

Identity, Language, Culture and *Our*story: A Brief Tour of World/Black History

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(Standing on the shoulders of giants)

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1. Origins

1.1. “All Of Us Are Africans”: The Monogenetic Thesis (‘Out Of Africa’)

Africa’s Eastern Rift Valley is the home of the oldest known human remains.

Many earlier transient migration waves, but there were lasting ones starting ca. 70–60,000 B.C.E. (Asia & Australia), ca. 55,000 B.C.E. (Europe), ca. 40,000 B.C.E. (Americas), etc.

[Wikipedia > Recent African origin of modern humans]

1.1.1. Climate Change, As A Primary Driver

Great Ice Ages, with ice sheets covering some of the Earth’s temperate regions, and much desert / drought in the more tropical zones.

1.1.2. Also, Perhaps A Sense Of Adventure / Curiosity?

What’s beyond that horizon? Although, leaving home could be both exhilarating and scary. :-)

1.2. Early Civilisations: Start Of Recorded History

1.2.1. Eastern Africa: Nile Valley Complex {**Kush** (Kerma; Meroë; +) / **Nubia** (Ta-Seti; Nehesi; +) / **Kemet** (Ta-Meri; Ancient Egypt)}

Collectively flourished ca. 3500 B.C.E. {or possibly earlier, depending on various still-controversial factors, such as the actual build date of the Hor-Em-Akhet ('Heru Of The Horizon') (Great Sphinx) sculpture, etc.} - 350 C.E. (although, as three separate Christianised kingdoms, also lasted another millennium or so).

Absolutely incalculable influence on subsequent civilisations, both within (Ancient Ghana, +) & outside Africa (Ancient Greece, +).

Following captions {All via Wikipedia > List of pharaohs}:

- Djedefre {4th D. (ca. 2566–2558 B.C.E.)} {Time of the Great Pyramids}.
- Pepi I {6th D. (2332–2283 B.C.E.)}.
- Mentuhotep II {11th D. (ca. 2060–2010 B.C.E.)} {Start of Middle Kingdom}.
- Amenhotep III {18th D. (ca. 1390–1352 B.C.E.)} {Height of New Kingdom}.
- Amenhotep IV / Akhenaten {18th D. (ca. 1352–1336 B.C.E.)} {Reformer}.









[Diop, Cheikh Anta - African Origin of Civilisation, 1974 {1954,55 + 1967}]

[Diop, Cheikh Anta - The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, 1978 {1959}]

[Obenga, Theophile - African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period, 2004 {1990}]

[Wikipedia > {List of pharaohs | Nubia}]

1.2.1.1.Ethnic / Cultural Unity Of Kemet And Nubia (& Kush)

The idea of the Nile Valley being a single continuum is becoming mainstream, although there is still a lingering tendency to consider influence & innovation as flowing mostly from Kemet southwards.

*Megaliths [...] at Nabta Playa [Nubian Desert, Kemet / Nubia border] are [...] one of the world's first astronomical devices, predating Stonehenge by almost 2,000 years.[...] **This complexity as observed at Nabta Playa, and as expressed by different levels of authority within the society there, likely formed the basis for the structure of both the Neolithic society at Nabta and the Old Kingdom of Egypt.[...] Around 3500 BC, the second "Nubian" culture, termed the A-Group, arose.[...] It was a contemporary of, and ethnically and culturally very similar to, the polities in predynastic Naqada of Upper Egypt.*** [Wikipedia > Nubia]

Also interesting to note that Kemet's main Kingdom eras (Old, Middle & New) were all of

southern / Nubian / Kushite origin.

1.2.1.2.Nile Valley Contributions To World Civilisation

1.2.1.2.1.Metu Neter (Writing of The Divine / Nature / +) — also known by its Greek name, ‘Hieroglyphs’ (Sacred Writing) — is the ancestor of all known alphabetic scripts (except possibly some Indic ones), by way of the Phoenician intermediary

1.2.1.2.2.Unity of Arts & Sciences: Even much later, ‘Science’ was originally called Philosophy of Nature, or Natural Philosophy.

{Also cf. Dr. Mae Jemison’s Feb 2002 TEDTalk on teaching arts and sciences together.}

1.2.1.2.3.Philosophy, in particular Moral Philosophy, including the 42 Maatian Principles as elaborated in the Ru-Nu-Peret-Em-Heru (‘Book of Coming Forth By Day / Into Light’) and others.

