

Afrocentricity and History

Molefi Kete Asante

Afrocentricity as a theory of human liberation and intellectual critique was initially a project of practical social reform for highly industrialized, complex, heterogeneous nations.¹ As such, it challenged the continuation of white racial hegemony over all symbols and social systems by opposing archaic structures of race based on the imposition of a particular cultural reality as if it were universal. Afrocentricity is presented as one way out of the impasse over social and cultural hegemony. One arrives at an understanding and rapprochement by accepting the agency of the African person as the basic unit of analysis of social situations involving African-descended people. This is a critical step in achieving community harmony. It becomes absolutely necessary to accept the subject position of Africans within the context of historical realities if progress is to be made in interpretation, analysis, synthesis, or construction. What this means, however, is that every system that has depended on the degradation of the African worldview, the denial of African humanity, and the ignoring of African achievements in civilization to enhance its own rationaliza-

tions must be confronted. With the end of the Great Enslavement in 1865, there were nearly 4.5 million African refugees in the United States. Within the next thirty-five years, the literacy rate leaped from 5 percent to nearly 50 percent in one generation in one of the most remarkable expressions of educational interest in the history of the world. This was generated by the period of Reconstruction from 1865 to 1877. It would barely last twelve years, but during that time it would mean that the African people could exercise freedoms that they had been denied for nearly 250 years.

During Reconstruction, the African population voted and ran for political office and once in office created many innovations such as public schools and public highways. But with the signing of the Hayes-Tilden Compromise, which allowed the rebellious Southern whites additional privileges, the Union Army that had protected the 4 million Africans of the Southern states was withdrawn from the South and a reign of terror literally set back the clock of social progress for generations. Whites organized vigilante

Mediating the Meaning of Culture in Western Society

groups to pursue, hound, and harass Africans out of government offices. The Ku Klux Klan organization was born with the express purpose of terrorizing any African who had the courage to register to vote or who voted or ran for office. The Southern landscape was littered with the corpses of Africans who simply attempted to express the right to vote. Such harsh measures meant that before long blacks were completely eliminated from legislative and administrative posts in the South.

An entire league of African reformists sought remedies and relief but was met with even more lynching and brutalizing of African people. In the United States, the beginning of the twentieth century was devoted to the campaign against mob rule and the denial of citizenship rights. By the time Martin Luther King Jr. and his supporters started the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, many religious African Americans had come to believe that it was possible for whites to reform their actions and change their racist behaviors.

Indeed, King's strategy was to appeal to the principal documents in which white Americans believe, the Bible and the U.S.

Constitution. Some change was brought about, and King was considered by many Americans to be a hero. Yet, the final results would reveal the hollowness of the victory of that romantic period, the 1960s.

There was a growing sentiment after Malcolm X, and perhaps in response to him, that African Americans and Africans in general needed a self-defining and self-determining attitude toward social, economic, political, and cultural issues. It was understood that reform was necessary, but the reform was to be of the African person. In fact, it was to be an intense interrogation of the African person's concept of space and time. When being was held to the light of history, it was revealed that for 500 years African people had been removed from all terms. We were operating, so to speak, in someone else's intellectual space and in someone else's time frame. This meant that African people could not actively pursue their own direction without conflicting with the perception that whites would have to change for progress to occur. Afrocentrists redefined the meaning of progress, charged that the victims of violence and oppression were



Meropa. Illustration by Nico Phooko © 1994.

as much to blame as the ones who carried out the crimes, and went on the warpath.² To change one's situation, it would be necessary to change one's self—such became the dictum of a new generation of scholar-activists after the publication of the first edition of *Afrocentricity* in 1980.

