

The Black Power Pan-Africanist Perspective

By Chinweizu
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The Black race will be exterminated
if it does not build a black superpower in Africa
by the end of this century.

Cheikh Anta Diop:

Rehabilitating the self-image of the Black African (1)

Most Africans today would agree with Aime Cesaire's famous description of Africans as

those who never explored anything,

those who never tamed anything,

those who give themselves up to the essence of things.

To such Africans, talk of an African Renaissance is just nonsense, hot air! But they are simply victims of a racist/white-supremacist, Eurocentric education foisted on us by the European colonizers. As Cheikh Anta Diop correctly pointed out:

“The philosophy of the colonizer was to make it very clear that the colonized people could do nothing for themselves without the assistance of the colonizing people.”

—Diop, *Great African Thinkers*, p. 349

One of the ways in which white supremacists have instilled this idea has been to demand to know: *What has Black Africa contributed to civilization, or to world progress?*

“In every country that one visits and where one is drawn into conversation about Africa, the question is regularly asked by people who should know better: ‘But what has Africa contributed to world progress? . . . not the wheel, not writing, not mathematics, not art . . . not this, not that and not the other thing. . .’
—L. S. Leakey, 1961, in his Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford University. Quoted in Kwesi Prah, *The African Nation*, p.283

The presumption was that Black Africans have contributed nothing. This presumption is false. But it was given an appearance of truth by two falsifications of history: (1) the denial of what Ancient Egypt had contributed to the cultures of the Greeks and the Hebrews, and through them to European civilization, and (2) the exclusion of Pharaonic Egypt from Black Africa.

Egyptology, in the early 19th century, had accomplished the remarkable feat of taking Egypt out of Africa, and Black Africans (Negroes) out of Egypt. Academically, Egypt was made an extension of Europe. Egyptology was habitually either silent on the race of the Pharaonic Egyptians or presented them as whites. One of the ways of doing that was through what Amos Wilson described as the ‘unwritten rule which says that if ethnicity [or race] is not mentioned, then we are talking about white-folks.’

The dogma that the Ancient Egyptians were not Black Africans [Negroes] was a major falsification of history, and it served to justify the

enslavement and colonization of blacks as a project to civilize the black primitives who have been unable to create any civilization.

In order not to be intimidated by this question, we need to remind ourselves that we, Black Africans, are not on earth to contribute to *their* White European civilization. Our business is to build our own civilization and take care of our own interests. That said, we can, nevertheless show that we have, through Black Egypt, contributed much to their white civilization, even though that is not our job.

Europe's denial of Egypt's seminal contributions to the foundations of Greek and Hebrew cultures, and its conjoined denial that the Ancient Egyptians were black, served as justification for the racist contempt that Blacks have been subjected to since the days of the trans-Atlantic chattel-enslavement of Negroes, and as part justification for colonialism.

Given the adverse consequences of this gross falsification, the race of the Ancient Egyptians is a vital question for Black Africans. Which was why Cheikh Anta Diop made it his life's work to scientifically and rigorously demonstrate the Black identity of the ancient Egyptians, the Pharaonic Egyptians who built the pyramids on the Nile; and to show that Pharaonic Egyptian civilization played a major role in shaping the classical civilizations of the Mediterranean zone, including the Greek civilization, and therefore was the foundation for European civilization. As he put it:

“For us the new, important fact is less to have stated that the Egyptians were Blacks, as one of our principal sources, the ancient writers, already did, than to have contributed to making this idea a conscious historical fact for Africans and the world, and especially to making it an operational scientific concept: this is where our predecessors did not succeed.” --[Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, p.2]

In 1974, at the Cairo Symposium on the Peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script, which UNESCO organized, Diop, ably assisted by his

disciple Theophile Obenga, faced the cream of the world's Eurocentric scholars who claimed that the Ancient Egyptians were not black. ***Diop carried the day by presenting eleven categories of evidence to support his argument for the blackness of the Ancient Egyptians: these categories included the contemporary eyewitness testimony of classical European writers; melanin levels in the skins of mummies; testimony from the Bible; linguistic and cultural comparisons with the rest of Black Africa; Pharaonic self-descriptions; data from physical anthropology, blood type studies, carvings and paintings; etc.***

Having demonstrated scientifically that the Ancient Egyptians were Blacks, Diop argued that "the moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the 'western' civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science. One needs only to meditate on Osiris, the redeemer god, who sacrifices himself, dies, and is resurrected to save mankind, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ." --[Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, p. xiv]

Diop elaborated:

"The oneness of Egyptian and Black culture could not be stated more clearly. Because of this essential identity of genius, culture and race, today all Negroes can legitimately trace their culture to ancient Egypt and build a modern culture on that foundation. A dynamic modern contact with Egyptian antiquity would enable Blacks to discover increasingly each day the intimate relationship between all Blacks of the continent and mother Nile Valley. By this dynamic contact the Negro will be convinced

that these [Ancient Egyptian] temples, these forests of columns, these pyramids, these colossi, these bas reliefs, mathematics, medicine, and all this science are indeed the work of his ancestors and that he had a right and a duty to claim this heritage.”—[Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* p. 140]

Diop furthermore declared, in his last major book, *Civilization or Barbarism*, that:

“Insofar as Egypt is the distant mother of Western cultures and sciences, as will emerge from the reading of this book, most of the ideas that we call foreign are oftentimes nothing but mixed up, reversed, modified, elaborated images of the creations of our African ancestors, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, dialectics, the theory of being, the exact sciences, arithmetic, geometry, mechanical engineering, astronomy, medicine, literature (novel, poetry, drama), architecture, the arts, etc. . . . Consequently, no thought, no ideology is, in essence, foreign to Africa, which was their birthplace. It is therefore with total liberty that Africans can draw from the common intellectual heritage of humanity, letting themselves be guided only by the notions of utility and efficiency.

--[*Civilization or Barbarism*, pp. 3, 4]

Since Diop’s death in 1986, a major European scholar, Martin Bernal, has published detailed research to show that Greek civilization was an heir to Egyptian civilization, and has also documented how, beginning in the early 19th century, European scholarship, motivated by racist/white supremacist pride, denied that anciently accepted fact. (The book to read is *Black Athena, Vol. I* by Martin Bernal).

Diop’s life’s work challenged and overthrew the Eurocentric and Eurochauvinist history of the world, with its legend of the primitive Negro. It removed the intellectual basis for the racist contempt that European imperialists had instigated towards Blacks.

But why the legend of the primitive Negro? Why did it arise? According to

Diop,

“The desire to legitimize colonization and the slave trade—in other words, the social condition of the Negro in the modern world—engendered an entire literature to describe the so-called inferior traits of the Black. The mind of several generations of Europeans would thus be gradually indoctrinated, Western opinion would crystallize and instinctively accept as revealed truth the equation: Negro=inferior humanity.

“To crown this cynicism, colonization would be depicted as a duty of humanity. They invoked ‘the civilizing mission’ of the West charged with the responsibility to raise the African to the level of other men [known to us as ‘the white man’s burden’]. **From then on, capitalism had clear sailing to practice the most ferocious exploitation under the cloak of moral pretexts.** . . . The memory of the recent slavery to which the Black race has been subjected, cleverly kept alive in men’s minds and especially in Black minds, often affects Black consciousness negatively. From the recent slavery an attempt has been made to construct—despite all historical truth—a legend that the Black has always been reduced to slavery by the superior white race with which he has lived, wherever it may have been. This enables Whites easily to justify the presence of Negroes in Egypt or in Mesopotamia or Arabia, by decreeing that they were enslaved. **Although such an affirmation is nothing but dogma designed to falsify history—those who advance it are fully aware that it is erroneous—it nonetheless contributes to alienating Black consciousness.** [Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* pp. 25, 26]

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But why the legend of the primitive Negro? Why did it arise? According to Diop,

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As Jacob Carruthers points out:

“In the name of ‘the only true religion,’ or ‘higher civilization,’ or ‘progress,’ century after century has witnessed the dismantling, deforming, and defaming of African institutions, a necessary precondition for the more perfect exploitation of African peoples and resources. ***This perennial onslaught has been waged not only by***

foreign invaders, but also by African converts to the alien cultures.” –[Jacob Carruthers, *Intellectual Warfare*, p.270]

The life work of Cheikh Anta Diop and the life work of Ivan van Sertima together pose a great challenge to the media and education systems of Black Africa. The challenge is to disseminate their work so that the next generation of Black Africans is not burdened and held down by an inferiority complex. ***Our schools, at all levels, need to develop a new history curriculum that will cure us of inferiority complex.***

As Amos Wilson explained:

“We are, to a very great extent, what we are today as a people as the result of believing lies presented as truth. We must recognize that this often comes in the guise of history. . . . ***European history . . . functions as a mythology, and as mythology it functions to maintain European power, domination, and control . . .*** A mythology organizes the world, organizes behavior; it organizes interpersonal and intergroup relations. Whatever mythology we believe is one that organizes our approach to other people, our perception of ourselves and of other people. . . . We have to recognize the function of mythology since mythology seeks to mold character and to motivate, as well as to de-motivate.” –[Amos Wilson, *The Falsification of Afrikan Consciousness*, pp. 28, 30-31]

Amos Wilson also reminds us that:

“If we wish to understand ourselves and wish to understand other people’s psychology we must then understand our history and their history. We must be very clear about this matter. . . . It is through studying the history of our people that we come to understand ourselves as individuals and as a people.” –[Amos Wilson, *The Falsification of Afrikan Consciousness*, p.22.]