{Also cf. Tony Browder’s discussions on the Heru-Bedhet symbol (‘Gnothi Seauton’ or ‘Know Thyself’), and Ra Un Nefer Amen’s Metu Neter series of volumes on Kemet’s educational principles (‘Mystery system’).}

1.2.1.2.4. Mathematics (esp. geometry), including the so-called “Pythagorean” Theorem, the volumes of several three-dimensional objects, etc.

1.2.1.2.5. Astronomy, including the Sopdet (‘Sirius’) cycle, each lasting 1,460 years, etc.

1.2.1.2.6. Architecture, including innumerable temples and pyramids

1.2.1.2.7. Medicine, including anatomy and surgery

1.2.2. Western Africa: Nok Complex {Benin / Niger / Nigeria}

Flourished ca. 1500 B.C.E. - 500 C.E. (as of our current limited knowledge).

[Wikipedia > Nok culture]

[Wikipedia > Smelting: § Early iron smelting]

1.2.2.1. Just At The Beginning Of Discoveries

Relative difficulty of archaeological digs in comparison with the continent’s Eastern side {less stone, often wetter climate, etc.}.

1.2.2.2. Advanced Art

Famous terracotta (earthenware) sculptures.

Following captions {All via Wikipedia > Nok culture}:

- Nok sculpture, terracotta.
- Female Statue; 48 cm tall; Age: 900 to 1,500 years.



1.2.2.3.Iron Smelting

Iron production techniques were independently discovered by the regions's inhabitants (i.e., not imported from the Eastern side, or elsewhere), ca. 1200 B.C.E.

1.2.3. Trans-Saharan Connections

1.2.3.1 .Significance of domesticated livestock

Dating back to ca. 10,000 B.C.E., when the Sahara was green.

Saharan rock reliefs depict scenes that have been thought to be suggestive of a cattle cult, typical of those seen throughout parts of Eastern Africa and the Nile Valley even to this day. [Wikipedia > Nubia]

1.2.3.2. Dogon People of Mali

Intricate religion based on the concept of duality, both physical & spiritual. Deep knowledge of Astronomy, esp. the Sopdet ('Sirius') multi-star system. Origin traditions vary, but some indicate that the Dogon originally came westward from the Nile Valley.

[Griaule, Marcel - Conversations with Ogotemmêli, 1965 (1948)]

1.3. Ancient Indus Valley {Harappa [Pakistan]; Mohenjo Daro [India's Northwest]}

Flourished from 3300–1300 B.C.E.

Growing (albeit still-controversial!) evidence of Ancient African connections, esp. w.r.t. Nile Valley and Ancient West Africa. Cultural and linguistic links {Dravidian / Ethiopian}, etc.

*The civilisation's cities were noted for their **urban planning**, baked brick houses, **elaborate drainage systems**, **water supply systems**, clusters of large non-residential buildings, and **new techniques in handicraft** (carnelian [gem] products, seal carving) and **metallurgy** (copper, bronze, lead, and tin). [...] The people of the Indus Civilisation **achieved great accuracy in measuring length, mass, and time**. They were **among the first to develop a system of uniform weights and measures**. [Wikipedia > Indus Valley Civilisation]*

Following Captions {All via Wikipedia > Mohenjo-daro}:

- The Dancing Girl.
- The Priest-King.



[Rashidi, Runoko - <Various Works>]

[Winters, Clyde A. - <Various Works>]

[Wikipedia > {Indus Valley Civilisation | Harappa | Mohenjo-daro}]

1.4. Ancient Meso-America {Mexico; Guatemala; Belize}

Flourished from ca. 1500–400 B.C.E. {Olmec}, ca. 750 B.C.E. - 1697 C.E. {Maya}, and ca. 1300–1521 C.E. {Aztec}

Again, growing (albeit still-controversial!) evidence of Ancient and/or Middle-Era African connections, particularly w.r.t. the seminal Olmecs, and their own influence on the later Maya & Aztec civilisations. Architectural, iconographic, botanical, and linguistic links, etc.