It is important that we have a clear understanding of how Afrocentricity emerged as a paradigm in the arena of African American studies. By way of distinction, Afrocentric-

ity is not Afrocentrism. The term "Afrocentrism" was first used by the opponents of Afrocentricity. Their aim was to assign religious significance to the idea of African-centeredness, but the term has come to refer to a broad cultural movement of the late twentieth century and its philosophical, political, and artistic ideas, which provide the basis for the musical, sartorial, and aesthetic dimensions of the African personality. On the other hand, Afrocentricity, as I have previously defined it, is a theory of agency, that is, the idea that African people must be viewed as agents rather than spectators to historical revolution and change. To this end, Afrocentricity seeks to examine every aspect of the subject place of Africans in historical, literary, architectural, ethical, philosophical, economic, and political life.

Afrocentricity precedes

Afrocentrism, that is, it is older as a term in the intellectual discourse.

Afrocentricity enters the critique of European hegemony after a series of attempts by European writers to advance critical methods of the construction of reality in the context of Europe itself. But Europe has been unable to satisfactorily critique itself from outside the racist, hegemonic paradigm established as the grand narrative of the European people. It is here that Afrocentricity provides the first deep

analysis of the social and political situation inherent in hegemonic societies. It is as if we cannot learn from Europe in the area of human relations because everywhere Europe has been it has been the destroyer of humanity. In no place has Europe sought to live in mutual peace with non-European peoples. Everywhere Europe has sought domination, defeat, ethnic cleansing, and conquest. All European ideologies from dialectical materialism to postmodernism protect the ruthless Eurocentric idea of white triumphalism and hegemony.

European thought is unable to allow space for other cultures and therefore it becomes self-absorbed in the notion that it represents the categorical universal for the world. Such self-centeredness has left the rest of the world searching for a theoretical corrective.³ Europe has approached its rendezvous with destiny by establishing schools of thought that have answered some of the questions of displacement, economic inequality, fragmentation, universalism, grand narratives, and ethical issues. To ascertain how and where Afrocentricity enters the picture in the context of the Western world, I will discuss some of these Eurocentric approaches and suggest how they differ from Afrocentricity.

Dialectical Materialism

The European concern with industrialism and capitalism gave birth to dialectical materialism.⁴ We must never forget that these concerns did not occur universally, and that different nations arrived at industrialization in different ways. Marx was very Eurocentric in his focus, and there was no global aspect to his initial formulations. One might even say that dialectical materialism includes a bias against modern notions of culture, whether as cultural relativity or cultural materialism, because of its fascination and intense concern with the position of Euro-

peans in the world. I am not criticizing this inasmuch as I believe that what the dialectical materialists sought was the revivification of Europe. This was their task because they saw it as their obligation to Europe itself. When one reads *The Communist Manifesto*, one grasps the ideas of Marx and Engels clearly when they say, "The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms."⁵ In a later edition, Engels corrected this idea when he wrote that "all past society" should be the "history of society" since the evolution of the state. Engels wrote the book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which was the centerpiece of Marxian social thought for nearly thirty years.⁶ Lewis Henry Morgan had written *Ancient Society* (1877), influencing works by Engels and Marx.⁷ They saw in Morgan a corroboration of the materialist conception of history. Yet, *Ancient Society* was interested in causality as much as germ ideas and natural selection. The idea of trying to impute causality to original germ ideas demonstrates how Eurocentric writers have periodically been fascinated with an interest in essentialist theories, yet quite ironically it is the Eurocentrists who now try to demonstrate that Afrocentrists are essentialists. As African-American ancestors often said when the hounds of the slave owners were tracking those who ran away, "They are barking up the wrong tree." Engels never transcended the Morgan's limitations, and his book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, is now seen as flawed in its methodology. There was no attempt to provide an infrastructural explanation for the development of the clan lying at the heart of village and chiefdom social structure.⁸ The reason for this inability of dialectical materialism to deal with some of the issues outside of Europe is because the work falls in line with the entire narrative of European history, in which anything that is

precapitalist, non-European, and external to the capitalist system is literally outside of history.

The key contribution of dialectical materialism is its understanding and appreciation of the material conditions of society. To the degree that dialectical materialism establishes theoretical principles that undergird the primacy of material conditions, it is distinguished from Afrocentricity, which argues that the constant interplay of infrastructure and structure, the material conditions and matter, so to speak, is the proper way to understand society. It is like nature or the relationship between lovers.

