

Africa and Afrocentric Historicism: A Critique

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Abstract

Since the dawn of slavery in America, black activists have used Africa to construct a countervailing frame of resistance to oppression. Africa had functioned both as the justification for enslavement and racial discrimination for the dominant white society, and as the counter-hegemonic weapon of resistance and empowerment for blacks. Reacting to subordination and marginalization, modern black intellectuals, borrowing from the past, have equally invoked Africa in their quest for a useable and instrumental historical past with which to counteract the Eurocentric constructions of their heritage and experiences. However, the resultant Afrocentric historicist framing of Africa, as well as its racialized and essentialist character, had only replicated precisely the negative shortcomings of the Eurocentric historiography and black intellectuals were attempting to debunk.

Keywords

Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism, Historiography, Diaspora, Mis-Education, Pan-Africanism

1. Introduction

The black experience in America, and indeed the black experience worldwide, has borne the burden of Western history: the history of negation. Blacks confronted a formidable and combative historical tradition that legitimized a worldview of negation. “The Dark Continent”, “Heathens”, and “Barbarians” were some of the racist epithets that “enlightened” Europeans mobilized to launch the imperial phase of “The White Man’s Burden”. This worldview denied peoples of African ancestry a credible space among civilized beings. It nullified African history and culture, and mandated Europeans to lead Africans and Diaspora blacks toward civilization, and historical and cultural rebirth (Blaut, 1993; Smedley, 1993; Lauren, 1988; Afikgbo, 1977; Uya, 1984). The negation of African history and culture to justify enslavement and white superiority nurtured in blacks what Samuel DuBois Cook characterized as a tragic historical consciousness (Cook, 1960). Paradoxically, an ideology meant

to develop a compliant, subordinate, docile and malleable personality induced in blacks, as well a self-deterministic resolve to seek succor in the very discipline (History) that legitimized their subordination. As several scholars have demonstrated from the late Earl Thorpe through John Ernest to the more recent work by Stephen Hall, the negation of African history and culture induced in blacks a determination to resist with the weapon of History (Thorpe, 1971; Wright, 2002; Ernest, 2004; Meier & Rudwick, 1986; Hall, 2009). Put differently, the denigration of African history unleashed a passion for historical studies. As Malcolm X once declared, “of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research” (Shabaaz, 1990: p. 75) (emphasis in original). This interest in History birthed the nucleus of a black intelligentsia in the nineteenth century. These “Pioneers in Protest”, as Earl Thorpe described them (James W. C. Pennington, William Wells Brown, Benjamin Brawley, William Cooper Nell, William Still, George Washington Williams, etc.), embarked on the study and research of history in order to combat the racism that permeated the intellectual culture of their times (Thorpe, 1971: pp. 33-61). They set the stage for future historians, such as William E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and members of the New Negro History Movement (NNHM) of the early twentieth century.

Thus, the historical calling of the black intellectual is rooted in the challenges and tribulations of the black experience. Long before the appearance of a professional class of black intellectuals, the challenges of historical racism compelled some blacks to seek historical knowledge. G. N. Grisham, a Professor and Principal of a High School in Kansas City, Missouri described as “one of the ablest educators and most practical philosophers in the country”, delivered a speech in December 1897, in which he stressed the importance of historical scholarship and urged the black scholar to “do something for his race” by helping to develop a revolutionary historical consciousness, and forging “the connection between his race and civilization” (Grisham, 1975: pp. 629-630). Grisham wanted black intellectuals to reclaim that link between Africa and civilization that leading European intellectuals had denied (Ibid: 632-633). Grisham’s motivation and vision were consistent with those of the early “Pioneers”. It would be left to future generations to theorize about black intellectual responsibility. The intellectual leadership, Du Bois characterized as the “Talented Tenth”, would have to undertake historical studies in order to destroy the legacies of what Woodson later characterized as “miseducation” (Du Bois, 1971: pp. 31-51). The preoccupation of black intellectuals with rewriting, revising and publicizing black history and culture became a critical repertoire of resistance. Generations of black intellectuals since the nineteenth century, therefore, have undertaken this struggle for historical legitimation (Hall, 2009; Ernest, 2004). Due to the historical circumstances, the writings of the “Pioneers” were driven more by advocacy and rehabilitation than respect for canons of historical scholarship. Most were activists drawn to History by the challenge of debunking entrenched historical fallacies (Ibid; Thorpe, 1971). By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, Du Bois and Woodson inaugurated a school of professional historians who combined advocacy with attention to a cardinal rule of historical scholarship—research derived from credible and verifiable historical sources (Hall, 2009; Meier & Rudwick, 1986). To be taken seriously, therefore, black intellectuals must not be driven solely by ideology and advocacy. They had to take their scholarly responsibilities seriously, and had to be validated by established canons of historical scholarship. Du Bois, Woodson, and the NNHM utilized their research and scholarship to gain legitimacy for Black History (Ibid). Black History became the foundation on which Black Studies thrived in the late 1960s. These intellectuals fought hard for intellectual respectability and later generations of black intellectuals would have to defend and preserve this standard in order to attract any modicum of credibility.