In his *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aime Cesaire wrote: “I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement.”—[Quoted in Kwesi Prah, *The African Nation*, p.146.]

We must bear in mind that this skillful injection of crippling fears and inferiority complexes has not stopped. It still goes on today. We Black Africans are the people most afflicted with this inferiority complex. ***The mythology that we are a people who invented nothing, explored nothing, tamed nothing, serves to de-motivate us. The mythology that Europe invented everything, etc. serves to motivate Europeans. It gives them power.*** As Amos Wilson explained it:

“I often tell [black] college students that ‘you look at your college catalogue and you see a course in there and assume that because it’s in the catalogue it’s worth learning.’ You say to yourself, ‘If it’s not there then it must not be worth learning; because if it was worth learning it would be there.’ You look at the list of required courses and you don’t see anything about your history as being *required*. You assume that the most important courses are required and since the ones related to us are not required then they must not be important. Just the reading of the catalogue inflates one group and deflates the other. It creates a superiority complex in one and an inferiority complex in the other.”—[Wilson, *Falsification*, p.31]

As a people psychologically crippled by inferiority complexes, we have to use history for sociotherapy. On this issue, Amos Wilson says: “We have to use history as a means of reconstituting our personality and restructuring ourselves.” (Wilson, *Falsification*, p. 54].

And James Spady adds:

“To avoid a deformed African personality one must be conversant with the full range of one’s ancestral past, not just to establish self pride but to use it as the basis for

constructing a modern civilization in the post-colonial and neo-colonial era.”—[James G. Spady, *Great African Thinkers* p. 96].

On the practical value of history, Van Sertima elaborated:

“History is a critical complement to contemporary reality and it is particularly helpful to those who have lost their way in the world because the footprints of their past have vanished or been erased. . . . It should charge us not only with a surge of new pride but the electric energy of creative action. For it to animate us thus, it will demand, it will most certainly demand, a corresponding animation of consciousness. . . . The vision of our former stature in the world must penetrate our consciousness so deeply that it begins to transform the degrading and dwarf-like habits of our present thought and action, habits which have crippled our progress for so long. This heightened awareness of the best in our past can stimulate and inspire and heal us but it must blend intelligently with a maturing vision of the living present if it is to be of practical value.” —[Ivan van Sertima, *Egypt: Child Of Africa*, pp. 475, 476]

And the remedy for our crippling inferiority complexes is to organize and teach ourselves our Afrocentric history based on the facts unearthed by such scholars as Diop and Van Sertima. And, according to Diop: “The essential thing, for people, is to rediscover the thread that connects them to their most remote ancestral past. —[Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism* p. 212].

And that is precisely what our education curriculum must accomplish as quickly and thoroughly as possible. We need to teach an African history that reaches back beyond the era of Arab and European invasion; that reaches back to the beginning of humanity in equatorial Africa, and of human civilization in the Nile Valley. Let us retire

Eurocentric history from our classrooms and bring in Afrocentric history: Let us teach the works of Diop, let us teach the works of Van Sertima, let us teach the truth about the Black African origins of Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Psychology, Astronomy and other sciences; let us teach that the true sources of western philosophy, Christianity, and Islam, were in Black Egypt; let us teach these truths so that a new light might shine on the minds of Black Africans and bring forth a fresh spirit of racial self-confidence. And our media must mount a campaign to oblige our ministries of Education to get on with this task.

Education for African Renaissance

To those who ignorantly believe that Black Africans invented nothing, explored nothing, tamed nothing; who ignorantly believe that we have always been primitives, any talk of an African renaissance can only seem unreal and ridiculous. Renaissance of primitiveness?

To correct their ignorance, Diop and Van Sertima need to be taught in the schools of Black Africa. Only with knowledge of what they have supplied does it make sense to talk of an African renaissance. In particular, we must note what Diop said about the centrality of knowledge of Ancient Egypt for any project of African cultural renewal:

“The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be correctly written until African historians dare to connect it with the history of [Ancient] Egypt. . . . Ancient Egyptian culture enjoys a position vis-à-vis present day African cultures analogous to the role which Greco-Latin culture plays in regard to contemporary western culture. Could you imagine a western scholar researching in western history without referring to Greco-Latin culture? Could his work be considered as scientific? The same applies to African scholars in respect to ancient Egypt. . . . For us, the return to Egypt in

all domains is the necessary condition for reconciling African civilizations with history, in order to build a body of modern human sciences, and thus revive African culture. Far from being a diversion centered around the past, a look toward ancient Egypt is the best way to conceive and to build our cultural future. Egypt will play the same role in the rethinking and renewing of African culture that ancient Greece and Rome plays in the culture of the west.”—[Diop, *Great African Thinkers*, pp. 238, 163-164].

ENDS

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