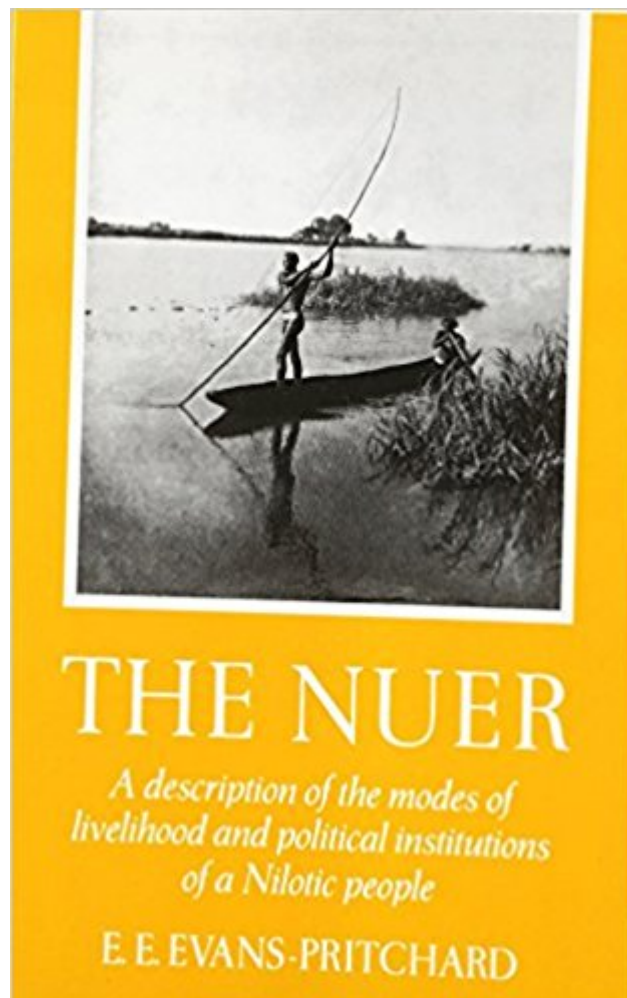




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The Nuer: A Description Of The Modes Of Livelihood And Political Institutions Of A Nilotic People



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Book Information

Paperback: 271 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press (July 15, 1969)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195003225

ISBN-13: 978-0195003222

Product Dimensions: 8.2 x 0.8 x 5.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.2 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #190,442 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 in [Books > History > Africa > Central Africa](#) #124 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Africa](#) #429 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Native American Studies](#)

Customer Reviews

"An excellent example of British social anthropology. Useful as a teaching tool for social organization."--Michele Gamburd, Portland State University
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"Amazed that it went out of print briefly. I plan to use it again."--P. Shipton, Harvard University

The late Edward E. Evans Pritchard was a Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford.

The Kindle edition is illegible. The diagrams and photos are unavailable and the footnotes are placed in the middle of the text, sometimes separating a paragraph by a few pages ... and sometimes even separating words. If I paid more than \$0.99 I would be asking for my money back. Now the semester is started and I have to rush order a physical copy in order to complete my assignments. I KNEW the price was too good to be true.

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great

Textbook

The complexity of Nuer relations with their environment, because of herding cattle, is detailed in the first chapters. (Nuer name thier cattle and can distinguish scores of them.) In the later chapters Evans-Pritchard takes us through how herding leads to patrilineal descent and the formation of lineages and clans. This social organization dictates whom a man will marry, how the bride price will be paid, and how most disputes are settled. The work helps us understand the nature of feuds, both their negative aspects and their positive ones. The social organization is further shaped by conflict with the Dinka, a neighboring tribe. The analysis gave us a paradigm for how lineal organization

works leading to important insights in North America as well as Africa where clan organization is common. Both Nuer and Dinka are in today's news because of the conflict in southern Sudan. Their earlier "wars" are hardly more than quarrels by the standards of northern Sudan's brutality. It's not uncommon to meet Nuer refugees in Tucson because of war's ravages.

This book is one of the classics of ethnography - indeed, one of the works which defines what ethnography and anthropology are. The Nuer is an account of a group of pastoralists living in the Sudan as Evans-Pritchard knew them when he did field work in er... uh... the late 30s early 40s. The first half of the book is a detailed and lively (for an academic) account of their way of life, the seasonal rhythms of the year, and their intense interest in cattle. The second half of the book then deals with the main subject of the book: the social organization of the Nuer. E-P moves to a greater and greater level of abstraction, creating a more and more crystalline view of the patterns of kinship and marriage that underlie Nuer life. The main structure is the lineage system - a group of people all related from a common ancestor through an unbroken line of male succession. This book is famous because of E-P's account of the lineage system. The concept of the lineage and descent became key in anthropology, and E-P's Nuer materials helped provide the perfect example of the lineage as theorized by Radcliffe-Brown, E-P's teacher. As a result of this book, anthropologists spend the next two decades running around all over the world looking for lineage systems. As it turns out, this sort of system is not particularly widespread across the world - at least not in its pure form. Indeed, it turns out that E-P's formulation was too neat and clean and too crystalline. As one pundit put it, "not even the Nuer are like The Nuer". So one drawback of the book is the false clarity that it provided. This was useful in the forties and fifties, but meant that eventually the study of kinship and social organization would have to move out of the paradigm E-P had set up. Another problem with the book is the fact that it takes place in a vacuum. It is easy not to notice that the Nuer are under the sway of British authority and had recently been bombed when E-P arrived. The colonial context of the book is suppressed. There are other criticisms that could be made of the book - it is now a half-century behind the times - but it stands up today as a good read and a fascinating argument. The fact that reactions to it have been so extreme - overwhelming enthusiasm, abiding hatred, quizzical puzzlement, cow obsession - point to the fact that a book doesn't have to be loved forever to be read forever. Like all classics, The Nuer both good to read and good to think.

The Nuer is a challenging but supremely rewarding study of a people who, with minimal technology and living a way of life that is very primitive by the standards of Westerners, achieve a perfection of

ecological harmony with their environment. Evans-Pritchard's (E-P) description of the Nuers' rich and multifaceted relationship with their cattle is unforgettable. E-P writes with elegance, brilliance, compassion, and respect for the proud and dignified Nuer who, because of this great monograph, are among the most famous people ever studied by anthropologists.

I disagree completely with the "reader from Washington" who wrote it is a boring book. Probably he/she didn't read more than the first two, more descriptive chapters. This book became "a classic" because it was a turning point in the history of Anthropology, specially because of its analysis of the political system of the Nuer.

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