No one better understood the importance of intellectual credibility than the late John Hope Franklin, whose scholarship remains a lasting monument of intellectual excellence. As he once observed, “the dilemmas and problem of the Negro scholar are numerous and complex. He has been forced, first of all, to establish his claim to being a scholar and he had somehow to seek recognition in the general world of scholarship...this has not been an easy and simple task” (Franklin, 1963: p. 64). Furthermore, Franklin continued, “since American scholarship in general”, denied that “Negroes were capable of being scholars”, the black intellectual had to first “struggle against forces and personalities in American life that insisted that he could never rise in the intellectual sphere” (Franklin, 1963: p. 65). Earlier generations had struggled against these “forces and personalities” and won recognition for Black History and ultimately Black Studies. However, the attainment of intellectual recognition for Black Studies had the unintended consequence of ghettoizing of the black intellectual. Black intellectuals became, Franklin noted, “the victim of segregation in the field of scholarship” (Ibid: 68). Curiously, the struggle to validate the African historical tradition led to the depiction of the black intellectual as someone uniquely qualified and best suited to study and research black history and experiences. In other words, Franklin

suggested that blacks were deemed to possess “peculiar talents that fitted them to study themselves and their problems” (Ibid: 69). Franklin denounced this mindset. He called on black scholars to reject this “unfortunate development”, this ghettoizing, by focusing on the truths, and insisting that their writings be “sanctioned by universal standards developed and maintained by those who frequently do not even recognize him” (Ibid). In other words, Franklin cautioned against combating Eurocentrism with a black substitute that replicated negative, racist and anti-intellectual ethos. He acknowledged that “the task of remaining calm and objective is indeed a formidable one”, and that the black intellectual is always tempted to “pollute his scholarship with polemics, diatribes, arguments...” (Ibid: 73). Though Franklin understood the challenges of objectivity in the context of such overwhelming intellectual bigotry, he warned the black intellectual nonetheless against succumbing to the “attractive temptation” to fight intellectual racism with intellectual racism (Ibid). By succumbing to “the attractive temptation”, the black intellectual would, Franklin believed, “by one act destroy his effectiveness and disqualify himself as a true and worthy scholar” (Ibid). Franklin valued intellectual credibility. He urged black intellectuals to recognize the “difference between scholarship and advocacy”, and use scholarship “to correct the findings of pseudo scholars in other disciplines who used their writings to justify oppression of blacks” (Ibid: 74). Thus, the black scholar, in Franklin’s words, “Must rewrite the history of this country and correct the misrepresentations and falsifications in connection with the Negro’s role in our country” (Ibid). Though he acknowledged that there is “a place for advocacy” in scholarship, Franklin underlined the importance of developing a clear understanding of the distinction between advocacy and scholarship (Ibid: 74-76).

No school of black intellectuals has either failed or refused to distinguish between advocacy and scholarship and blatantly flouts every recognized and established canon of historical scholarship more than Afrocentrism. Building upon the historical tradition of black alienation and marginalization, Afrocentric scholars advocate jettisoning objectivity and scholarship, and prioritizing ideology and advocacy instead. While Franklin called for “recognizing the importance of the use of objective data in the passionate advocacy of the rectification of injustice”, Afrocentric scholars boldly dismiss objectivity and question its value in historical scholarship. Assuming the task of “rectifying injustice” with their “historical” writings, Afrocentric scholars struck hard at Eurocentric scholarship. Building on the nineteenth century “Afrocentric” ideas and themes in the writings of Martin Delany, Henry Garnet, and Henry McNeal Turner, among others, Afrocentric scholars such as Molefi Asante, Maulana Karenga, Na’im Akbar, Dona Marimba Richards (aka Marimba Ani), the late John Henrik Clarke, and Chancellor Williams developed Afrocentrism into a full-fledged and combative ideology of intellectual resistance.

2. Historical Roots and Antecedents

Afrocentric historicism developed as a medium of black protest against what was perceived as the universalistic, absolutist and fundamentalist claims of Western historiography in relation to the interpretation and determination of the place and role of Africa in history. Thus, it is rooted in the tradition of blacks’ quest for historical authenticity. Several nineteenth-century black intellectuals published to rescue African history from obscurity, and establish the antiquity of civilization in Africa. This group included Martin Delany, and the “Pioneers.” Collectively, they used evidence of African history and African cultural wealth to affirm both their humanity and citizenship, and gain recognition for Africa/Diaspora blacks as contributors to world history and civilization (Ernest, 2004; Quarles, 1988; Harris, 1982). Their writings bore the seeds of the future Afrocentric genre. For example, Delany was unequivocal on the African origins of ancient Egyptian civilization. As he quizzed rhetorically,

Who were the builders of the everlasting pyramids, catacombs, and sculptors of the sphinxes? Were they Europeans or Caucasians, Asiatic or Mongolians... Among what race of men, and what country of the globe, do we find traces of these singular productions, but the African and Africa? (Delany, 1868: p. 323)

His answer was emphatic, “None whatever. It is in Africa the pyramids, sphinxes, and catacombs are found; here the hieroglyphics still remain. Among the living Africans, traces of their beautiful philosophy and symbolic mythology still exist” (Ibid). Underlining the antiquity of civilization in Africa, Delany declared,

And is it not known to history that Egypt was the “cradle of the earliest civilization,” propagating the arts and sciences, when the Grecians were an uncivilized people, covering their persons with skins and clothing, anterior to the existence of the she-wolf (Ibid: 324).

Du Bois’ theory of the “Talented Tenth” underscored the critical role of the intellectual. As he explained it,

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then,

among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races (Du Bois, 1971: p. 31).

It should be acknowledged that Du Bois was not the first to highlight the importance of intellectual leadership. Grisham, identified earlier, aggressively challenged the prevailing Eurocentric historiography. However, long before both Du Bois and Grisham, the “Pioneers” had popularized this “protest” historiography. By the closing years of the nineteenth century, leading black intellectuals had come to associate black empowerment with rehabilitating and solidifying a historical heritage. G. N. Grisham implored black scholars to assume the challenge of developing a revolutionary historical epistemology, and vigorously defend blacks “against unjust criticism and wrong” (Grisham, 1975: p. 632). Grisham further called on the black intellectual “in his exalted personality,” to “furnish a standard for building aspiration, and his superior intelligence and keen foresight should offer guidance over the thousands of moral, social and political difficulties that throned the dark and devious pathway of the people” (Ibid). Though cognizant of the critical need for black intellectual leadership, Grisham was equally mindful of a challenge that John Hope Franklin would later underscore: the need for the black scholar to appeal beyond race. According to Grisham, “The Negro scholar must not confine himself to Negro questions. He must, in action, manifest the breadth of Terence. . . mankind, humanity” (Ibid). Thus, Grisham placed immense responsibility on the black intellectual. He called for an instrumentalist history; specifically designed for uplifting blacks and enhancing their self-esteem, and yet not limited by race. To generate this type of scholarship, black intellectuals had to turn to their own history and heritage in Africa.