*The Olmecs [...] were the earliest known major civilization in Mesoamerica. [...] In addition to their influence with contemporaneous Mesoamerican cultures, as the first civilization in Mesoamerica, the Olmecs are credited, or speculatively credited, with many "firsts", including the bloodletting and perhaps human sacrifice, **writing and epigraphy, and the invention of popcorn, zero and the Mesoamerican calendar**, and the Mesoamerican ballgame, as well as perhaps the compass.* [Wikipedia > Olmecs]

Following Captions {All via Wikipedia > Olmecs}:

- Olmec Head No. 3 from San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan 1200–900 BCE.
- Olmec Head No.1, 1200–900 BCE.





The Maya civilization [...] was a Mesoamerican civilization developed by the Maya peoples, and noted for its logosyllabic script—the most sophisticated and highly developed writing system in pre-Columbian Americas—as well as for its art, architecture, mathematics, calendar, and astronomical system. [Wikipedia > Maya civilisation]

[Van Sertima, Ivan - They Came Before Columbus,]

[Van Sertima, Ivan (Ed.) - Journal Of African Civilisations, <Various Volumes>]

[Winters, Clyde A. - <Various Works>]

[Wikipedia > {Olmecs | Maya civilization | Aztecs}]

2. Middle-Era Sahelian / Savannah Empires {Africa's Central/Western Region}

To paraphrase Guyana's own Dr. Ivan Van Sertima, as the collective Nile Valley's once-blazing light was fading on the Eastern side, the Central / Western region was rapidly rising, first with the Ancient Ghana (Wagadou) Empire {partly the inspiration for today's renamed Ghana, which was actually the later forest-belt Asante Kingdom}. This was later followed by, among others, the famous Mali and Songhai Empires, with both being among the (geographically) largest empires in Africa {e.g., according to some scholars, Songhai covered almost one-fifth of the vast continent}.

[Diop, Cheikh Anta - The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, 1978 {1959}]

[Diop, Cheikh Anta - Pre-Colonial Black Africa, 1987 {1960}]

[Wikipedia > {Ghana Empire | Mali Empire | Songhai Empire}]

2.1. Ancient Ghana (Wagadou) Empire

Flourished ca. 700–1240 C.E.

Camels, trade & stability. Gold, salt, silks & spices. Cavalry & archers. Monarch & councils.

2.2. Mali Empire

Flourished ca. 1235–1507+ C.E.

Major rulers (or ‘Mansas’): Sundiata Keita; Musa Keita {cf. Hajj & gold}; Suleyman; +.

Extensive trade in gold, copper, salt. {Almost half the “Old” World’s gold, by 14th Century C.E.}

Nominally Islamic, with use of the Arabic script.

Great world-class universities, in the cities of Timbuktu (including the Sankoré Mosque and two others) and Djenné. Recent global efforts to assist today’s Mali nation in preserving that scholarly heritage of research in several fields, including astronomy, physics / optics, mathematics, etc.

By the end of Mansa Musa's reign, the Sankoré University had been converted into a fully staffed university with the largest collections of books in Africa since the Library of Alexandria. The Sankoré University was capable of housing 25,000 students and had one of the largest libraries in the world with roughly 1,000,000 manuscripts. [Wikipedia > Mali Empire]

2.3. Songhai Empire

Flourished ca. 1464–1591 C.E.

Major Rulers: Sunni Ali; Askia the Great; +.

Again, nominally Islamic, with use of the Arabic script. {Continuation of University learning, with some ups & downs.}

Administrative & logistical innovations: Mail system; Efficient bureaucracy; Accurate weights & measures; Inspectors at trading posts for gold and salt; etc.

3. Forest-Belt Kingdoms {Africa's Western Side; +}

As the continent's Central / Western empires in turn were fading, to their south the forest-belt kingdoms — largely protected from those empires' horse-based cavalries by the infamous tsetse fly ('sleeping sickness' agent) — were asserting themselves, starting with the Yoruba / Oyo Empire

(including the Benin Kingdom), ca. 1300 C.E. This was later followed by, among others, the Dahomey and Asante kingdoms.

These economies of these Empires and Kingdoms were mostly based on agriculture and trade.

[Diop, Cheikh Anta - The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, 1978 {1959}]

[Drewal, Henry John - Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought, 1990]

[Wikipedia > {Oyo Empire | Kingdom of Benin | Dahomey | Ashanti Empire}]

3.1. Yoruba / Oyo Empire

From ca. 1300–1896 C.E., the Yoruba people developed an innovative political organisation with many checks and balances, and a complex religion, art and music. E.g., in religion, the *orisha*'s serve as avatars or manifestations of various aspects of the Divine / Nature, and mainly guide us to the proper alignment and knowledge of our own *ori* ('soul'). In music, the *dundun* (talking drum) are the centrepiece of an extremely advanced drumming tradition.

