INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS

John G. Jackson

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INTRODUCTION

One thing should be completely understood before entering into the main body of this book. Mr. Jackson has not written this volume on African history to tell benevolent stories about so-called savages and how the Europeans came to civilize them. Quite the contrary, in many ways he has reversed the picture and proved his point. Civilization did not start in European countries, and the rest of the world did not wait in darkness for the Europeans to bring the light. In order to understand how this attitude came about, one needs to look at the sad state of what is called “world history.” There is not a single book in existence with a title incorporating the words “world history” that is an honest commentary on the history of the world and its people. Most of the history books in the last five hundred years have been written to glorify Europeans at the expense of other peoples. The history of Asia has been as shamefully distorted as the history of Africa.

Most Western historians have not been willing to admit that there is an African history to be written about, and that this history predates the emergence of Europe by thousands of years. It is not possible for the world to have waited in darkness for the Europeans to bring the light because, for most of the early history of man, the Europeans themselves were in darkness. When the light of culture came for the first time to the people who would later call themselves Europeans, it came from Africa and Middle Eastern Asia. Most history books tend to deny or ignore this fact. John G. Jackson has examined this fact and its dimensions with scholarly honesty. He has also examined the origins of racism and its effects on the writing of history.

It is too often forgotten that, when the Europeans emerged
and began to extend themselves into the broader world of
Africa and Asia during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,
they went on to colonize most of mankind. Later, they would
colonize world scholarship, mainly the writing of history.
History was then written or rewritten to show or imply that
Europeans were the only creators of what could be called a
civilization. In order to accomplish this, the Europeans had to
forget, or pretend to forget, all they previously knew about
Africa.

In his booklet *Ancient Greece in African Political Thought*
(1966), Professor Ali A. Mazrui of Makerere University in
Uganda observes, after reading the book *A History of the
Modern World* by R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, that:

As Africans begin to be given credit for some of their own
civilizations, African cultural defensiveness would gradually
wane. Not everyone need have the confidence of Leopold
Senghor as he asserts that “Negro blood circulated in the veins
of the Egyptians.” But it is at any rate true that it was more
openly conceded not only that ancient Egypt made a contribu-
tion to the Greek miracle, but also that she in turn had been
influenced by the Africa which was to the south of her. To
grant all this is, in a sense, to universalize the Greek heritage. It
is to break the European monopoly of identification with an-
cient Greece.

And yet this is by no means the only way of breaking
Europe’s monopoly. In order to cope with the cultural of-
ensive of the Graeco-Roman Mystique, African cultural
defenders have so far emphasized the Africanness of Egypt’s
civilization. But a possible counteroffensive is to demon-
strate that ancient Greece was not European. It is not often re-
membered how recent the concept of “Europe” is. In a sense, it is
easier to prove that ancient Egypt was “African” than to
prove that ancient Greece was “European.” In the words of
Palmer and Colton:

There was really no Europe in ancient times. In the Roman
Empire we may see a Mediterranean world, or even a West
and an East in the Latin and Greek-speaking portions. But the
West included parts of Africa as well as of Europe, and Europe
as we know it was divided by the Rhine-Danube frontier, south
and west of which lay the civilized provinces of the Empire,
and north and east the “barbarians” of whom the civilized
world knew almost nothing.

The two historians go on to say that the word “Europe,”
since it meant little, was scarcely used by the Romans at all.

Even as late as the seventeenth century, the notion that the
land mass south of the Mediterranean was an entity distinct
from the land mass north of it had yet to be fully accepted.
Melville Herskovits has pointed out how the Geographer
Royal of France, writing in 1656, described Africa as “a
peninsula so large that it comprises the third part, and this the
most southerly, of our continent.”

In the years when the slave trade was getting effectively
under way, some Europeans were claiming parts of Africa—
especially Egypt—as an extension of their “continent” and
their “culture.” During this period, most history books were
written to justify the slave trade and the colonial system that
followed. Therefore, any honest writing of African history
today must take this fact into consideration and be, at least
in part, a restoration project.

The distinguished Afro-American poet, Countee Cullen,
began his poem “Heritage” with the question: “What is Africa
to me?” The new writers of African history must extend this
question by asking, “What is Africa to Africans and what is
Africa to the world?” Asking these questions emphasizes the
need for a total reexamination of African history. A new ap-
proach to African history must begin with a new frame of
reference. We will have to discard a number of words that
have been imposed on African history. There is a need to
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reject the term "black Africa" because it presupposes that there is a "white Africa." There is an urgent need to discard the term "Negro Africa" and the word "Negro" and all that it implies. This word grew out of the European slavery and colonial systems and it fails to relate the people of African descent to land, history, and culture. There is no "Negro-land." When one hears the word "France" or "French," it is easy to visualize the land, history, and culture of a people. The same thing is true of the words "English" or "Englishman." When one hears or reads the word "Negro," the only vision that comes to mind relates to a condition.

There are many physical varieties of African peoples. The complexions of Africans are mainly black and brown. Most of the light-skinned people in Africa today are latecomers or interlopers. They have little or no relationship to Africa's ancient history. The Egyptians are a distinct African people. They did not originally come from Europe or Asia. Their history and their culture started in what is now Ethiopia and the Sudan. It is incorrect to refer to them or any other African people as Hamites. There is no such thing as a Hamite people. This is another term that was imposed upon African history by Europeans who wanted to prove that everything good in African history was brought in from the outside. The Hamites are supposed to be "black white people." Western historians move the so-called Hamites around in Africa as they see fit in order to prove that the rest of Africa has no history worthy of its name.

In a recent speech on "The Significance of African History," the Caribbean-American writer Richard B. Moore has observed:

The significance of African history is shown, though not overtly, in the very effort to deny anything worthy of the name of history to Africa and the African peoples. This widespread, and well nigh successful endeavor, maintained through some five centuries, to erase African history from the general record, is a fact which of itself should be quite conclusive to thinking and open minds. For it is logical and apparent that no such undertaking would ever have been carried on, and at such length, in order to obscure and to bury what is actually of little or no significance.