The movement to use African history as a counter hegemonic discipline gained momentum in the early twentieth century. Two individuals helped advance this development: Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson. They strengthened a foundation upon which future generations, including Afrocentric scholars would flourish. Harvard trained historians, Du Bois and Woodson researched and published extensively to establish African history as a serious field of intellectual endeavor. They publicized the wealth of African culture and civilization, and the contributions of Africans and Diaspora blacks to civilization. They affirmed both the historical agency of Africans and Diaspora blacks, and established Black History as a serious intellectual discipline (Meier & Rudwick, 1986; Hall, 2009). Future generations such as John Hope Franklin, Benjamin Quarles, and Earl Thorpe expanded this tradition, and prepared grounds for the civil rights generation. Franklin’s own landmark study, *From Slavery to Freedom* (now in its 9th edition) mirrored the “progressive” and integrationist essence of this historiography; one defined by faith in the perfectibility of America (Franklin, 2010). This “progressive” genre, which was dominant in the 1940s and 1950s, soon came under scrutiny as disillusionment with the slow pace of change led to demands for a more combative historiography. Critics sought an instrumental and adversarial historiography that challenged America for failure to adhere to its democratic ideals. Advocates such as Vincent Harding and Sterling Stuckey favored jettisoning the “progressive” and integrationist tradition, preferring instead a combative anti-establishment black history. Harding faulted the “fathers” of Negro history for being overly optimistic about America and thereby diminished the excesses and tragedies of the history (Harding, 1970: pp. 269-292). In his own critique, Stuckey accused historians of the NNHM of failure to “condemn America for her crimes against black people,” and for being so blinded by optimism that they ignored the tragedies of black America (Stuckey, 1971: pp. 261-295). Both proposed a radical and ideologically driven black history, developed specifically for advancing the black struggle. This was the precursor to Afrocentric historiography.

The historicity and antiquity of civilization in Africa had been affirmed by the onset of the 1960s civil rights movement. Black history had won recognition. But the struggle was far from over. The next phase was the struggle for the institutionalization of Black Studies, and securing a critical space in American higher education for the teaching and dissemination of information about the African and Diaspora black historical and cultural experiences. The establishment of Black Studies, however, soon illuminated a sub-layer of the intellectual contest: the struggle for cultural and civilizational preeminence. Black Studies became, for some, not just a field for disseminating knowledge about the African and Diaspora black experiences, but also for reenacting old battles over history, culture, and civilization; the most fundamental of which was the battle to resolve the question of historical preeminence: Africa or Europe, which came first? Thus, there developed a strong connection between “Politics and Pedagogy” in the 1960s struggles. Black Power activists forcefully defended the historicity of Africa. As Daniel Perlstein contends, the “relationship of civil rights activists’ pedagogical ideas to their political analysis is particularly evident in the history of the SNCC and the Black Panther Party”. Activists such as

Stokely Carmichael, James Foreman, and H. Rap Brown emphasized simultaneously “fostering of personal and social transformation” and infused both the Black Panther Party and SNCC (Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) with pedagogical concerns. This was reflected in the considerable attention given to the creation of alternative Afrocentric “Freedom Schools” for black children. The goal was to use this education to develop a counter-hegemonic and self-deterministic consciousness (Perlstein, 2005: p. 35; Rojas, 2007; Rooks, 2006). The conception of America as irredeemably racist reinforced this faith in segregated education, and as Haroon Kharrem and Eileen Hayes (1990) corroborate, “The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the resurgence in black nationalist thought in education in the form of Black Independent Schools, and a push toward an Afrocentric curriculum” (Perlstein, 2005: p. 81). Afrocentric scholars took on this struggle with a crusading zeal. By the late 1970s, Afrocentrism had emerged as a forceful ideological and philosophical Black Studies/Struggle paradigm.

3. Afrocentrism

The Afrocentric perspective is premised on centering Africa as the foundation of black Diaspora epistemology. It developed largely in reaction to what was perceived as a critical need for a forceful ideological response to Eurocentric historiography. Asante identifies Eurocentrism as a major threat to blacks in America. He asserts that this threat had existed since the dawn of history, and remains intractable despite the efforts and accomplishments of earlier generations (Asante, 1990). In his view, Eurocentrism has destroyed African culture; de-Africanized the consciousness of blacks, and arrested their economic and cultural developments. It represents a potent threat to the cultural, social, economic and political development of blacks. To combat this, Asante and his ideological cohorts propose Afrocentrism, which he defines as “a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person... (and which) seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person” (Asante, 1991: p. 171). The Afrocentric solution, therefore, entails strengthening black American knowledge and awareness of African historical and cultural heritage and making Africa the foundation of knowledge. This knowledge became the defensive weapon against a pervasive and domineering Eurocentric worldview (Asante, 1993a).

Although a twentieth century terminology, the fundamental tenets of Afrocentrism, as noted above, surfaced much earlier. By the second half of the twentieth century, however, Afrocentrism had become more structured and ideological. Leading Afrocentric scholars vigorously rejected Eurocentric constructions of knowledge, and what they perceived as the universalistic pretensions of western epistemology. Advocates such as Asante, Karenga, John Henrik Clarke, etc, began to publish “Afrocentric” texts in defense and validation of African/Black Diaspora history and culture. This combative ideological response became even more pronounced in the 1980s in reaction to Ronald Reagan’s counter-civil rights policies. The more blacks felt marginalized by, and alienated from, the Reagan presidency, the closer they were drawn to Africa. Assuming and publicly proclaiming the African identity became a means of existential validation, and a counter-hegemonic resistance to an oppressive and seemingly racist establishment. Paradoxically, Reagan’s policies bolstered the utilitarian appeal of Africa as a viable, albeit symbolic emblem of resistance to what blacks perceived as the anti-African, anti-black character of national policies. It is worth recalling that it was precisely in the mid-1980s, during the Reagan Presidency, that leading Black Americans officially and publicly adopted “African-American” as preferred identity.