Afrocentricity answers questions that are left open by dialectical materialism's fascination with the industrial realm in European development. In saying this, I am not saying that Afrocentricity is the opposite of dialectical materialism, as the dialectical materialists might say, but rather that Afrocentricity must not be seen as a counter to Eurocentricity. The idea behind Eurocentricity in its most vile form, whatever its theoretical manifestation, is that Europe is the standard and nothing exists in the same category anywhere. It is the valorization of Europe above all other cultures and societies that makes it such a racist system. There is nothing incorrect about European people wanting to have motifs, ideas, narratives, concepts that are derived from their history. That is to be expected, but what is not to be expected is the idea that Europe somehow has a right to hold a hegemonic banner over all other people. Afrocentricity does not seek African hegemony; it seeks pluralism without hierarchy. We will replay this discussion in a different light when I return to the dangers of avoiding structure or content in symbols, society, infrastructure, and text.

Structuralism

While dialectical materialists were having difficulties in maintaining the character of their work on a consistent basis, the French intellectuals under the guidance of Claude Lévi-Strauss were actually defining the most influential Western system of analysis, structuralism. Most of what we read in the social sciences in the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is influenced by structuralism, whether it is a support of it or a rejection of it. Structuralists are fundamentally antipositivist, ahistorical, and idealist. But like all theorists, each structuralist has a commentary to make on the type of structuralism practiced. For example, there are those who argue that they are not idealists because they accept the idea of infrastructure as primary in analysis. Idealism privileges ideas, denying the grounds for material bodies, and, in the extreme, having belief in nothing except percipient minds and ideas. Yet, Lévi-Strauss attempted to deal with superstructures that Marx ignored, namely, the psychological structure of sociocultural systems, seeing ethnology as psychology. Structuralism and ethnology impact Africans at the level of research itself. If you assume that there are certain molds that must fit some societies, hence, people, and other molds that must fit other people, you are likely to establish a hierarchy of molds. This is what the Eurocentric writers did in following Émile Durkheim's construct of society as a conscience collective, collective consciousness, or collective conscience (all meaning the same thing in French), defined as a set of exterior ideas that have a coercive force over individual thought. Durkheim may have given the classic essentialist position when he wrote, "The collective con-

Drumming in Harlem. Photo by Kristen Clarke.



sciousness is the highest form of the psychic life since it is the consciousness of the consciousness. Being placed outside of and above individual and local contingencies, it sees things only in their permanent and essential aspects, which it crystallizes into communicable ideas."⁹

Afrocentrists are interested in structuralism in some of its guises because it questions the collectivity of Europe as a creator of images and the motivations behind the actions that destroy, maim, and stifle human personality and community. But Afrocentricity is not structuralism; it is more than structuralism because, like dialectical materialism, structuralism fails to answer the questions or address the issues the Eurocentric ground creates for itself. For example, although I share structuralism's interest in developing a system that considers "superstructures," I have a problem with the inability of structuralists to self-analyze. This lack of self-analysis leads to a paralysis of interpretation, explanation, and meaning whenever the structuralists are confronted with white racial supremacy. It is more complicated when the ideas of white racial supremacy are inherent in the discussion of social confrontations among people who are presumably defining themselves as whites. The structuralists and almost all European theorists are at a loss for words when it comes to properly explaining white racial supremacy. Starting from this idea means that Africans are automatically thrown into the categorically other. Afrocentrists reject this notion and therefore understand that structuralism cannot handle the contradictions of white racial supremacy any more than the dialectical materialists or their relatives, the cultural materialists. They are blinded by a white racial ideology that is only a little more sophisticated than that of the sociobiologists.