The prime significance of African history becomes still more manifest when it is realized that this deliberate denial of African history arose out of the European expansion and invasion of Africa which began in the middle of the fifteenth century. The compulsion was thereby felt to attempt to justify such colonialist conquest, domination, enslavement, and plunder. Hence, this brash denial of history and culture to Africa, and, indeed, even of human qualities and capacity for civilization to the indigenous peoples of Africa.

Mr. Moore is saying, in essence, that African history must be looked at anew and seen in its relationship to world history. First, the distortions must be admitted. The hard fact is that most of what we now call world history is only the history of the first and second rise of Europe. The Europeans are not yet willing to acknowledge that the world did not wait in darkness for them to bring the light. The history of Africa was already old when Europe was born.

In an essay, "The Nations of Black Africa and Their Culture," written in 1955, the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop makes the following observation:

In our time it is customary to ask ourselves all kinds of questions; so we must ask if it was necessary to study the problems dealt with in this work. Even a superficial examination of the cultural situation in Black Africa justifies such an undertaking. Indeed, if one must believe western works, it is useless to look in the interior of the African forest for a single civilization which, in the last analysis, might be the product of blacks. The civilizations of Ethiopia and Egypt, the express testimony of
the ancients notwithstanding, the civilizations of the Ife and Benin, of the Chad Basin, of Ghana, all those referred to as neo-Sudanese (Mali, Gao, etc.) those of Zimbabwe (Monomotapa), of the Congo on the Equator, etc. . . . according to the coteries of western scholars, were created by mythical whites who then vanished as in a dream, leaving the blacks to perpetuate the forms, organizations, techniques, etc., which they had invented.

The explanation of the origin of an African civilization is only logical and acceptable, serious, objective and scientific if one, by what distortion whatsoever, leads up to this mythical white man. One does not bother to provide proof of his arrival or his settling in these parts. It can be readily understood how scholars could not help being led to the extreme from their reasoning, from their logical and dialectical deductions, to the notion of “whites with black skins,” a notion quite widespread in the circles of European specialists. Such modes of thought obviously cannot persist forever since they are completely lacking in any substantial foundation. They are explained only by the passion which consumes those who create them and shows through their appearances of objectivity and calm.

But these “scientific” theories on the African past are highly consistent; they are utilitarian, pragmatic. Truth is what is good for something and, in this instance, good for colonialism: the aim is, under cover of the mantle of science, to make the black man believe that he has never been responsible for anything at all of worth, not even for what is to be found right in his own house and home. In this way, it is made easy to bring about the abandonment and renunciation of all national aspirations on the part of those who are wavering, and the reflexes of subordination are reinforced in those who have already been alienated. It is for this reason that there exist numerous theorists in the service of colonialism, every one more clever than the other, whose ideas are spread abroad and taught on a popular scale as fast as they are worked out.

The use of cultural alienation as a weapon of domination is as old as the world itself; every time one people in the world have conquered another, they have used it. It is edifying to underline that it is the descendants of the Gauls against whom Caesar used that weapon who, today, are employing it against us.

Many white students of African history are now willing to admit that, according to most of the evidence we now have available, mankind started in Africa. The same students are not also willing to admit that it is logical to assume that human cultures and what we refer to as civilization also started in Africa.

In a lecture on “Early African Civilizations,” Professor William Leo Hansberry calls attention to the long search for the origin of man:

Between the years 1834 and 1908, there occurred a revolution in academic thinking about Africa’s place in the outlines of world geography and world history. And in the past 150 years, European explorers and archaeologists have found in the valleys of the Niger, Benwezi, Limpopo and Nile Rivers, in the basin of Lake Chad and the Sahara, extensive remains of hundreds of ruins which bear witness to the existence of former civilizations hundreds and thousands of years ago. This knowledge of the facts about the African past when combined with the known history of other continents reveal that these also are the stories of triumphs and failures of mankind, and form many chapters in the history of the human race.

When and where did living things and human life first appear on earth? Who built the first human civilization? For centuries these questions have been raised in the minds of poets, philosophers, and myth makers among most of the world’s peoples. Specifically, the Athenians thought that the first men sprouted from Attic soil; the ancient Hebrews and their spiritual descendants were of the opinion that Adam, the supposed primal parent of mankind, was made in the Garden of Eden six days after the creation of the world. According to
In his book *Egypt*, Sir E. A. Wallis Budge says: “The prehistoric native of Egypt, both in the old and in the new Stone Ages, was African and there is every reason for saying that the earliest settlers came from the South.”

He further states: “There are many things in the manners and customs and religions of the historic Egyptians that suggest that the original home of their prehistoric ancestors was in a country in the neighborhood of Uganda and Punt.” (Some historians believe that the Biblical land of Punt was in the area known on modern maps as Somalia.)

European interest in “Ethiopia and the Origin of Civilization” dates from the early part of the nineteenth century and is best reflected in a little-known, though important, paper on “Karl Richard Lepsius’ Incomparable Survey of the Monumental Ruins in the Ethiopian Nile Valley in 1843–1844.”

The records found by Lepsius tend to show how Ethiopia was once able to sustain an ancient population that was numerous and powerful enough not only to challenge, but on a number of occasions to conquer completely, the populous land of Egypt. Further, these records showed that the antiquity of Ethiopian civilization had a direct link with the civilization of ancient Egypt.

