

Egypt in its African Context

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Public Understandings of Ancient Egypt in the Formation of Dalit and Afro-American Identities and History Curriculum

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Abstract

In this paper I will discuss the role Ancient Egypt has played in the identity formation of Dalits and Afro-Americans, why both groups see a direct link between themselves and the Ancient Egyptians, and why they made this a major part of their history curriculum within the context of their civil rights movements.

Keywords: curriculum, Dalit, haplogroup, indentured servant, segregation, lascars.

Introduction

Two principal minorities in the United States and India are Afro-Americans and the Dalits, formerly known as the Untouchables of India. W. E. B. DuBois in *Africa and the World* (1965), V. T. Rajshekar in *Dalits: The Black Untouchables of India* (1995), and the Dalit Bishop Rev. Azariah in *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology* (2002) have linked Afro-Americans and East Indians to an African origin. Although these minorities are separated by thousands of miles, both ethnic groups locate their origins in Africa and see Egyptian civilisation as part of their ethnic heritage. This idea of Egyptian heritage is part of the liberation history curriculum taught in their schools. Recently in the United States the history curriculum has been changing in relation to how Afro-Americans are represented in United States text books. The changing demographics in many American schools have led to educators seeking to be more multicultural in their outlook towards education. In the Chicago Public Schools in the Chicago, Illinois, region students come from homes where over twenty non-English languages are spoken. In CPS we find that there has been an increase in the number of Spanish speaking children as well as a significant number of students in Chicago's western suburbs from Arabic speaking backgrounds.

This movement toward multiculturalism is welcome to many Afro-Americans, but this shift to multiculturalism as a curriculum idea is not new. In many parts of the United States, up until the desegregation of American schools in 1954, Afro-Americans attended schools which were segregated. In the 19th century Afro-Americans began to write textbooks which were used in segregated Afro-American schools and which included material about the history of Blacks in Africa and the ancient world, especially Egypt. In the segregated schools Afro-American school administrators used a history curriculum that included Afro-American and African history, including Egypt.

Slavery in the United States

Afro-Americans are deeply interested in the study of ancient world history and the role of Blacks in this history. Many Afro-Americans believe that writing

ancient history is a political act. Carter G. Woodson, in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) observed that '[The oppressor p]lays up before the negro, then, his crimes and shortcomings. Let him learn to admire the Hebrew, the Greeks, the Latin, and the Teuton. Lead the Negro to detest the man of African blood—to hate himself' (p. 192). These scholars see the writing of ancient Black history as an anecdote to White supremacy. Woodson, again in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* wrote: 'The oppressor, however, raises his voice to the contrary. He teaches the Negro that he has no worthwhile past, and that his race has done nothing significant since the beginning of time, and that there is no evidence that he will ever achieve anything great. The education of the Negro then must be carefully directed lest the race may waste time trying to do the impossible... If you teach the Negro that he has accomplished as much good as any other race he will aspire to equality and justice without regard to race. Such an effort would upset the program of the oppressor in Africa and America' (p. 192).

The Atlantic slave trade (c. AD 1631-1865) played an important role in how Afro-Americans viewed the development of their history curriculum. This historical experience led to the African holocaust in which W. E. B. DuBois claimed 100 million Blacks died crossing the Atlantic Ocean during the Middle Passage or on slave plantations throughout the Americas (DuBois [1915] 2001, 93).¹ The African origin of Afro-Americans led to the desire among many members of this population for an understanding about their African homeland. They also wanted to know about the history of their people in the United States.