Modernism and Postmodernism

Of all European narratives on society, postmodernism is the most difficult to define and locate, because of its continuing flux in art, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, and technology. Those who call themselves postmodernists know that Europe is in a period of deep social danger and they are searching for another venue for explanation and sense. The upheaval in social and political life—characterized by the Nazi Holocaust; the interminable hatreds of Ireland and the Balkans; and ethnic rivalries in numerous nations of Europe—appeared constant, and after the 1960s, European writers, mainly literary scholars, attempted to create a new response to the crisis of culture and identity. Even in the absence of a formal definition, it is possible to view postmodernism as a set of ideas about literary, artistic, and social life that emerged during the 1980s. Was it intended as a counter to the newly found voice of African agency with the emergence of Afrocentricity in the 1980s, or was it by chance that these two approaches to social phenomena arose to compete in the African arena?

Postmodernism emerges out of modernism's aesthetic sensibilities, and, in some ways, it may be seen as a reaction to twentieth-century ideas of European art forms. Modernism was a movement of the visual arts, drama, literature, and music that transcended the Victorian rules of what constituted art. There was a period of "high modernism" between 1910 and 1930, taking in the disintegrating period of the First Great European War (1914–1918). At this time, as Europe sought to redefine its own value systems on the battlefields, the writers Rilke, Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Proust, Mallarmé,

Woolf, and Kafka undertook a radical alteration in the way people viewed poetry and fiction. Europe's literary modernists must include these writers as among the founders of twentieth-century modernism. They held in their minds and put on their pages the seeds of postmodernism.

Among the leading characteristics of postmodernism are fragmentation, reflexivity, a rejection of high and low cultural forms, and an intense subjectivity that allows for self-consciousness in writing. In some senses, these were also the elements of modernism as seen in the stream-of-consciousness and highly subjective forms of modernist writers such as e. e. cummings and Rilke. The difference between modernism and postmodernism relies on ways of viewing the decentered, deconstructed, and destabilized state of our existence. Postmodernists would not rely on works of art to produce anything of value, certainly not a more stable or a better society. The modernist view was that art could bring stability, unity, and a degree of coherence to human society. A rejection of this view has enthroned postmodernism as the principal literary mode of the European experience at the dawn of the new millennium. Thus, the attack on grand narratives remains in full force and constitutes the major assault on the works of African scholars, poets, and novelists seeking to bring about a revolutionary change in society.

It is extremely important to appreciate the source of postmodernism's uncertainty, its

lack of place and fear of anything solid, certain, either as belief or as fact. I trace it back to the ghastly war fought in Europe in the late 1930s and 1940s, to the reconstruction of the German economy by the West, to the dispersal of European Jews to Israel, to the unsettling of the Roma, to the continuing drive of the Anglo-Germanic elements to define a separate identity from the rest of Europe, and to the inability of Europe to agree on a collective consciousness in the Durkheimian sense. What this meant was that the uncertainty of persons created alienation, unrest, insecurities, and a sense that stability was not only fleeting but useless. If people knew who you were, then they could bring danger to you, harm your family, resurrect some old crime, entangle you in a web of red tape and Kafkaesque bureaucracy, so why not be someone today and someone else tomorrow? The African writer Manthia Diawara, in his recent book, *In Search of Africa*, claims as much for himself. He is a Parisian, New Yorker, Guinean, or Malian, according to him, in a most postmodern expression.¹⁰ This is precisely the problem, as the Afrocentrist would see it. One can live in many places, but one's identity, basic personality structure, and all the elements that go into culture, whatever and whoever you are, remain with you regardless of your venue. Jews cannot escape their Jewishness by claiming that they are American citizens. They simply add a layer to their identity. They could be citizens of

The problem here is just as the African has found identity after 500 years of moving Africans off center, the West announces through postmodernists that there is no longer any warrant to discuss identity.

France, Britain, or Germany, but they remain Jews.

The problem here is just as the African has found identity after 500 years of moving Africans off center, the West announces through postmodernists that there is no longer any warrant to discuss identity. Afrocentricity rejects this as a false position, one that is intended to stunt the growth and development of African people while maintaining the dominance of Europeans as Europeans in a solid and stable place. The English are no more going to give up Englishness than the tiger is giving up tigerness. Suggesting the death of identity or the end of essentialism or the completion of the search for stability is nothing less than a betrayal of the oppressed.