Against the negativism and objectifications of Eurocentric historiography, Afrocentric scholars counterpoise Africans as historical actors; and Africa as the basis of self-definition and identity for Diaspora blacks (Asante, 1987, 1988; Keto, 1995). Premised on a Manichean conception of reality, Afrocentrism offers re-Africanization as the only viable weapon of resistance, survival, and eventual triumph for Diaspora blacks. As Asante explains it, “We are seriously in battle for the future of our culture; Afrocentric vigilance is demanded to preserve our culture” (Asante, 1988: p. 49). To “Africans who have lived amidst Europeans on the land of the ancestors of the Native Americans,” and have been in consequence exploited materially and psychologically, and whose historical heritage has been misrepresented and maligned, Asante offers strong grounding or centering in African history as the strategy for liberation (Asante, 1993a: p. 18). Re-establishing connections with Africa became an essential step toward empowerment (Ibid: 48). Affirming the universality of the African worldview is a critical component of this paradigm. Na’im Akbar, a black psychologist advances African cosmology as the foundation for developing Social Science pedagogy for human liberation. Such attributes of African cosmology as emotionalism, communalism, irrationality, and the unity of body and spirit would, according to Akbar, infuse education with a humane and moral imperative. When made the foundation of scholarship, the African worldview would,

he suggests, obliterate the negative attributes (competition, materialism, greed, violence, aggression, etc) of western cosmology; attributes that sustained slavery and now racism (Akbar, 1984).

Africa offers blacks a rich antiquity of history, culture and civilizations, the very basis of identity, and a rallying point for group/corporate initiatives against Eurocentric threats (Asante, 1987, 1988, 1990). Since the negation of African civilization and culture justified the subordination of blacks, Afrocentric scholars vigorously challenge those negative portraits and images in order to affirm, albeit philosophically and psychologically, a counter-hegemonic African identity and homeland. Reversing centuries-old misrepresentations of African/Diaspora Black history and culture became critical to enhancing self-esteem. Convinced that blacks would never be fully integrated in America, Afrocentric “historians” represent *black* and *American* as contradictory and antagonistic. They portray America as an arena of conflict between two irreconcilable worldviews, locked in a contest for superiority. Afrocentric historiography, therefore, focuses on challenging Europe’s claim to pre-eminence in history, civilization, morality and culture. Afrocentric scholars seek to resolve this battle over history and civilization with a declaration of Africa’s superiority (Lefkowitz, 1996; Howe, 1998; Walker, 2001; Shavit, 2001). They advance what Yaacov Shavit characterizes as an Afrocentric universal history that positions Africa at the apex of global historical development (Shavit, 2001: Chap. 1). They then couple this history with a monolithic construction of identity for all blacks, thus de-historicizing almost four centuries of New World acculturation (Walker, 2001; Howe, 1998; Shavit, 2001).

Asante believes that to undo the psychological damage of Eurocentric miseducation, black education must be grounded in a philosophy that affirms blacks as “active historical agents”. This requires vigorously contesting European superiority, and offering blacks an ennobling, albeit exaggerated and mythologized, version of history (Asante, 1987, 1988, 1990). Like their nineteenth century predecessors, modern Afrocentric scholars reject the nullification of African history and civilization. They address two key challenges. First, reconstructing, and establishing a credible homeland and history; second, affirming a countervailing monolithic African identity for all blacks. This identity, as the late black psychologist Amos Wilson acknowledged, is essentially and functionally a protest identity. To be “Afrikan,” he suggested, is inherently anti-hegemonic (Wilson, 1993: pp. 40-41).

The writings of the late Senegalese scholar, Cheikh Anta Diop, constitute the ideological bedrock of the Afrocentric genre. Perhaps his most notable contribution is rejection of the Hamitic interpretation of ancient Egyptian origins, and affirmation instead of its Negroid origins and character. However, Diop went beyond reclaiming ancient Egypt for Africa to declaring its influence on classical Greece. In his view, Africans and Diaspora blacks needed ancient Egypt to serve the same purpose that the classical Greco-Roman civilization served Europeans. According to Diop, “For us the return to Egypt in all fields is a necessary condition to reconcile African civilization with history, to be able to build a body of human sciences and to renew African culture...a look toward ancient Egypt is the best way of conceiving and building our cultural future” (Diop, 1974, 2003: p. 3, 1984, 1981). Agreeing with Diop, Asante writes, “Afrocentrism reestablishes the centrality of the ancient Kemet (Egyptian) civilization and the Nile Valley cultural complex as points of reference for an African perspective in much the same way as Greece and Rome serve as reference points for the Western world” (Asante, 1987: p. 9). Asante portrays ancient Egyptian civilization as both the foundation of Africa’s classical civilization and the progenitor of European civilization. By focusing on ancient Egypt, blacks, Amos Wilson argued, “are trying to take back what European historiography has stolen, completely falsified, to erase the new false identities it placed on the Afrikan Egyptian people” (Wilson, 1993: p. 25).