It was during the period of the slave trade and slavery that Afro-Americans and Dalits (East Indians) generally met, as a result of the fact that many East Indians came to the United States as slaves from Madras, Bombay, Surat, Cochin and Calcutta (Chatterjee and Easton 2006). Some of these East Indian slaves were *lascars* (Indian sailors) of the Dutch East India Company, carried to the USA by Dutch, French and English captains, while other slaves were captured in slave raids in India and sold into chattel slavery in America (Assisi 2009; Kaiwar and Muzamdar 2003). The first East Indian slaves were situated in Jamestown, Virginia. In 1622, there is a report of an East Indian slave or servant of Captain George Menefie (Assisi 2009). As early as 1667 East Indian slaves were

¹ 'The American slave trade, therefore, meant the elimination of at least 60,000,000 Negroes from their fatherland. The Mohammedan slave trade meant the expatriation or forcible migration in Africa of nearly as many more. It would be conservative, then, to say that the slave trade cost Negro Africa 100,000,000 souls. And yet people ask today the cause of the stagnation of culture in that land since 1600!' DuBois, 1915, 93. Retrieved 5/21/2010 at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/dbn/dbn11.htm>

being sold in the New World (Kaiwar and Muzamdar 2003). For centuries some East Indians were traded as slaves by American slave traders who were always on the lookout for the cheapest slaves they could find from India and East Africa. In the Virginia Gazette, 4th August 1768, there is a report that acknowledges a young 'East Indian' who had 'a thin visage, a sly look'. Another East Indian was identified as 'an East Indian negro man' who spoke French and English (Assisi 2009). And on 13 July 1776, the Virginia Gazette reported an escaped East Indian servant as follows: 'Servant Man named John Newton, about 20 Years of Age, 5 feet 6 inches high, slender made, is an Asiatic Indian by Birth, has been about twelve months in Virginia, but lived ten Years (as he says) in England, in the Service of Sir Charles Whitworth' (Assisi 2009). Court documents provide us with details about East Indian slaves in New England and Virginia. In these records East Indian slaves were identified as 'East India Indians', 'Asiatic Indians' and 'East Indians': 'This East Indian was named Tony, and was used as a headright' (Assisi 2009).

Court documents and newspaper advertisements provide historians with indisputable evidence for the earliest historical link between people from the Indian subcontinent and America. Since many of these East Indians were held in bondage as chattel slaves over the years these East Indians were absorbed into the Afro-American slave population (Chatterjee and Easton 2006). This allows Asian Americans and African Americans, particularly those with South Asian ancestry, to re-vision their history and claim their full heritage.

Slavery and Beyond

During and after slavery in the United States, state and national history curriculums portrayed Afro-Americans as backwards and ignorant. The curriculum maintained that African people had always been slaves and contributed nothing to ancient history. After slavery Afro-Americans began to write history and establish their own history curriculum. This curriculum was based on the 'Ancient Model' of history. This 'Ancient Model' of history was based on references to Africans and Black people in the Classical literature and The Bible.

There are four philosophical schools associated with the Afro-American history curriculum: perennialist, essentialist, existentialist and progressivist. The taxonomic system we use to classify the various Afro-American history philosophical positions and related values affecting the Afro-American history curriculum are modelled on philosophical developments associated with education. We can use taxonomies of educational philosophies to discuss the Afro-American history curriculum because both education and philosophy are 'cultural experiences'. Moreover, because the Afro-American history curriculum seeks to explain and delineate the story of African people, it clearly is a field of study which encompasses all aspects of the culture of Black and African people (Asante 1990, 1991; Winters 1994).

The Afro-American perennial scholars study the great works such as The Bible and the writings of the classical scholars. The adherents of this school include Cornish and Russwurm (1827), Edward Blyden (1869, 1887, 1890, 1905), Frederick Douglass (1966) and Martin Delaney (1978). These Afrocentrists see knowledge as truth, which is eternal.² Essentialist Afro-American history researchers emphasise in their writing data that is well established through scientific research. Afrocentrists of this philosophical school include W. E. B. DuBois (1924, 1965, 1970), John Jackson (1974), Leo Hansberry (1981) and C. A. Winters (1985a, 1985b, 1989a, 1990, 1994). They believe that, as new research is published, it should be analysed to discover how it relates to the ancient history of African and Black people to enrich our understanding of the past. The existentialist Afrocentrists believe that africalogical studies should strive to teach African people to know more about themselves so we can have a better world. The Afrocentric existentialist social scientists include G. M. James (1954), Marcus Garvey (1966), J. A. Rogers (1967), Cheikh Anta Diop (1974, 1991) and A. A. Schomburg (1979). The final philosophical school is progressivist. The progressivist believes that we should have knowledge of the process and futuristic focus on Afrocentric studies. The major exponent of this frame of reference is Molefi K. Asante (1991).