Therefore, since we cannot find any intellectual support in the major avenues of European thought we must look closer to home, that is, to the traditions that have helped to make African thought what it is today. Thus, I sought to discover in the reading of several African authors their understanding of Africa, African culture, and linkages to Afrocentricity.

Linkages to Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity is a response to Europe only to the extent that it is a response to the conditions of African people at the hands of European oppression for 500 years; it is not a response to European intellectual theory and does not find its energy in any European system of thought. Critics sometimes speak of the Afrocentrist's use of European languages and the use of logical arguments as indications that the Afrocentrist is really incapable of abandoning European influences. But that suggestion itself is an attempt to place Europe at the center of all discourse. To discuss anything intellectually, critics would claim, is to participate in European discourse.

There are several responses to such a charge, but the important one, particularly as it

relates to language, is that the languages English and French are increasingly less English and French. In fact, English has been changed permanently by the black speakers of the language, and there are more non-English people speaking the language now than there are culturally English speakers of it, and the same holds true for French. English and French are truly contested languages. Beyond this fact, the Afrocentric discipline protects the Afrocentrist in the matter of language choice. This was one of the initial developments in Afrocentric theory, because I understood that the first liberation had to be language liberation. A considerable literature has grown up around this particular point and I will not repeat it here except to say that Afrocentrists are aware of this charge regarding language. You will never find an Afrocentrist using expressions such as "Black Africa," "African tribes," "primitive huts," "Africa, South of the Sahara," because of the discipline.

The statement about logical argument is less serious. Logic is not the exclusive purview of any people. Indeed, logical argumentation itself, as far as actual presentation of arguments is concerned, goes back to *Khun-anup's Defense Before the Judges* (often called by Europeans *The Eloquent Peasant*), which appeared more than a thousand years before Thales of Miletus, the first Greek philosopher. Using logic is a human activity, and to set one's arguments in a certain fashion is not following Europe but Africa, just as when Europeans use introductory greetings at the beginning of their speeches, they are following the patterns of the ancient Nile Valley Africans.

Three intellectual currents are directly linked to Afrocentricity: Négritude, Diopian historiography, and Kawaida. Although each influenced the early work in Afrocentric theory, the development of Afrocentricity itself must be seen as linked to each one differently. Afrocentricity shares with Négritude its



West African Youth. Photo by Antonio García.

promotion of African agency, though Négritude was unable to deliver African centeredness. Afrocentricity and Diopian historiography share the same epistemology, but Afrocentricity reaches much more broadly in its effort to shape the discourse around the African world. Afrocentricity and Kawaïda share the same epistemology but have emphasized different theoretical and philosophical methods. Kawaïda is much more concerned with ethical aspects of actions than Afrocentricity, which is more concerned with the structures that encourage moral decisions.

Négritude

The main proponents of Négritude were Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Jean Rabemananjara, and Léon Damas. The school of thought emerged in Paris in the 1930s and 1940s as a reaction to the totaliz-

ing idea of culture as presented by French scholars. The French, in the European fashion, considered Africa to be without culture, that is, without self-conscious art or an artistic tradition. As students in Paris, these young continental Africans, South Americans, and Caribbean Africans came together to defend their own historical tradition as legitimate and valid within the global context. They were the first line of resistance to the virulent racism of white supremacy in the area of art, particularly in poetry, drama, and literature. On the fringes of this movement, Cheikh Anta Diop, Alioune Diop, and Pathe Diagne operated as fellow travelers, encouraging the Négritudinists, writing historical essays, and creating spaces for writers to assemble and publish.