Many of the leading antiquarians of the time, based largely on the strength of what the classical authors, particularly Diodorus Siculus and Stephanus of Byzantium, had to say on the matter, were exponents of the view that the ancient Ethiopians or, at any rate, the black people of remote antiquity were the earliest of all civilized peoples and that the first civilized inhabitants of ancient Egypt were members of what is referred to as the Black Race who had entered the country as emigrants from Ethiopia. A number of Europe’s leading writers on the civilizations of remote antiquity have written brilliant defenses of this point of view. Some of these writers are Bruce, Count Volney, Fabre, d’Olivet, and Heeren. In spite of the
fact that these writers defended this thesis with all the learning at their command, and documented their defense, most of the present-day writers of African history continue to ignore their findings.

In 1825, German backwardness in this respect came definitely to an end. In that year, Arnold Hermann Heeren (1760–1842), Professor of History and Politics in the University of Göttingen and one of the ablest of the early exponents of the economic interpretation of history, published, in the fourth and revised edition of his great work *Ideen Über Die Politik, Den Verkehr Und Den Handel Der Vornehmsten Volker Der Alten Welt*, a lengthy essay on the history, culture, and commerce of the ancient Ethiopians, which had a profound influence on contemporary thought respecting such matters, not only in Germany, but throughout the learned world. In 1850, an English translation of Professor Heeren’s *Historical Researches into the Politics, Intercourse and Trade of the Carthaginians, Ethiopians and Egyptians* was published. This book gave more support to the concept of the southern African origin of Egyptian civilization. Professor Heeren joined other writers in the conclusion that it was among these ancient black people of Africa and Asia that international trade was first developed, and he thinks that as a by-product of these international contacts there was an exchange of ideas and cultural practices that laid the foundations of the earliest civilizations of the ancient world.

Mr. Jackson’s chapter on “Egypt and the Evolution of Civilization” calls to mind the fact that the study of Egyptology developed in concurrence with the development of the slave trade and the colonial system. It was during this period that Egypt was literally taken out of Africa, academically, and made an extension of Europe. In many ways Egypt is the key to ancient African history. African history is out of kilter until ancient Egypt is looked upon as a distinct African nation.

The Nile River played a major role in the relationship of Egypt to the nations in southeast Africa. During the early history of Africa, the Nile was a great cultural highway on which elements of civilization came into and out of inner Africa. Egypt’s relationship with the people in the south was both good and bad, depending on the period and the dynasty in power.

Egypt first became an organized nation about 6000 B.C. Medical interest centers upon a period in the Third Dynasty (5345–5307 B.C.) when Egypt had an ambitious pharaoh named Zoser; and Zoser, in turn, had for his chief counselor and minister a brilliant noble named Imhotep (whose name means “he who cometh in peace”). Imhotep constructed the famous step pyramid of Sakkara near Memphis. The building methods used in the construction of this pyramid revolutionized the architecture of the ancient world.

Egypt gave the world some of the greatest personalities in the history of mankind. In this regard, Imhotep is singularly outstanding. In the ancient history of Egypt, no individual left a deeper impression than the commoner Imhotep. He was probably the world’s first multi-genius. He was the real father of medicine. In his book *Evolution of Modern Medicine* (London, 1921, page 10), Sir William Osler refers to Imhotep as “the first figure of a physician to stand out clearly from the mists of antiquity.” Imhotep, the Wise, as he was called, was the Grand Vizier and Court Physician to King Zoser and architect of the world’s earliest stone building, after which the Pyramids were modeled. He became a deity and later a universal God of Medicine, whose images graced the first Temple of Imhotep, mankind’s first hospital. To it came sufferers from all the world for prayer, peace, and healing.

Imhotep lived and established his reputation as a healer at the court of King Zoser of the Third Dynasty about 5345–
5307 B.C., according to the book *A Scheme of Egyptian Chronology* by Duncan Macnaughton (1932). From a study of the period in which he lived, Imhotep appears to have been one of the most versatile men in history. In addition to being the chief physician to the king, he was sage and scribe, Chief Lector Priest, architect, astronomer, and magician. He was a poet and philosopher. One of his best-known sayings, which is still being quoted, is “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we shall die.”

Imhotep’s fame increased after his death. He was worshiped as a medical demi-god from 2850 B.C. to 525 B.C., and as a full deity from 525 B.C. to 550 A.D. Kings and queens bowed at his shrine.

When Egyptian civilization crossed the Mediterranean to become the foundation of what we think of as Greek culture, the teachings of Imhotep were absorbed along with the precepts of other great African teachers. When Greek civilization became predominant in the Mediterranean area, the Greeks wanted the world to think they were the originators of everything. They stopped acknowledging their indebtedness to Imhotep and other great Africans. Imhotep was forgotten for thousands of years, and Hippocrates, a legendary figure of two thousand years later, became known as the father of medicine. As regards Imhotep’s influence in Rome, Gerald Massey, noted poet, archaeologist, and philologist, says that the early Christians worshiped him as one with Christ.

It should be understood that, while the achievements of Egypt are the best known among African nations, these are not the only achievements that African nations can claim. The nations to the south called Kush, Nubia, and Ethiopia developed many aspects of civilization independent of Egyptian influence. These nations gave as much to Egypt as Egypt gave to them.

Trade was the basis for the earliest contact of Egypt with the rest of Africa. Gold was obtained from Nubia. Trading expeditions were sent to visit the nations along the east coast of Africa, and the city-state of Meroe. These trading expeditions also helped to spread Egyptian ideas. Egypt, in turn, observed and took ideas from other nations within Africa.

Mr. Jackson’s chapter on *Africa and the Civilizing of Europe: The Empire of the Moors* challenges two standard myths about Africa. One is that the Africans played no part in introducing civilization into Europe; the other myth is that the “Empire of the Moors” was a white North African achievement and had no relationship to what is referred to as Black Africa. This assumption prevails because most students of the subject, including most so-called African scholars, have no detailed knowledge of the interrelationships of African nations. North Africa did not develop out of context with the rest of Africa, and early Europe did not develop out of context with Africa in general.