With regard to the Afrocentric view that the Egyptians were Black Africans we must look to the perennialists. The perennialist school, associated with Frederick Douglass (1966) and Martin Delaney (1978), founded the Afro-American history curriculum. These Afrocentrists, writing in the 19th century, placed the great works of the past centre-stage in the formulation of their Afrocentric ancient history knowledge base. The perennialists postulated that you should use The Bible and the writings of the classical scholars who recognised the 'Ancient Model' of history (i.e. that Blacks played a major role in ancient history) in deciding what to teach people in relation to the ancient history of African Americans. The Old Testament provides annals of the ancient empires of Africa and Mesopotamia. In the Old Testament the Blacks are recognised as the sons of Ham. According to the Old Testament narrative found in the Book of Genesis (10:6), the children of Ham are alleged to be the founders of **all** the ancient civilisations including Kush (the Ta Seti, and C-Group cultures of Nubia and the Sudan; the Sumerians of Mesopotamia and the Elamites of Iran), Mizraim (the founder of the Egyptians), Phut (the civilisations of ancient Ethiopia/South Arabia), and Canaan (the early Canaanites and Hattians of ancient Palestine). The Old Testament narrative and the classical literature were important to the perennialists because it already recognised the division of Black people of Africa into two groups: the Semitic (Canaan and Phut) speakers and Black African (Egypt, Sumer and Elam) speakers (Winters 1985a, 1989a, 1990).

² An Afrocentrist can be defined as a social science researcher who uses traditional social science research methods to explain and discuss the history of African people from an African-centred perspective.

Africological Paradigms of Ancient History

As a result of the 'Ancient Model' of history the scientific efforts of africological ancient history researchers of the diverse philosophical schools discussed above were organised around two theoretical or empirical generalisations, or paradigms. An empirical generalisation is 'an isolated proposition summarizing observed uniformities of relationships between two or more variables' (Merton 1957, 95); a 'scientific law' is 'a statement of invariance derivable from a theory' (Merton 1957, 96). The two paradigms associated with the africological study of African history (ASAH) developed by the perennialist Afrocentric scholars are:

1. Black/African people are the children of Ham;
2. Blacks founded the first civilisations in Asia (Sumer, Babylon and Elam), Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya/North Africa) and Europe (Greece and Crete).

The normal scientific research in africological ancient historical studies is directed toward the articulation of those phenomena and theories supplied by the ASAH to deduce new paradigms. Due to the foundation of africological ancient research by the Afrocentric perennialists, ASAH research is paradigm-based. The perennialists made Egypt the centrepiece of the Afro-American history curriculum.

As a result, fact-gathering is done by employing historical, linguistic and anthropological research methods. Using these research methods Afro-American scholars taught that Egypt was a Black African civilisation. This history curriculum was reinforced by the Black Church which, every Sunday, taught Afro-Americans about the Hamites, central to which group were the Ancient Egyptians. By the late 19th century Afro-American researchers began to write text books on Afro-American history. In these textbooks Afro-American educators not only discussed the history of Africans in the USA. and Africa, they also discussed the ancient civilisations founded by Blacks in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The scholarship of these researchers was based on contemporary archaeological and historical research indicating the African/Black origin of civilisation throughout the world. These Afro-American scholars, mostly trained at Harvard University (one of the few universities that admitted Blacks in the 19th century) provide the scientific basis for Afrocentrism and the global role played by African people in civilising the world. These researchers practiced Afrocentrism; Afrocentrism and the africological study of ancient Black civilisations were initiated by Afro-Americans.