Senghor wrote "Négritude and Humanism" as one of the central essays in the definition of the movement. It was he who unfortunately

characterized the African as concerned with emotion and the European with reason. Widely misunderstood and badly interpreted, Senghor could never live down "*L'emotion nègre, la raison Hèllene*." Of course, Senghor knew, if anyone did, that all human beings shared emotion and reason, and he was simply trying to place an emphasis on the degree to which Africans and Europeans had distanced themselves from each other as one embraced and the other distanced life.

Césaire has grown over the years to be the greatest poet of the African race, as his work in *The Return to My Native Country* is known as the best poetry of the Négritude period. He is at once serious, playful, surreal, symbolic, and culturally sensitive to the various moods, directions, contours, and crevices of the African condition.¹¹ As a voice of Africa, Césaire remains, at least in his poetry, clairvoyant.

From Négritude, Afrocentricity learned that the constituents of resistance to oppression were action and agency, although Négritude itself did not give us the kind of agency that would be revealed in the work of the Afrocentrists. In fact, Afrocentricity was a much broader paradigm than Négritude, which depended on Africanity much more than Afrocentricity to wrest its place in the discourse of social change. Africanity is not Afrocentricity. One can have an appreciation of African cultural behavior, participate in it, and still not be Afrocentric. One is a state of being, the other, a state of consciousness. The value of one is that it is an existential state, but the other allows us to see what is possible even in the area of consciousness. Afrocentricity establishes a window on African culture but does not see the culture merely as a good photograph; it must be a moving picture that takes into consideration all of the ways African people express agency. It is not simply about poetry, or about blacks in poetry, or about beautiful black women in poems, but about a way of viewing the images that move

in and out of our sight as we carry out our lives.

Diopian Historiography

Cheikh Anta Diop, the late Senegalese scholar who wrote for the Négritudinists, went beyond their work with a new historiography of Africa. Indeed, Diop may be considered the most significant African scholar of the twentieth century because of his demolition of the European construction of ancient Africa.¹² He did it almost single-handedly, without African or European support when he initially started his research. In the end, he established conclusively that the ancient Egyptians were black-skinned Africans and that the origin of civilization must be traced to the Nile Valley. A school of historians calling themselves Nile Valley historians arose to lend support to his thesis. Among the principals in this discussion and debate were the African Egyptologists Theophile Obenga and Maulana Karenga. Obenga had been a protégé of Diop since the 1970s, and after Diop's death, Obenga continued his work in the United States, initially at Temple University, in the midst of the Afrocentrists, and then at San Francisco State University as professor of African American studies. At Temple University, the first graduate class in Ancient Egyptian Language and Culture was organized and taught by Obenga and myself. Karenga, a professor of black studies at California State University, Long Beach, organized the first conference around the Diopian methodology and founded the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization. In addition, he published several key books on ancient Egyptian civilization that gave direction to a new field of research, culminating in his second dissertation, a comprehensive study of Maat, the ancient Egyptian ethical system, written for the University of Southern California.

Although it is true that Afrocentricity borrows from Diopian historiography in the arena of historical epistemology and methodology, Afrocentricity is much more far-reaching than a discussion of history. As we used to say in the late 1960s, African American studies and history are two different disciplines. You cannot limit Afrocentricity to Diop's historiography any more than you can limit soccer to a ball and soccer shoes; these are necessary pieces of equipment, but one must have all the other elements—rules of play, field, and so on—to make the game. The Afrocentric idea engages all sciences, social sciences, family sciences, and arts and consequently must be viewed as an innovative paradigm in the discourse around African people. In the graduate class in Ancient Egyptian Language and Culture at Temple University, we were not simply reproducing Diop; he had already done his work. The scholarship of Miriam Maat Ka Re Monges, Troy Allen, Mohammed Garba, Cynthia Lehman, James Naazir Conyers, Katherine Bankole, and others actually followed in the line created by Diop but added Afrocentric dimensions that articulated the best methods and practices of the Afrocentrists.