There was a considerable African influence on what later became Europe in the period before the Christian era. Africans played a major role in the formative development of both Christianity and Islam.

Many aspects of the present-day Christian church were developed in Africa during the formative years of Christianity. One of the more notable of African contributions to the early church was monasticism. Monasticism, in essence, is organized life in common, especially for religious purposes. The home of a monastic society is called a monastery or a convent; the inhabitants are monks or nuns. Christian monasticism probably began with the hermits of Egypt and Palestine about the time when Christianity was accepted as a legal religion.

Professor J. C. deGraft-Johnson gives us the following information on the rise of monasticism in Africa:

It was left to another Egyptian Christian to be the founder
of the monastic life. I refer to Pachomius, who established the first Christian monastery on an island in the Nile in the Upper Thebaid. Monastic life became very popular in Egypt and tended to undermine the military and economic life of the country; and in A.D. 365, we find a law of the Valens which decreed that all who left the cities of Egypt for the monastic life of the desert should be compelled either to return to discharge or perform their civic duties, or else to hand over their property to relatives who would be under obligation to perform those duties.

In the Emperor Valens' day the persecution of the African Church had ceased. The persecution of African Christians came to an end with the rise of Constantine as the undisputed master of Rome and the West in A.D. 312.

From the north the church continued to spread southward and eastward. Ethiopia received Christianity at an especially early date. Part of tradition suggests that St. Matthew, who wrote one of the Gospels, preached in Ethiopia.

When an Ethiopian emperor was converted from a "worshiper of Michren" to Christianity in the middle of the fourth century, this transformation marked a turning point in the history of the century. Eventually, the national church that emerged became the strongest supporter of Ethiopian independence.

Hadzrat Bilal ibn Rahab, a tall, gaunt, bushy-haired, black Ethiopian, was the first High Priest and treasurer of the Mohammedan empire. After Mahomet himself, that great religion, which today numbers upwards of 300,000,000 souls, may be said to have begun with Bilal. He was reputed to be the Prophet's first convert. Bilal was one of the many Africans who participated in the establishment of Islam and later made proud names for themselves in the Islamic wars of expansion.

Zaid Bin Harith, another convert of Mahomet, later became one of the Prophet's foremost generals. Mahomet adopted him as his son and made him governor of his tribe, the proud Koreish. He was later married into the Prophet's own family—the highest honor possible. Zaid Bin Harith was killed in battle while leading his men against the armies of the Byzantines. The Encyclopedia of Islam hailed him as one of the first great heroes of that faith.

In writing about the nations on the Mediterranean, Harold Peake, the English scientific writer, has this to say:

The first light that burst in upon the long night of Europe's Dark Ages and heralded the dawn of a new day was from Moorish Spain, and from their Saracenic comrades who had settled in Sicily and Italy. Light first dawned on Europe from Spain, by means of the foundation by the Moors in the 9th century of a Medical School at Salerno, in Southern Italy. This developed into a university about 1150 A.D. and received a new constitution from Emperor Frederick II in 1231. Thence the new civilization spread up through Italy then to France and soon penetrated all parts of Europe except the north-eastern section.

All over the Arab-Moorish Empire a brisk intellectual life flourished. The Khalifs of both the East and West were, for the most part, enlightened patrons of learning. They maintained immense libraries and offered fortunes for new manuscripts. Khalif Harun-al-Rashid founded the great University of Baghdad, at which the most celebrated professor was Joshua ben Nun, a Jew. Here Greek classics were translated into Arabic. In other fields of science the Arabs and Moors were equally brilliant. Geber, in the eighth century, was an outstanding chemist. He has been called the founder of scientific chemistry. The names of some other savants and their fields of study will further show us the extent of Arab-Moorish erudition.

The outstanding characteristic of the Arab-Moorish rulers was tolerance. Their relations with the most distant nations were most cordial. The Moslem traveler journeyed with ut-
Christopher Columbus opened up the New World for European settlement. The combination of Africans—Moors, Arabs, Berbers, and some Africans who came from south of the Sahara—lost their power in Spain after ruling that country for nearly eight hundred years.

In the great Songhay Empire of West Africa, the Emperor, Sunni Ali, died in 1492. This event brought to power Muhammad Touré, better known in African history as Askia the Great. This man, the last of West Africa's great rulers before the Europeans penetrated the hinterland of Africa, took inner West Africa through the last of its Golden Age after the slave trade had already started.

The story of the African slave trade is essentially the story of the consequences of the second rise of Europe. In the years between the passing of the Roman Empire in the eighth century and the partial unification of Europe through the framework of the Catholic Church in the fifteenth century, Europeans were engaged mainly in the internal matters within their own continent. With the opening up of the New World, after the expulsion of the Moors from Spain during the latter part of the fifteenth century, the Europeans started to expand beyond their homeland. They were searching for new markets and materials, new manpower, and new lands to exploit. The African slave trade was created to accommodate this new expansion.

Hab there been no market for the slaves there would have been no slave trade. The market and the motive were the opening up of the New World and the creation of the vast plantation system that followed.

The slave trade had far-reaching repercussions that are acutely apparent today. In fact, there is no way to understand the social, political, and cultural history of black Americans without understanding what happened before and after the slave trade.

most freedom in such widely separated lands as China and the Sudan. When the Mohammedan merchants reached the western Sudan (now West Africa) in the year 1000, or our era, they found well-developed kingdoms flourishing in this region. The commercial relations that they established with these kingdoms lasted for more than five hundred years.

The period covered by the chapter "The Golden Age of West Africa" has a special significance for the whole world. Europe was lingering in her Dark Ages at a time when western Africa was enjoying a Golden Age. In the non-European world beyond Africa, Asians built and enjoyed an age of advancement in technology before a period of internal withdrawal and isolation permitted the Europeans to move ahead of them.