Afrocentric scholars prioritize three objectives: establishing the antiquity of history and civilization in Africa; affirming the influence of Egyptian civilization on ancient Greece, and by extension, Africa’s superiority over European civilization; and finally proclaiming the universality of the African worldview. Consequently, they substitute Afrocentric diffusionist theory for the Eurocentric, proclaiming Africa the epicenter of world civilization. Most telling, Afrocentric scholars represent ancient Egypt as the birthplace of Science, Philosophy, and Mathematics; the place Greek scholars went to study, before returning to shape Western civilization (Ibid: 38: Chap. 4-5; Bernal, 1987, 1991, 2001). Thus, the Greeks, acclaimed progenitors of Western civilization, were tutored by, and borrowed copiously from, ancient Egyptians (Africans) (Howe, 1998; Shavit, 2001; Walker, 2001). This is the basis for what Shavit describes as Afrocentric “Greek dependency theory.” The logic of this theory is simple and simplistic: If ancient Greece is the fountain of Western culture, and if it could be proven that Greek culture was heavily influenced by Egypt, it seemed reasonable then to depict western civilization as a product of non-whites (Africans) (Shavit, 2001: Chap. 3). The recognition of Greek Science and Philosophy sans acknowledgment of Egyptian influence compelled Afrocentric scholars to invoke the “Stolen Legacy” theory. They cha-

racterize Western civilization as the product of “stolen” ancient Egyptian and African legacies. They identify the Alexandrian conquest of Egypt as epochal in this theft and pillage. Greek scholars allegedly accompanied Alexander on his rampage through Egypt, and pilfered the ancient libraries and treasures of the Egyptian temples (Shavit, 2001: Chap. 6-7; Lefkowitz, 1994: pp. 27-31). This theory is discussed in detail in George G. M. James’s (1954) *Stolen Legacy*, a book that has become a standard text of the Afrocentric genre. The underlying purpose of the *Stolen Legacy*, as the author contended is “an attempt to show that the true authors of Greek philosophy were not the Greeks; but the people of North Africa, commonly called the Egyptians...” (Walker, 2001: pp. xix-xx; James, 2009). In other words, Afrocentric historicism constitutes a fundamentalist and absolutist discourse that repositioned Africa on the “universalist” edifice from which Afrocentric scholars had dislodged Europe.

Developing and establishing affinity with a heritage of grandeur and opulence became an obsessive preoccupation of Afrocentric “historians.” This called for embellishing and at times willfully misrepresenting African historical and cultural realities. This was also accompanied by a reluctance or refusal to acknowledge and engage historical *change*. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois described black Americans as peoples of dual identities who are constantly battling with, and in fact tormented by, the conflicting demands of the duality (African/American). This conflict and torment notwithstanding, Du Bois warned against privileging either of the identities (Du Bois, 1903: pp. 3-4). Some critics characterize the duality paradigm as an accurate and perceptive representation of the complexity of the black American experience (Adeleke, 2002). Afrocentric scholars, however, disagree. Anxious to deny any lasting European influence on blacks, they contest the duality, proclaiming instead the permanence and immutability of the African identity. Asante, for example, insists he was never afflicted by double consciousness. Deemphasizing the duality, Asante affirms, “I was never affected by the Du Boisean double-consciousness. I never felt “two warring souls in one dark body” nor did I experience a conflict over my identity” (Asante, 1993b: pp. 127-143). The true Afrocentrist, therefore, according to Asante, retains his/ her *Africanness* intact. According to W. D. Wright, Asante accepts “only an African parentage for blacks in America”, while completely blacking out the Euro-American parentage (Wright, 1997: p. 39). As Yaacov Shavit underscores, a major problem of Afrocentric historiography is the attempt to split the duality of the black American, to magnify one dimension of identity (African) and deny the other (American) (Shavit, 2001: Chap. 1-2). Such de-historicizing enables Afrocentric scholars to construct a monolithic identity for Diaspora blacks, regardless of location, ignoring the multiple, complex, and complicated historical and cultural experiences.

Afrocentric exaltation of ancient Egypt represents the continuation of a tradition characteristic of nineteenth-century Black Nationalism. Afrocentric ethnocentric construction of Black Nationalism has provoked the most criticisms. To enhance black self-esteem, Afrocentric scholars advance a monolithic construction of black Diaspora identity, and a romanticized view of the African past (Justice, 2005; Williams, 1976, 1993; Asante, 2007). They portray pre-colonial Africa as a period of harmony characterized by cultural and civilizational achievements. They depict Africa as a continent inhabited by people who are morally and ethically superior to Europeans. In his scathing criticism of Afrocentrism, Shavit rightly notes that Afrocentrists use, “strategies of cultural self-affirmation to offset a sense of collective inferiority by boosting national self-esteem or express a sense of collective superiority” (Shavit, 2001: p. 3). But the Afrocentric ideology was not meant purely for enhancing black self-esteem. It also targeted white cultural arrogance. Paradoxically, despite its anti-Eurocentric and anti-hegemonic character, Afrocentrism soon developed its own hegemonic, and some would argue, racist tendencies: the claim of Africa’s preeminence and superiority in History and Civilization. One such grandiose “theory” was Leonard Jeffries’ curious dichotomy between the so-called superior “Sun people” (Africans), and inferior “Ice people” (Europeans)! (Berger, 1990; Schlesinger Jr., 1998: p. 73). Thankfully, this embarrassing “theory” has crawled quietly into obscurity.

As Shavit contends, the quest for validation in antiquity is a driving force of Afrocentric historiography. Afrocentric scholars desperately seek to establish originality and distinctiveness in antiquity; a preoccupation undoubtedly driven by Eurocentric denial of African antiquity. Shavit describes this search for authenticity in antiquity as “an important tool in a vanquished nation’s struggle for pride, dignity and status” (Shavit, 2001: p. 23). Ancient Egypt enables Afrocentric scholars to establish both the genesis and evolution of civilization and culture in Africa and authenticity in antiquity. But Egypt also serves another function, that of constructing what Shavit terms a grand scale universal history. Afrocentric scholars use Egypt to affirm the authenticity of African culture both “among black and non-black people around the globe” (Ibid: 29). They researched ancient Egypt “in the hope of finding within it the origins of a black centered philosophy, a foundation for group unity and

identity, a source of resistance to alien domination, and a basis for independence and creativity” (Ibid: 38, Chaps. 4-5).

Clarence Walker attributes the Afrocentric proclamation of ancient Egypt as the primal site of world civilization to a problematic conflation of two concepts—*life* and *civilization*. The claim that *life* began in Africa is often mistaken for another—that *civilization* began in Africa. The truth of the former, Walker suggests, did not necessarily establish the latter. He offers the possibility that civilization could have had multiple origins (Walker, 2001: pp. 40-41). Walker seriously questions the Negroid construction of ancient Egyptian civilization, accusing Afrocentric scholars of reading too much of racial essentialism into ancient Egypt. He proposes a much more complex origin of ancient Egyptian civilization, one that includes Mediterranean and Asia Minor influences (Ibid: 44). He accuses Afrocentrists of “a selective reading Egyptian cultural production as biological,” and applying modern racial categories to a context (ancient Egypt) that did not recognize those categories (Ibid: 46-50).

4. Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism and Identity

Afrocentric scholars also forcefully defend the Pan-African and Identity paradigms. According to Asante, Africans and Diaspora blacks share a “collective consciousness” not impacted by centuries of separation (Asante, 1988: Chap. 2). Underlining this global unifying identity, he declares,

We have one African Cultural System manifested in diversities... We respond to the same rhythms of the universe, the same cosmological sensibilities, the same general historical reality as the African descended people... All African people participate in the African Cultural System (Ibid: 2).

Invoking Maulana Karenga, Asante asserts, “Our Africanity is our ultimate reality” (Ibid: 43). Furthermore, he envisions a “Pan-African” world based on African cultural retentions (Africanisms) among black Americans, and rejects any notion of *difference* between continental Africans and blacks in America. As he reasons, “There are some people around who argue that Africans and African-Americans have nothing in common but the color of their skin. This is not merely an error, it is nonsense” (Ibid: 67). Asante proclaims a single “African Cultural System” to which all blacks, regardless of location, respond. In his words, “There exists an emotional, cultural, psychological connection... that spans the ocean” (Ibid).

In the opinion of W. D. Wright, the Afrocentric “Pan-African” construction of identity establishes no boundaries separating continental Africa and the black Diaspora. It is one global world (Wright, 2007: p. 106). Afrocentric scholars justify this “Pan-African” conflation of continental Africa and the black Diaspora on the basis of shared history and culture. As a result, both supposedly confront similar problems and challenges: economic marginalization, political domination, and cultural alienation in the United States; political instability, poverty, and neo-colonialism in Africa; challenges directly or indirectly linked to Eurocentrism. Afrocentric scholars presume the antiquity of Pan-Africanism, which they represent as a movement and, the embodiment of deep rooted and unifying consciousness derived from shared historical and cultural experiences and challenges. They theorize that black Americans and Africans have always been drawn together by common interests, and have historically cooperated in furtherance of those interests. Asante’s numerous publications, especially those written since the 1980s, testify to the depth and strength of his faith in Pan-African identity and unity (Asante, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1999). The identity paradigm unequivocally declares black Americans “Africans” premised on residues of African traditions and values (or what some scholars call “Africanisms”) found among blacks in Diaspora. These cultural retention or survivals confirm the African essence of Diaspora blacks; ethnically and culturally, despite centuries of exposure to, and acculturation in, Western/European values and civilization (Holloway, 2005; Richards, 1980; Asante, 1988).

Marimba Ani is a leading advocate of the African identity paradigm. She represents black Americans and blacks in the Caribbean and South America as Africans based on vestiges of indigenous African traditions in their music, religion, and lifestyles. She argues that Africans and blacks in Diaspora share the three essential elements of identity—spirituality, ethos and worldview (Richards, 1980). In her judgment, these unifying and immutable African elements underscore shared identity. As she explains:

Africa survives in our spiritual make-up; that it is the strength and depth of African spirituality and humanism that has allowed for the survival of African-Americans as a distinctive cultural entity in New Europe;

that it is our spirituality and vitality that defines our response to European culture; and that that response is universally African (Ibid: 1).

The African identity paradigm contradicts the Du Boisean duality. While acknowledging the American experience, Afrocentric scholars seek to delegitimize its identitarian significance. In their judgment, American blacks are Africans, period. Black Americans supposedly came out of slavery and the American experience with their African identity intact. The identity and Pan-African paradigms are historically flawed. The portrayal of black Americans and Africans as one people unified by cultural attributes and historical experience is both theoretically and practically problematic. Regardless of the degree and depth of African cultural retentions, black Americans are undeniably products of the American historical experience; an experience that profoundly and indelibly altered their identity.

Furthermore, the black experience in the Diaspora is culturally transforming and revolutionary. It is difficult to superimpose a “Pan-African” identity on this complex historical reality. It should be noted that not all black Americans embrace the Afrocentric bandwagon. Some critics object to the location of identity exterior to America. For example, Slavocentrists define black American identity exclusively within the American context. Deemphasizing, and at times rejecting Africa, they identify *Slavery* as the substantive identitarian element. In their judgment, slavery was far more profound and consequential than the fact of African ancestry. A modern amplification is found in Keith Richburg’s provocative book, *Out of America...* (1996). Former *Washington Post* Africa Bureau Chief, Richburg rejected “Mother Africa,” and thanked God profusely that his ancestors “got out.” On identity, he wrote, “Thank God that I am an American” (Richburg, 1996: p. xiv). Reflecting on his stay in Africa, Richburg was emphatic; “I know now that I am a stranger here. I am an American, a black American, and I feel no connection to this strange and violent place” (Ibid: 227). Richburg loathed the concept “African-American,” preferring “Black America,” which he insisted more accurately reflected the reality. He doubted if there was “anything really ‘African’ left in the descendants of those slaves who made that torturous journey across the Atlantic” (Ibid: 227-228). “African-American” in his words, “never existed in the first place” (Ibid: 237). Underlining his Slavocentric identity, Richburg declared, “Condemning slavery should not inhibit us from recognizing mankind’s ability to make something good arise often in the aftermath of the most horrible evil” (Ibid: xiii).

Richburg is not alone in contesting the continuing relevance of the African heritage. Despite the problematic character of race, some blacks continue to prefer a racial construction of identity. For example, in a study advocating “a New Philosophy of Black Identity” Michael Eric Owens also rejects “African American” and advances race as the central element of his “new philosophy” of black identity. As he argues,

Regardless of how poetic African-American sounds to our ears, it tells us nothing about “who we are and how we fit in American society”... **Black America** is our title. It alone speaks of our contributions and commitment to the American experience, not the African experience... The name “African-American”, tells us absolutely nothing about who we are or what we shall become (emphasis added) (Owens, 2009: p. 128).

