

African Perspectives

"INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE."

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

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by Dr. Jamil Cherovee

The status of African World History is changing faster than our understanding of this change. Who is responsible for bringing it in to being? The intent of this article is to call attention to several new books by African and Afro-American writers who have challenged the old approaches to African history and culture. Most of the writers whose books are reviewed here interpret African history and its relationship to world history. By taking this approach, they show that the Africans, who were the first people in the commentary of history, have never been absent from the history's achievements and failures. From their new, bold research and their Afro-centric vantage point, they view African history as a very important division of the total history of mankind.

The African people have never been static within Africa. They have traveled extensively within their continent, spreading and taking on a diversity of cultures and ways of life. The Senegalese historian, Cheikh Anta Diop, calls attention to this neglected aspect of African history in his book, "The Cultural Unity Of Negro Africa." Professor Diop goes on to explain the cultural conditions that shaped old African societies. One of these conditions was the development of matriarchy, which gave African women basic rights long before the idea was extended to women in other parts of the world. When Africa is viewed through the work of historians like Cheikh Anta Diop, it is obvious that Africa was never what most non-Black historians said it was.

John G. Jackson's second book, "Man, God, and Civilization," is an inquiry into the part that religion has played in shaping the destinies of men in nations. In this book, he says: "Nearly all the so-called world historians of civilization, so popular in contemporary academic circles, are based mainly on what is known as European civilization. This species of parochialism gives a false picture of human history; and few students become aware of the fact that European civilization, speaking historically, is a product of the recent past, and that European culture was not indigenous, but was derived from older civilizations of Africa and Asia."

Professor Jackson has made a mission out of the effort to set history

straight, especially as it related to African people. In doing this, he has, throughout his book, displayed a sharp insight into world history in general. The more-than-200 sources used for this book range from Diodorus Siculus to H.G. Wells. In this book he has updated the information that appeared earlier in his pamphlets such as: "Christianity Before Christ" (1938), "Ethiopia and the Origin of Civilization" (1939), and "Pagan Origins of the Christ Myth" (1941). Chapters 11 and 12 in the book trace the origins of most North African and southern European civilizations to the heart of Africa. This will disturb many historians who cannot live with this point of view.

There has long been a need for a book about the invaders of Africa and their effect on nations, people and civilizations. Chancellor Williams of Howard University has written such a book. His book, "The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.," has broken new ground in this field. From the beginning of his book, Dr. Williams puts the long-distorted facts about Egypt's relationship to the rest of Africa in order. He refers to Egypt as "Ethiopian's oldest daughter" and that is precisely what it was.

Black children should have a true knowledge of their history so that they may feel proud of their antecedents, proud of the glorious past, which no amount of hate and prejudice could wipe from history's pages. There is a need for Black historians to specialize in specific areas of African history, until those particular areas have been thoroughly explained.

The image of Africa among Afro-Americans has been a concern for a long time to a large number of scholars, including some bigoted non-Black scholars who use this image to spread dissension between Africans and Afro-Americans. Many pseudo-historians have tried to wipe out the African from world history; but as long as the monuments of Ethiopia and Egypt exist, they cannot do so. There were many Africans who distinguished themselves in many fields. It is important for anybody writing about Africans to trace their origin and the part they have played, are playing, and will play in the world.



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— Roger Crow, construction worker



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James Weldon Johnson Commemorative Stamp

The 1988 Black Heritage Series stamp, the 11th such issue, will feature James Weldon Johnson (June 17, 1871-June 26, 1938), educator, diplomat, lawyer, author, and lyricist. The issue date is February 2 in Nashville, Tennessee.

Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing

Lift ev'ry voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring.
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty:
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee,
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God
True to our native land.

Words by JAMES WELDON JOHNSON
Music by ROSAMOND JOHNSON