It should be realized that during the Middle Ages oriental technology was far more advanced than European technology, and that until the thirteenth century Europe, technologically, was but an appendage of Asia. While the Greeks and Romans were weaving subtle philosophies, the Chinese were busy inventing gunpowder, paper, alchemy, vaccinations, plastic surgery, paint, and even the pocket handkerchief, which was unknown to the fastidious Greeks.

For more than a thousand years the Africans had been bringing into being empire after empire until the second rise of Europe, internal strife, and the slave trade turned what was an "Age of Grandeur" of the Africans into an age of tragedy and decline. Certain events in Europe and in Africa set this historical period in motion. In this respect no year was more important than 1492.

The fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries were both good and bad for Africa. The great nation states in Africa, especially in western Africa, rose to their height and began to decline. Europe partly recovered from the trouble of the Middle Ages and began to expand into the broader world.
Africans were great storytellers long before their first appearance in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. The rich and colorful history, art, and folklore of West Africa, the ancestral home of most Afro-Americans, present evidence of this, and more.

Contrary to a misconception which still prevails, the Africans were familiar with literature and art for many years before their contact with the Western world. Before the breaking up of the social structure of the West African states of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay, and the internal strife and chaos that made the slave trade possible, the forefathers of the Africans who eventually became slaves in the United States lived in a society where university life was fairly common and scholars were beheld with reverence.

There were in this ancestry rulers who expanded their kingdoms into empires, great and magnificent armies whose physical dimensions dwarfed entire nations into submission, generals who advanced the technique of military science, scholars whose vision of life showed foresight and wisdom, and priests who told of gods that were strong and kind. To understand fully any aspect of Afro-American life, one must realize that the black American is not without a cultural past, though he was many generations removed from it before his achievements in American literature and art commanded any appreciaible attention.

I have been referring to the African origin of Afro-American literature and history. This preface is essential to every meaningful discussion of the role of the Afro-American in every major aspect of American life, past and present. Africans did not come to the United States culturally empty-handed.

I will elaborate very briefly on my statement to the effect that “the forefathers of the Africans who eventually became slaves in the United States once lived in a society where university life was fairly common and scholars were beheld with reverence.”

During the period in West African history from the early part of the fourteenth century to the time of the Moorish invasion in 1591, the city of Timbuktu and the University of Sankore in the Songhay Empire were the intellectual centers of Africa. Black scholars were enjoying a renaissance that was known and respected throughout most of Africa and in parts of Europe. At this period in African history, the University of Sankore at Timbuktu was the educational capital of the western Sudan. In his book *Timbuctoo the Mysterious*, Felix DuBois gives us the following description of this period: “The scholars of Timbuctoo yielded in nothing, to the saints in their sojourns in the foreign universities of Fez, Tunis, and Cairo. They astounded the most learned men of Islam by their erudition. That these Negroes were on a level with the Arabian Savants is proved by the fact that they were installed as professors in Morocco and Egypt. In contrast to this, we find that the Arabs were not always equal to the requirements of Sankore.”

I mention here only one of the great black scholars referred to in the book by Felix DuBois.

Ahmed Baba was the last chancellor of the University of Sankore. He was one of the greatest African scholars of the late sixteenth century. His life is a brilliant example of the range and depth of West African intellectual activity before the colonial era. Ahmed Baba was the author of more than forty books; nearly every one of these books had a different theme. He was in Timbuktu when it was invaded by the Moroccans in 1592, and he was one of the first citizens to protest the occupation of his beloved home town. Ahmed Baba, along with other scholars, was imprisoned and eventually exiled to Morocco. During his expatriation from Timbuktu, his collection of 1,600 books, one of the richest libraries of his day, was lost.

Now, West Africa entered a sad period of decline. During the Moorish occupation, wreck and ruin became the order of
the day. When the Europeans arrived in this part of Africa and saw these conditions, they assumed that nothing of order and value had ever existed in these countries. This mistaken impression, too often repeated, has influenced the interpretation of African history for over four hundred years.

In order to understand the chapter on “Africa and the Discovery of America,” it will be necessary for most students of the subject to suspend all that they think they know about the presence of the Africans in the New World. After reading Mr. Jackson’s documented analysis of this little-known aspect of history, it will be difficult for anyone to hold to the old assumption that the Africans just came to the New World as slaves. This assumption will be easier to discard if we look first at the formative development of Africans at the dawn of history. We need to look again and again at this African man and see how he developed and what he contributed to himself and mankind.

In the pamphlet African Contribution by John M. Weather wax (published by the Bryant Foundation of Los Angeles, California, 1964), the following information about early Africa is revealed:

Today’s cannon, long-range missiles, ship propellers, automatic hammers, gas engines, and even meat cleavers and upholstery tacks hammers have the roots of their development in the early African uses of power.

Africans gave mankind the first machine. It was the fire stick. With it, man could have fire any time. With it, a camp fire could be set up almost any place. With it, the early Africans could roast food. Every time we light a match, every time we take a bath in water heated by gas, every time we cook a meal in a gas-heated oven, our use of fire simply continues a process started by the early Africans: the control of fire.

Knives and hammers and axes were the first tools. It is the making of tools that sets man apart from and in a sense above all living creatures. Africans started mankind along the toolmaking path.

Of course those early Africans were the first to discover how to make a thatched hut. They had to be the first because for hundreds of thousands of years they were the only people on earth. They discovered coarse basket-making and weaving and how to make a water-tight pot of clay hardened in a fire.

In cold weather, they found that the skins of beasts they had killed would keep them warm. They even made skin wraps for their feet. It was from their first efforts that (much later) clothing and shoes developed. We owe the early Africans much, much more.