Kawaida

Maulana Karenga, while in graduate school, proposed the theory of Kawaida as a corrective for what he observed were cultural problems in the African-American community.¹³ In Karenga's view, examples of alienation, degradation, dysfunctionality, self-hatred, and criminal activity were directly related to a misplaced consciousness. How to regain a sense of culture or to introduce a sense of national culture into a community that had abandoned its best ideals in the face of oppression and white racial supremacy was the challenge confronting Karenga. Contending that the cultural crisis was the main element

in the dysfunctionality of many in the African-American community, in the philosophy of Kawaida Karenga expressed an orientation toward corrective action that included the reconstruction of cultural values on the basis of African traditions. It was to be a reconstruction, in the sense that what Africans had lost in the 500 years of involvement in the West with European domination and racism had to be regained through conscious action, but it was also a rediscovery, in the sense that what was possible existed within the epic memory of the people themselves and only had to be appealed to in ways that the masses would respond to with action.

Kawaida was dependent on collective action. Karenga perceived the truth of the organic relationship of leadership to community and articulated a belief in the possibility of mass education resulting in mass revolution in the sense that people would do better if they knew better. The real revolution, he was fond of saying, had to be in the mind of the people or else no other revolution was possible. His appreciation of the role of the masses in all modification of society was a major contribution to the radical movement of humans from a condition of dependence to one of liberation.

The tenets of Kawaida were prescriptive; the concepts of Afrocentricity proved normative in terms of what was happening in the African-American community. Afrocentricity sought to use the Kawaidan critique of culture as a starting place for suggesting African agency in two radically different kinds of phenomena. In the first place, agency must be sought in all human behaviors influenced by the environment, large or small, in any given situation. This meant that the superstructure or infrastructure along with the structure or content had to be seen as loci for agency. What is the role of the African in such-and-such a story? How are we to examine the position of the African person during the Con-

stitutional debate in Philadelphia? Did the enslaved African have a choice in his or her enslavement? What role did Africans play in resistance against oppression? These are questions that get at the phenomena of the infrastructure and structure, but what of phenomena that are more mental? What about the thoughts and emotions we experience within our heads? What is to be done with the researcher's silent questions regarding phenomena that seem racist, white supremacist? To explain the mental processes of the African people in Brazil, Jamaica, Ghana, the United States, Britain, or any other nation means to have some idea of the symbols, myths, motifs, concepts that exist in those cultural realms. Even so, the explanation can only be partial since it is not possible to reproduce the behavioral processes or mental processes of any people with 100 percent certainty. We can only speak of plausible approximations. Yet, I know enough as an Afrocentrist to know that an African in Britain, say, would have different things going on in his or her head than an ordinary white English person during a discussion of racism in the workplace.

We Are Free at Last!

The escape from the Western hegemony is not easy, and just as we have announced our escape we recognize that the Fortress West is not going to let us leave the mental plantation without a struggle. Afrocentricity seeks to obliterate the mental, physical, cultural, and economic dislocation of African people by thrusting Africans as centered, healthy human beings in the context of African thought. Every conceivable concept, movement, institution, and office will be placed at the dis-

posal of those who would argue against the self-determination of African people. To be for one's self is not to be against others; this is the most authoritative lesson that can be learned from the Afrocentric school of thought. Only when there is an effective mass movement of Africans from the margins of Europe to the center of their own reality, in a self-conscious way, can there be a true revolution. This would, of course, mean the end of white world hegemony.

Notes

1. Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987; revised edition, 1999). See also Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2000; originally published 1980).

2. Marimba Ani, *Yurugu: An Africa-Centered Critique of European Thought and Behavior* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1996).

3. See Claude Alvares, *Decolonizing History: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West 1492 to the Present Day* (New York: Apex, 1979).

4. Marvin Harris, *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Altamira Press, 1998).

5. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in L. Feurer, ed., *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

6. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

7. Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1877).

8. Harris, p. 161.

9. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain (London: Allen and Unwin, 1915), p. 444.

10. Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

11. Aimé Césaire, *The Return to My Native Country* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1954).

12. See Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1976); also Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1990).

13. Maulana Karenga, *Kawaida* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1997).