The foundation of any mature science is its articulation in an authoritative text (Kuhn 1996). The africological textbooks published by Williams (1883), Perry (1893) and Hopkins (1905) provided the vocabulary and themes for further Afrocentric social science research and curriculum development. The pedagogy for ancient africological research was well established by the end of the 19th century by Afro-American researchers well-versed in the classical languages and knowledge of Greek

and Latin. Cornish and Russwurm (1827), in the *Freedom Journal*, were the first Afro-Americans to discuss and explain the 'Ancient Model' of history. These Afrocentric social scientists used the Classics to prove that the Blacks founded civilisation in Egypt, Ethiopia, Babylon and Nineveh. Cornish and Russwurm made it clear that archaeological research supported the classical, or 'Ancient Model' of history. Edward Blyden (1869) also used classical sources to discuss the ancient history of African people. In his work he not only discussed the evidence for Blacks in West Asia and Egypt, but also the role of Blacks in early America (Blyden 1869, 78). In 1883, G. W. Williams published the first textbook on African American history, *History of the Negro Race in America*, which provided the schema for all future africological history texts. Dr. Williams, who trained at Howard, confirmed the classical traditions for Blacks founding civilisations in both Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia) and West Asia. In addition to confirming the 'Ancient Model' of history, Dr. Williams also discussed the presence of Blacks in Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula. A decade later R. L. Perry (1893) also presented evidence to confirm the classical tradition of Blacks founding Egypt, Greece and the Mesopotamian civilisation. He provided empirical evidence for the role of Blacks in Phoenicia, thus increasing the scope of the ASAH paradigms. Pauline E. Hopkins (1905) added further articulation in understanding the role of Blacks in Egypt as well as providing further confirmation of the role of Blacks in Southeast Asia, and expanding the scope of africological research to China.

This review of the 19th century africological social science research which is the foundation of the Afro-American history curriculum theories serves to confirm the 'Ancient Model' for the early history of Blacks. We also see a movement away from self-published africological research, to more formal publication of research, research articles on Afrocentric themes, and the publication of textbooks. It was in these books that the paradigms associated with the 'Ancient Model' and Afro-American study of ancient history were confirmed, and given reliability by empirical research. It was these texts which provided the pedagogic vehicles for the perpetuation of the africological normal social science. The Afrocentric textbooks of Williams (1883), Perry (1893) and Hopkins (1905) proved the reliability and validity of the ASAH paradigms. The discussion within these texts of contemporary scientific research findings proving the existence of ancient civilisations in Egypt, Nubia-Sudan (Kush), Mesopotamia, Palestine and North Africa lent congruence to the classical literature which pointed to the existence of these civilisations and their African origins (i.e. founded by the children of Ham=Khem=Kush?).

The authors of the africological textbooks reported the latest archaeological and anthropological findings in their textbooks, adding precision to their analysis of the Classical and Old Testament literature. This, along with the discovery of artefacts on many ancient sites depicting Black/African people, proved that the Classical and Old

Testament literature, as opposed to the 'Aryan Model', objectively identified the Black/African role in ancient history. The 'Aryan Model', created during the Slave Trade era, claimed that African peoples had no history. Finally, these textbooks confirmed that any examination of references in the classical literature to Blacks in Egypt, Kush, Mesopotamia and Greece/Crete was consistent with the evidence recovered from archaeological excavations in the Middle East and the Aegean. These researchers disconfirmed the 'Aryan Model', which, according to their research, proved to be a falsification of the authentic history of Blacks in early times.