They domesticated the dog. They used digging sticks to get at roots that could be eaten. They discovered grain as a food, and how to store and prepare it. They learned about the fermentation of certain foods and liquids left in containers. Thus, all mankind owes to Africans: the dog that gives us companionship and protection, the spade the farmer uses, the cereal we eat at breakfast-time, the fermented liquids that many people drink, the woven articles of clothing we wear and the blankets that keep us warm at night, the pottery in which we bake or boil food, and even the very process (now so simple) of boiling water—a process we use every time we boil an egg, or make spaghetti, or cook corned beef. Canoes made it possible for man
to travel farther and farther from his early home. Over many centuries, canoes went down the Nile and the Congo and up many smaller rivers and streams. It was in this way that the early peopling of Africa took place.

From the bow-gun of ancient Africa, there followed, in later ages, many devices based on its principle. Some of these are: the bellows, bamboo air pumps, the rifle, the pistol, the revolver, the automatic, the machine gun—and even those industrial guns that puff grains.

African hunters many times cut up game. There still exist, from the Old Stone Age, drawings of animal bones, hearts and other organs. Those early drawings are a part of man's early beginnings in the field of Anatomy.

The family, the clan, the tribe all developed first in Africa. The family relationships which we have today, they fully understood then. The clan and the tribe gave group unity and strength. It was in these groups that early religious life and beliefs started.

When a great tribal leader died, he became a god to his tribe. Regard for him, appreciation of his services to the tribe, and efforts to communicate with him, became worship.

The first formal education was spoken tradition given during African tribal initiation ceremonies. The leaders of these ceremonies were medicine men. From their ranks the priests of following periods came. Ceremonial African ritual dances laid the basis for many later forms of the dance. Music existed in prehistoric Africa. Among instruments used were: reed pipes, single-stringed instruments, drums, gourd rattles, blocks of wood and hollow logs. Many very good prehistoric African artists brought paintings and sculpture into the common culture. The early Africans made a careful study of animal life and plant life. From knowledge of animals, mankind was able to take a long step forward to cattle raising. From the knowledge of plants and how they propagate, it was possible to take a still longer step forward to agriculture.

Today, science has ways of dating events of long ago. The new methods indicate that mankind has lived in Africa over two million years. In that long, long time, Africans and people of African descent migrated to other parts of the earth. Direct descendants of early Africans went to Asia Minor, Arabia, India, China, Japan and the East Indies. All of these areas to this day show an African strain.

Africans and people of African descent went also to Turkey, Palestine, Greece and other countries into Europe. From Gibraltar, they went into Spain, Portugal, France, England, Wales and Ireland.

Considering this information, the pre-Columbian presence of Africans in the New World is highly possible and somewhat logical.

The first Africans to be brought to the New World were not in bondage, contrary to popular belief. Africans participated in some of the earliest explorations by Spanish people into what is now the United States. The best known of these African explorers was Estevanico, sometimes referred to as Little Stephen. He accompanied Cabeza de Vaca during his six years of wandering, 1528–1530, from Florida into Mexico. In 1539, as guide to the Niza expedition, Estevanico set out from Mexico City in the party of Friar Marcos de Niza, in search of the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. When the others wearied, Estevanico went ahead alone, except for Indian guides, and opened up to European settlers the rich land that is now Arizona and New Mexico.

There were Africans with Christopher Columbus, Balboa, and with Cortez in Mexico.

Most historians writing about the subject have attributed the civilizations of East Africa to every known people except the East Africans. Mr. Jackson's chapter, "Mariners and Merchants of the Eastern Coast," and a recent book by Basil Davidson A History of East and Central Africa (Doubleday, Anchor Books) will help to put some of the main historical facts in order.
The early civilizations of this part of Africa are splendid with achievements that most European writers have not been able to accept as evident African accomplishment. The influence of Islam and the Arabs in East Africa has been highly overstated. This influence was not always for the better. In fact, the Arabs, like all of the other invaders of Africa, did more harm than good. They, like the Europeans of a later day, destroyed many African cultures that they did not understand. Their role in the East African slave trade brought wreck and ruin to the nation states in this part of Africa. They were not without achievements, but their achievements are outweighed by the harm they did.

For the last five hundred years of recorded history, East Africa has had one troublesome invader after the other. Following the Arabs, the Portuguese came with a new crew of vandals.

The nations of central and southeast Africa have only recently been given some of the attention by historians that should have been given all along. There was less Arab influence in this area than in the nations of Africa further north. These nations have succeeded in keeping most of their culture intact. This is especially true of Zimbabwe, Monomotapa, and the kingdoms of the interior. The remarkable thing about these African states is that, in most cases, they had a resurgence of development in nation building and in the arts after the slave trade had already started. These were, in the main, landlocked nations that saw fit to avoid the troubles of the coastal African states.

The fall of the western Sudan (West Africa) and the beginning of the slave trade did not mark the end of great state building in Africa. During the slave trade, and in spite of it, great nations and empires continued to be created. One of the most vivid examples is the nations of East and Central Africa.

The people and nations of Central Africa have no records of their ancient and medieval history like the “Tarikh es Sudan” or the “Tarikh el Fettach” of the western Sudan (West Africa). The early travelers to these areas are mostly unknown. In spite of the forest as an obstacle to the formation of empires comparable to those of the western Sudan, notable kingdoms did rise in this part of Africa and some of them did achieve a high degree of civilization.

The Congo Valley became the gathering place of various branches of the people we know now as Bantu. When the history of Central Africa is finally written, it will be a history of invasions and migrations. According to one account, between two and three thousand years ago, a group of tribes began to move out of the region south or southwest of Lake Chad. Sometime during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the center of Africa became crowded with pastoral tribes who needed more land for their large flocks and herds. This condition started another migration that lasted for more than a hundred years. Tribes with the prefix “Ba” to their names spread far to the west into the Congo Basin and southward through the central plains. The Bechuana and Basuto were among these tribes. Tribes with the prefix “Ama”—great warriors like the Ama-Xosa and Ama-Zulu—passed down the eastern side.