3.2. Benin Kingdom {Eventually Adjunct To / Part Of Oyo Empire}

From ca. 1180–1897 C.E., known especially for its exquisite Art, especially naturalistic bronze sculptures (molded via the 'lost wax' method).

3.3. Dahomey Kingdom {Today's Benin Nation}

From ca. 1600–1904 C.E., the Fon people were the origin of the fascinating Vodun ('Spirit') religion, often misunderstood (especially given Hollywood's 'zombie' sensationalism). These spirits (*loa*'s later in Haiti) serve both as manifestations of universal essences or principles, and as intermediaries with the Hidden Divine (not unlike the Nile Valley's Neters, or indeed perhaps the Angels of other religions).

Also home of the famous Mino ('Our Mothers'), a.k.a. 'Dahomey Amazons', an all-female military unit {partly the model for the Dora Milaje team seen in the 2018 superhero film, *Black Panther*, and other media}.

Unfortunately though, on the down side, some monarchs did also profit from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

3.4. Asante Empire

From ca. 1670–1957 C.E., the Asante people developed a sophisticated governmental bureaucracy, largely monarchic (symbolised by the Asantehene's Golden Stool), but with separate ministries including a Foreign Office. Much like the Oyo Empire, this structure encompassed many checks and balances.

In music, they invented their own version of the talking drum, the *Fontomfrom*. They also created the famous royal Kente cloth.

4. Diasporan Community & Resistance

The great soul of Africa continued to survive and even flourish in her descendants across the Atlantic Ocean, despite the often extremely brutal conditions of Trans-Atlantic Slavery, including the voyage itself and the subsequent plantation system. It was indeed an African Holocaust or Maafa (‘Great Disaster’ in Swahili).

[Guyanese Online > Damon – Freedom fighter – hanged October 13, 1834]

[Wikipedia > {Haitian Revolution | Berbice slave uprising | Demerara rebellion of 1823 | Marcus Garvey | Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow}]

4.1. Haiti: Religion and Revolution

Dahomean influence (along with syncretic Catholicism) on Haitian religion {with Papa Legba as ‘Master Of The Crossroads’, etc.}.

First successful revolutionary movement in the African Diaspora (1791–1804 C.E.) — led initially by Toussaint L’Ouverture, and later by Jean-Jacques Dessalines — that resulted in an independent nation. Defeated some of the mightiest armies of Europe, including British forces as well as those

of France's Napoleon (with a little help from mosquitoes too, as Yellow Fever agents).

However: The nascent state's future was hobbled in 1825 when France forced it to pay 150 million gold francs in reparations to French ex-slaveholders—as a condition of French political recognition and to end the nation's political and economic isolation. Though the amount of the reparations was reduced in 1838, Haiti was unable to finish paying off its debt until 1947. The payments left the country's government deeply impoverished, causing long-term instability.
[Wikipedia > Haitian Revolution]

Lasting impact, especially as inspiration for later rebellions and revolutionary movements.

4.2. Guyana: Cuffy, Quamina and Damon

Leaders of respective uprisings during the colonial Trans-Atlantic Slavery period.

- Cuffy, Atta, Accara, Accabre, + {Berbice; February–December 1763}.
- Quamina {Demerara; August 1823}.
- Damon {Essequibo; August–October 1834}.

4.3. Jamaica: Marcus Mosiah Garvey

Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), from 1914 C.E. onwards, especially

throughout its heyday in the 1920s, consciously evoked the spirit of historical Black Civilisations (such as the Ancient Nile Valley) as typical examples of what Black people had accomplished, **and therefore could do so again.**

Goal of global economic self-sufficiency, via agriculture, manufacturing, trade, transportation, and other areas of endeavour. {E.g., the Black Star Line, etc.}

Again, lasting impact, especially as inspiration for later socio-political movements.

Guyana reportedly had one of the largest UNIA branches outside of the USA.

4.4. Guyana: Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow

Founded our country's modern labour (trade union) movement, particularly the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU) in 1917, which was officially the first trade union in the Caribbean.

Began with waterfront workers' rights, and by extension the rights of all working people.