The creation of africalogical textbooks provided us with a number of facts revealing the nature of the Afrocentric ancient history paradigms. They include a discussion of:

1. the artefacts depicting Blacks found at ancient sites recovered through archaeological excavation;
2. the confirmation of the validity of the Classical and Old Testament references to Blacks as founders of civilisation in Africa and Asia;
3. the presence of isolated pockets of Blacks existing outside Africa;
4. the fact that the contemporary Arab people in modern Egypt are not the descendants of the ancient Egyptians.

The early africalogical textbooks also outlined the africalogical themes research should endeavour to study and serves as content for the Afro-American history curriculum. The data collected by the africalogical ancient history research pioneers by the end of the 19th century led to the development of four questions which needed to be solved by the Afrocentric paradigms:

1. What is the exact relationship of Ancient Egypt to Blacks in other parts of Africa?
2. How and when did Blacks settle America, Asia and Europe?
3. What is the contribution of the Blacks to the rise and cultural expression of ancient Black/African civilisations?
4. Did Africans settle parts of America in ancient times?

In the early 20th century new researchers began to investigate the history of Egypt. These researchers include Leo Hansberry and W. E. B. DuBois. They argued, as their predecessors had, that the original Egyptians were Black Africans. There is no one who can deny the fact that Leo Hansberry, who was a professor of Howard University, founded African Studies in the USA. Hansberry was primarily interested in the Classical references to Blacks in Egypt and elsewhere. It is the Classical literature which linked Africans and East Indians; the Classical writers maintained that there were two Ethiopias of Kush: one in Asia and the other in Africa. Herodotus wrote: 'The Eastern Ethiopians differed in nothing from the other Ethiopians, save in their language, and the character of their hair. For the Eastern Ethiopians have straight hair, while they of Libya are more woolly-haired than any other people in the

world' (from *The History of the Persian Wars*, VII.70).

DuBois is also considered a content specialist when writing the Afro-American history curriculum. His major contributions to this area are *The World and Africa* (1965) and *The Negro* (1970). In these books Egypt's African heritage is explained and discussed in detail. Up until the 1950s the most popular Afro-American history text used in Afro-American public schools was *The Negro in Our History* (1922) by Carter G. Woodson and C. H. Welsley. Carter G. Woodson founded the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916, and his textbook was extremely popular, going into a number of editions. Many Afro-American teachers graduated from southern Negro Colleges and they encouraged the use of *The Negro in Our History* in schools in the large cities of the United States. By the 1960s the leading Afro-American history text was *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Afro-Americans* (1947) by John Hope Franklin. This book is one of the most comprehensive Afro-American history texts ever written, giving a fine history of Africa and Afro-American history, and it continues to be used not only at many colleges in the United States, but also in high school history programs.

Dalit History Curriculum

The Dalit civil rights struggle was initiated in 1928 by Dr B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), a leading Indian scholar and political leader, who articulated the dreams and aspirations of the Dalits. Dr Ambedkar was the major spokesman in India for Dalits to be given their human rights and not be treated unjustly by their fellow Hindus. He was awarded India's highest Civil Award posthumously in 1990. There are 160 million Dalits in India, sharing with Afro-Americans a history of segregation and slavery (Rajshakar 1995). In the past Dalits were called outcastes or 'Untouchables'. Mohandas Gandhi called them Harijans, 'children of God'. The term Dalit means 'crushed and broken'. The Dalits believe that their ancestors originated in the Sudan, from where they migrated to the Indus Valley (Winters 1985b), and they regard their relationship to Egypt and the Sudan as a link to Afro-Americans and Africans. According to the Dalits, this link allows them to have allies outside of India where they are harassed and discriminated against. V. T. Rajshekar is a major Dalit leader, and one who accepts the African origin of the Dalits, based on the Classical literature, and genetic and linguistic research that links Dravidians and Africans. After a long period of silence, the Dalits have begun a civil rights movement in India, with V. T. Rajshekar as one of their most articulate leaders. The Dalits identify with their African ancestry and are enamoured of Afro-Americans (Paswan and Jaivedd 2003). The Dalits idolised the Black Panther Party, and, in 1972, the Dalit Black Panther Party was founded in Bombay, India (Kapoor 2004).