In the meantime, some of the more stable tribes in the Congo region were bringing notable kingdoms into being. The Kingdom of Loango extended from Cape Lopez (Lubreville) to near the Congo; and the Kongo Empire was mentioned by the Portuguese as early as the fourteenth century. The Chief of Loango, Mani-Congo, extended his kingdom as far as the Kasai and Upper Zambesi Rivers. This kingdom had been in existence for centuries when the Portuguese arrived in the fifteenth century. They spoke admiringly of its capital, Sette-Camo, which they called San Salvador. The Kingdom of Kongo dates back to the fourteenth century. At the height
of its power, it extended over modern Angola, as far east as the Kasai and Upper Zambesi Rivers.

Further inland, the Kingdom of Ansika was comprised of the people of the Beteke and Bayoka, whose artistic talents were very remarkable. Near the center of the Congo was the Bakuba Kingdom (or Bushongo), still noted for its unity, the excellence of its administration, its art, its craftsmanship, and the beauty of its fabrics.

South of the Congo Basin the whole Bantuana territory formed a vast state which actually ruled for a long time over the Basutos, the Zulus, the Hottentots, and the Bushmen, including in a single empire the greater part of the black population of southern and central Africa. This was the era of Bushongo grandeur; the people we now know as Bakubas.

Only the Bushongo culture kept its records and transmitted them almost intact to modern research. The Bakubas are an ancient people whose power and influence once extended over most of the Congo. Their history can be traced to the fifth century. For many centuries the Bakubas have had a highly organized social system, an impressive artistic tradition, and a secular form of government that expressed the will of the people through a democratic political system. Today, as for many generations in the past, the court of a Bakuba chief is ruled by a protocol as rigid and complicated as that of Versailles under Louis XIV.

At the top of the Bakuba hierarchy is the royal court composed of six dignitaries responsible for cabinetlike matters such as military affairs, justice, and administration. At one time there were in the royal entourage 143 other functionaries, including a master of the hunt, a master storyteller, and a keeper of oral traditions. In the sixteenth century, the Bakubas ruled over a great African empire. The memory of their glorious past is recalled in the tribe with historical exactitude. They can name the reigns of their kings for the past 235 years. The loyalty of the people to these rulers is expressed in a series of royal portrait-statues dating from the reign of Shamba Bolongo, the greatest and best known of the Bakuba kings.

Shamba Bolongo was a peaceful sovereign. He prohibited the use of the shongo, a throwing knife, the traditional weapon of the Bushongo. This wise African king used to say: "Kill neither man, woman, nor child. Are they not the children of Chembe (God), and have they not the right to live?" Shamba likewise brought to his people some of the agreeable pastimes that alleviate the tediousness of life. The reign of Shamba Bolongo was really the "Golden Age" of the Bushongo people of the southern Congo. After abolishing the cruder aspects of African warfare, Shamba Bolongo introduced raffia weaving and other arts of peace. According to the legends of the Bushongo people, their history as a state goes back fifteen centuries. Legends notwithstanding, their magnificent sculpture and other artistic accomplishments are unmistakable, the embodiment of a long and fruitful social experience reflecting the life of a people who have been associated with a higher form of culture for more than a thousand years.

In the chapter on "The Destruction of African Culture," Mr. Jackson has dealt with some of the main reasons that African history is so misunderstood and that so many students of the subject get confused while trying to make an assessment of the available information. There has been a deliberate destruction of African culture and the records relating to that culture. This destruction started with the first invaders of Africa. It continued through the period of slavery and the colonial system. It continues today on a much higher and more dangerous level. There are now attempts on the highest academic levels to divide African history and culture within Africa in such a manner that the best of it can be claimed for the Europeans, or at the very least, Asians. That is the main
purpose of the Hamitic and the Semitic hypothesis in relationship to African history. It is also one of the main reasons so much attention is being paid to the Berbers and the Arabs in Africa. There is a school of thought supporting the thesis that, if the main bodies of African history, culture, and achievement have no European origin, they must, at least, have an Asiatic origin. The supporters of this thesis have forgotten several important facts about Africa, if they ever knew them at all: mainly, the evidence of high cultures that the first invaders of Africa found and to what extent these invaders destroyed a great deal of this culture. Every invader of Africa did Africa more harm than good. They destroyed the culture that they would later say never existed at all.

In this chapter, Mr. Jackson documents the events that led to the destruction of some of the great libraries in Africa that had old and priceless manuscripts relating to African history and culture. He further documents the tragedy of the destruction of millions of African men and women in the slave trade and shows the role that the Christian church willingly played in creating the rationale that attempted to justify this event.

His concluding chapter on “Africa Resurgent” recalls the need to look again at the nineteenth-century roots of the twentieth-century African resistance movements and the role that both Africans and Afro-Americans played in bringing this movement into being.

Until near the end of the nineteenth century the African Freedom struggle was a military struggle. This aspect of African history has been shamefully neglected. I do not believe the neglect is an accident. Africa’s oppressors and Western historians are not ready to concede the fact that Africa has a fighting heritage. The Africans did fight back and they fought exceptionally well. This fight extended throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. This fight was led, in most cases, by African kings. The Europeans referred to them as chiefs in order to avoid equating them with European kings. They were kings in the truest sense of the word. Most of them could trace their lineage back to more than a thousand years. These revolutionary nationalist African kings are mostly unknown because the white interpreters of Africa still want the world to think that the African waited in darkness for other people to bring the light.

In West Africa the Ashanti Wars started early in the nineteenth century when the British tried to occupy the hinterland of the Gold Coast, now Ghana. There were eleven major wars in this conflict. The Ashanti won all of them except the last one. In these wars, Ashanti generals—and we should call them generals because they were more than equal to the British generals who failed to conquer them—stopped the inland encroachment of the British and commanded respect for the authority of their kings.