The racial underpinning of Afrocentrism is perhaps its most provocative character. Economist Glenn Loury, for instance, is opposed to what he terms, “invented ethnicity.” In his view, “a personal identity wholly dependent on racial contingency falls tragically short of its potential because it embraces too parochial a conception of what is possible, and what is desirable” (Loury, 1993: pp. 1-12). Insisting that blacks are only “partially” descended from Africa, cultural critic Stanley Crouch urges blacks to construct their identity within a much broader framework. He believes that “Euro-American ancestry, far more than anything from Africa itself, also fuels the combination of ethnic nationalism and evangelical liberation politics domestic Negroes bring to high-pitched rhetoric over the issue of Nelson Mandela and his struggle” (Crouch, 1993: pp. 80-94; Crouch, 1995: pp. 45-57). The above suggests a strong opposition to prioritizing the African connection among black Americans. It also underscores a potent crisis of identity among black Americans and negates Afrocentric homogenizing of black identity. Richburg and Owens represent one extreme. Most critiques of the Afrocentric and Pan-African paradigms do not jettison the African background. While they acknowledge the historicity of Africa, they are opposed to romanticizing the history. It is noteworthy that even among Afrocentric or “Africancentric” scholars there is now a growing objection to a monolithic African identity. Denouncing what he terms, Asante’s “100 percent African parentage,” W. D. Wright, a self-proclaimed “Africancentric” scholar criticizes Asante for “ignoring, or down-playing... and even suppressing... historical, cultural and social reality” (Wright, 1997: pp. 38-

39).

5. Afrocentrism and Globalization

Globalization and the attendant shrinkage of spatial distance have given rise to optimism about the prospects for greater human interdependence and interactions. Enthusiasts predict the imminence of global “cultural citizenship” as globalization erodes national, ethnic, racial or other primordial constructions of identity (Cohen, 1997; Adeleke, 2010). The notion of global “cultural citizenship” suggests the possibility of transcending the limitations of national, racial or ethnic constructions of identity. It also implies the capacity to engage multiple cultural experiences without being boxed in, or restrained, by one’s *original* identity. As Robin Cohen further argues, “the scope for multiple affiliations and associations that has been opened up outside and beyond the nation-state has also allowed a diasporic allegiance to become both more open and more acceptable” (Cohen, 1997: pp. 157-159). There is a widespread belief that the world is becoming one “global village”, and that technology is breaking down cultural barriers. Consequently, increased interactions inexorably lead to the realization that *engagements, contacts, interactions, mutuality* and *shared experiences* rather than *differences*, define the human experience. Afrocentric scholars, however, deem this broadening of the human experience pregnant with hegemonic implication that could perpetuate a global system of unequal relationships. They discern the threat of a “colonial situation” within this global framework, which would facilitate European and super-power dominance over, and threat to the survival of, weaker nations and peoples. Afrocentric scholars magnify this image of a supra-European hegemonic and destructive cultural force. To highlight the magnitude of this threat and mobilize blacks, Afrocentric scholars advance a monolithic and hegemonic portrait of European culture. According to this perspective, Europeans are uniformly and insatiably driven by an unrepentant and arrogant culture of imperial greed. Europeans have used, and would continue to use, culture as a weapon of domination. They have objectified and denigrated Africans and successfully constructed a hegemonic world order in the past, and nothing in the new global horizon suggests a different outcome. To Afrocentrists, therefore, Europe’s cultural threat to blacks is perpetual and absolute.

Afrocentric scholars are deeply suspicious of any global cosmopolitan construction of identity (cultural citizenship). They deem the global context an extension of the hegemonic domestic American reality. Thus, the cultural implications of globalization add urgency and poignancy to the Afrocentric notion of cultural threat, since culture is perceived as a critical front in the war against Eurocentric hegemony. Asante’s cultural paranoia is worth recalling: “We are seriously in battle for the future of our culture. Afrocentric vigilance is demanded to preserve our culture” (Asante, 1988: p. 49). The cultural agenda of Afrocentrism, therefore, is to socialize blacks to recognize the dangers of white American and European cultural values, and regard any notion of inter-cultural dialogue with deep suspicion, while privileging African culture as the essential basis of identity. Afrocentric scholars counterpoise a racialized ideology for black survival against what they characterize as a new global order in which Europeans are unified and uniformly driven by hegemonic ambitions. In their judgment, therefore, globalization has rendered blacks more susceptible to western and European hegemonic interests. Strengthening and expanding, rather than shrinking, the global color line becomes an existential imperative. Afrocentric scholars advance race as the most effective construct and framework for a global unifying identity for Africans and Diaspora blacks. They portray globalization as fundamentally a disguised European hegemonic force, a post-modern metamorphosis of nineteenth century imperialism. In their perception, this new global imperialism has shed the blatantly racist arrogance, and ideological and militaristic characters of the past, and is now cleverly disguised as an internationalist, worldwide phenomenon that supposedly would benefit all of humankind.

Leading Afrocentric scholars, including the late Chancellor Williams and John Henrik Clarke laid the groundwork for the cultural construction of a racialized Manichean global order. In his critically acclaimed study of how the West “destroyed Black Civilization,” Williams advocated the creation of a “race organization,” which he described as “a nation-wide organization of Blacks only” (Williams, 1976: p. 362). He called on blacks to begin “building step by step, a race organization so great that it will not only be the voice of a united people but will carry on effectively an economic program to assist them advance on all fronts” (Ibid: 381). Arguably the most robust philosophical defense of this genre, Asante’s Afrocentric paradigm embodies the separatist vision in William’s “organization”. As he pontificates,

Eurocentrism in its most extreme form has generated an entire cacophony of voices that have been arrayed against the best interests of international cooperation and mutuality. It has generated a view toward the

world of domination, hegemony, and control. Every aspect of the gross Eurocentrism seems articulated toward this end, ultimately the subverting of international relationships. Thus, slavery, apartheid, Nazism, segregation, imperialism, intellectual arrogance, racial murders, and military and technological domination have been expressions of Eurocentrism (Asante, 1999: p. vii).