The Dalit history curriculum is founded on research linking Dravidian speakers to Africa. It is already recognised that there are known Indian populations of African ancestry (Indian Genome Variation Consortium

(IGVC) 2008). The archaeological and genetic evidence suggest that the Dravidians may have originated in Africa (Sergent 1992), and it appears from the linguistic evidence as well that some Dravidian speakers originated in Africa (Winters 2007). Aravanan (1976) and Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya (1983) provide considerable evidence that Dravidian originated in Africa, not Eurasia. Using osteological data researchers have established that the Dravidian speakers of South India and the Indus Valley were primarily related to the ancient Capsian population (c. 21,000-12,000 BP; Gates 1961; Guha 1935), which originated in Africa. Lahovary (1963) and Sastri (1955) maintain that this population was unified over an extensive zone from Africa to South India. B. B. Lal (1963) argued convincingly that the Dravidians were related to the C-group people of Nubia based on the fact that both groups used, 1) a common black-and-red ware pottery (BRW); 2) a common burial complex incorporating megaliths and circular rock enclosures; and, 3) a common type of rock cut sepulchre. Rao (1972) pointed out that the BRW industry diffused from Nubia across West Asia into Rajasthan, and thence to East, Central and South India. In addition, Singh (1982) made it clear that he believes that the BRW radiated from Nubia through Mesopotamia and Iran southward into India.

Many researchers, especially Dravidian speaking linguists, maintain that the Dravidian languages are genetically related to the Niger-Congo family of languages (Aravanan 1976, 1979; Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1976, 1979, 1983; Winters 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1994, 2007b, 2008a). The Niger-Congo speakers originated in Nubia, the same location as the archaeological evidence linking the Dravidian speakers to the C-Group culture of Nubia who lived in Africa around 3000 BC (Lal 1963; Winters 2008a). Millet was probably introduced to India from Africa by Dravidian speakers (Winters 2008b). Winters (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2008a) has reconstructed the Paleo-African-Dravidian terms for the hoe, millet, cattle, sheep and goats. Balakrishnan (2005) claims that onomastics indicate an African 'root' for the language of the Dravidian-speaking tribes. He presents data indicating that the names for rivers and hills in Koraput, for example are identical to the names for rivers and hills in Africa. Today many Niger-Congo speakers are spread across Africa and carry the M1 haplogroup which is also found in India (Gonzalez *et al.* 2006; Kivisild *et al.* 1999). Cordaux *et al.* (2003) and Winters (2010) noted that Africans and Dravidians share a number of haplogroups. The archaeological evidence makes it clear that the Dravidians and C-Group people of Nubia shared the same culture. The congruity that exists between the date for the C-Group culture, and the genome evidence of Reich *et al.* (2009) which suggests that the earliest Dravidian speakers lived around 3000 BC, supports the view that the Dravidian people originated in Africa, and are not autochthonous in India.

Conclusion

The Dalits and Afro-Americans do not look at Egypt solely as a major civilisation but rather they see Egypt as

a symbol of the greatness of their ancestral civilisation. Egypt, to the Dalits and Afro-Americans, gives them pride in their heritage, and recognition that they have not always been poor. Recognition of Egypt as their ancient homeland gives Afro-Americans and Dalits hope that one day they will experience true citizenship without the status of being recognised as different by the dominant cultural groups in India and the United States. The key element in Afro-American understandings of Egypt comes from the Black Church. The Black Church has been a constant source of healing and comfort for many Afro-Americans. It was here, through Sunday School, that Black children were taught that the Egyptians were Black Africans and descendants of Ham. Since Afro-Americans learned in church that Ham was the father of the Negro/African people, including Egyptians, this has kept alive for the last 200 years the popular idea that the Egyptians were Black.

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