In 1844, the Fanti Kings of Ghana signed a Bond of agreement with the English. This Bond brought a short period of peace to the coastal areas of the country. In the 1860’s, King Ghartery, the West African reformer, advocated democratic ideas in government at a time when the democratic institutions of Europe were showing signs of deterioration. King Ghartery ruled over the small coastal kingdom of Winnebah in pre-independent Ghana. He was the driving spirit behind the founding of the Fanti Confederation, one of the most important events in the history of West Africa.

There were two freedom struggles in pre-independent Ghana. One was led by the Ashanti in the hinterland and the other was led by the Fanti who lived along the coast. The Ashantis were warriors. The Fantis were petitioners and constitution makers. The Fanti Constitution, drawn up in conferences between 1865 and 1871, is one of the most important documents produced in Africa in the nineteenth century. In addition to being the constitution of the Fanti Confederation,
it was a petition to the British for the independence of the Gold Coast.

In 1896 the British exiled the Ashanti king Prempeh and still was not able to completely take over the hinterland of the Gold Coast. Fanti nationalists, led by Casely Hayford, started the agitation for the return of King Prempeh and soon converted this agitation into a movement for the independence of the country.

The stubborn British still did not give up their desire to establish their authority in the interior of the country and avenged the many defeats that they had suffered at the hands of the Ashantis.

In 1900, the British returned to Kumasi, capital of Ashanti, and demanded the right to sit on the Golden Stool. Sir Frederick Hodgson, who made the demand on behalf of the British, displayed his complete ignorance of Ashanti folklore, history, and culture. The Ashanti people cherished the Golden Stool as their most sacred possession. To them it is the Ark of the Covenant. Ashanti kings are not permitted to sit on it. The demand for the Stool was an insult to the pride of the Ashanti people and it started the last Ashanti war. This war is known as the “Yaa Asantewa War,” since Yaa Asantewa, the reigning Queen Mother of Ashanti, was the inspiring spirit and one of the leaders of this effort to save the Ashanti kingdom from British rule. After nearly a year of heroic struggle, Queen Yaa Asantewa was captured along with her chief insurgent leaders. At last, the British gained control over the hinterland of the Gold Coast. To accomplish this, they had to fight the Ashanti for nearly a hundred years.

In other parts of West Africa, resistance to European rule was still strong and persistent. While the drama of Ashanti and other tribal nations was unfolding in the Gold Coast, an Ibo slave rose above his humble origin in Nigeria and vied for commercial power in the market places of that nation. In the years before the British forced him into exile in 1885, he was twice a king and was justifiably called “The Merchant Prince of West Africa.” His name was Ja Ja. The story of Ja Ja is woven through all of the competently written histories of Nigeria. His strong opposition to British rule in the 1880's makes him the father of Nigerian nationalism.

In the French colonies, the two main leaders of revolts were Behanzin Hossu Bowelle, of Dahomey, and Samory Touré, of Guinea. Behanzin was one of the most colorful and the last of the great kings of Dahomey. He was one of the most powerful of West Africans during the closing years of the nineteenth century. After many years of opposition to French rule in his country, he was defeated by a French mulatto, General Alfred Dodds. He was sent into exile and died in 1906.

Samory Touré, grandfather of Sékou Touré, President of Guinea, was the last of the great Mandingo warriors. Samory is the best known personality to emerge from the Mandingos in the years following the decline of their power and empire in the western Sudan. Samory defied the power of France for eighteen years and was often referred to by the French who opposed him as “The Black Napoleon of the Sudan.” He was defeated and captured in 1898 and died on a small island in the Congo River in 1900.

In the Sudan and in East Africa, two men called Dervish Warriors, Mohammed Ahmed, known as the Mahdi, and Mohammed Ben Abdullah Hassen, known as the Mad Mullah of Somaliland, were thorns in the side of the British Empire. Mohammed Ahmed freed the Sudan of British rule before his death in 1885. The country stayed free for eleven years before it was reconquered. Mohammed Ben Abdullah Hassen started his campaign against the British in Somaliland in 1899 and was not defeated until 1921.

Southern Africa has furnished a more splendid array of
warrior kings than any other part of Africa. Chaka, the Zulu king and war lord, is the most famous, the most maligned and the most misinterpreted of all South African kings. By any fair measurement, he was one of the greatest natural warriors of all times. He fought to consolidate South Africa and to save it from European rule. When he died in 1828 he was winning that fight.

Chaka’s fight was continued with varying degrees of success and failure under the leadership of kings like Moshe of the Basutos; Khamo of the Bamangwato; Dingan, Chaka’s half-brother and successor; Cetewayo, nephew and disciple of Chaka; Lobengula, whose father, Maselitsho, built the second Zulu Empire; and Bambata, who led the last Zulu uprising in 1906.

What I have been trying to say is this: For a period of more than a hundred years, African warrior nationalists, mostly kings, who had never worn a store-bought shoe or heard of a military school, outmaneuvered and outgeneraled some of the finest military minds of Europe. They planted the seeds of African independence for another generation to harvest.

At the end of the nineteenth century, some of the personalities in the African and Afro-American Freedom Struggle met and formed an alliance. Out of this meeting of men and ideas the Pan-African concept was born. In Africa, the warrior nationalists gave way to the new nationalists that were now part of the small African educated elite. These men, stimulated by many Africans in the West such as W. E. B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey, laid the basis for the African Freedom Explosion. This was the preface to the “Resurgence of Africa.”

This book is about the history of Africa from the origin of man to the present time. This is not just another book on African history. It is, in my opinion, one of the best books that has so far been written on this subject. Mr. Jackson debunks most of the standard approaches and concepts relating to African history. His book will cause many academic feathers to fly. In spite of this, I think this book, because of what it reveals about Africa and its role in history, is of lasting value.

John Henrik Clarke
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