As already established, Asante firmly situates the black experience upon African cosmological foundation. This mandates cultural vigilance and unity against an ever-threatening Eurocentric force. Based essentially on race and ethnicity, such unity, Asante contends, was critical to black survival and triumph in a world order still dominated by Europeans (Ibid, 1987, also, Asante, 1988, 1999).

In his own study, Haki Madhubuti underlines the ever-present threat of “white world supremacy” and the need for blacks to strive toward “total separation”. He defines this “white world Supremacy” as “the supremacy of whites worldwide *finally* and *undiluted*” (Madhubuti, 1978: p. 187). Madhubuti enjoins blacks to limit contacts with whites in a social and cultural context and presented a litany of reasons. Primarily, he argues, whites have proven themselves to “be traditionally and historically enemies of black people” (Ibid: 186). Looking toward the future, he advocates organizing and preparing “for a future not dependent on the concepts and visions of others who do not have our best interests in mind” (Ibid: 190).

Perhaps no other Afrocentric scholar has defended the paradigm and condemned the global hegemonic character of Eurocentrism as fervently and scathingly as Marimba Ani whose seminal publication *Yurugu* (1996), is a devastating critique of the hegemonic character of Eurocentric history and culture (Ani, 1994). She is also one of the most forceful defenders of the absolutist construction of African identity for Diaspora blacks. Her study of identity deemphasizes the impact of New World transplantation and acculturation on black culture and identity. In her analysis, blacks retain their African essence and identity, centuries of transplantation in the new world notwithstanding (Richards, 1980). In *Yurugu* she reaffirms a cardinal Afrocentric conviction: the inherent and absolute hegemonic character of Eurocentric culture. She calls for the “de-Europeanizing” of culture. This would render culture much more relevant to the political needs of blacks. Her book underlines the urgency of racial and cultural vigilance in a global context in which, she contends, blacks remain threatened by Eurocentric values and cultural contacts (Ani, 1994).

More than any other Afrocentric scholar, Ani highlights the global, or what she calls the international character of the Eurocentric threat. In a rather tragic misrepresentation of European culture as monolithic, Ani discerns a unified and homogeneous European world order. She argues that Europeans are driven by the urge to dominate, and in furtherance of which they fraudulently invoke “universalism” and “internationalism” as weapons for expansion into, and domination of, other societies. She warns blacks against embracing “internationalism” of any kind, particularly one spearheaded by and involving Europeans. Since European culture is, in her view, monolithic, inherently expansionistic and hegemonic, she counterpoises black cultural unity and vigilance (Ani, 1994: pp. 528-570). In her analysis, two culturally monolithic worlds confront, and have always confronted, each other: Afrocentric and Eurocentric, both inherently and diametrically opposed. “Europe,” she writes, “is a culturally homogeneous” entity and thus threatening to blacks (Ibid: 4). She wants to dispel any illusions of cultural harmony. Culture, she insists, is ideological, political and hegemonic. Furthermore, she argues, European culture is also “extremely cohesive and well-integrated” with a deceptive veneer of heterogeneity (Ibid). Ani depicts the world order as an arena of perpetual cultural antagonism and conflict. Black survival is conceivable only in the context of perpetual opposition to, and vigilance against, and not in association with, Eurocentric values and influences. Asante echoes similar conviction. He draws a simplistic portrait of Europeans, and describes Eurocentrism as a force for global “domination, hegemony, and control. Every aspect of the gross Eurocentrism seems articulated toward this end, ultimately the subverting of international relations” (Asante, 1999: p. vii). Although he acknowledges that, “all people of Europe are not racists and imperialists,” Asante however insists that, “it is very difficult for Europeans to escape the conditions of their historical realities” (Ibid). Given this construction of Europe, Asante concludes, “Europe is dangerous; it is five hundred years of danger for Africans” (Ibid: 7).

Afrocentric scholars, therefore, remain indomitably opposed to a “global context;” in which, as H. V. Perlmutter suggests, “Multiple cultures are being syncretized in a complex way. The elements of particular cultures can be drawn from a global array, but they will mix and match differently in each setting” (Cohen, 1997: p. 174). Afrocentrists are concerned that the “mixing” and “matching,” could potentially destroy black cultural originality. The call for cultural vigilance and unity, and the projection of a monolithic African cultural world and identity represent a response to the cultural implications of globalization. Culture has become an arena of irreconcil-

able conflict and antagonism between blacks and whites. Consequently, Afrocentric scholars urge blacks to maintain a respectable distance from, and vigilance against, white cultural contacts. They understand “Cultural citizenship,” to mean distinct antagonistic cultural zones with no grounds for discourses and exchanges. Instead of cultural understanding, Afrocentrism defends a world of cultural isolation, suspicion and antagonism, one in which citizenship is defined not by cultural connectedness, or attempts to discover such connections, but by cultural disharmony and disengagement, foreclosing dialogue and communication across cultural spaces (Adeleke, 2010: pp. 225-244).

In opposition to the intercultural implications of globalization, Afrocentric scholars advocate racial distinctiveness preserved through a strict observance of the color line on a global scale in which blacks, regardless of socio-political experiences and geographical locations are compelled to forge a united racial front. Of course, besides race, the other emblematic factor is culture: the depiction of black Diaspora culture as quintessentially African. Due to its problematic character, some Afrocentric scholars deemphasize *race* as an identitarian construct, and highlight *culture* instead, arguing essentially that centuries of transplantation had not fundamentally altered the original African culture. This cultural *continuum* therefore constitutes the bedrock of unity between Africans and peoples of African descent in the Diaspora.

Challenging this homogenizing *weltanschauung*, some scholars advocate acknowledging the dynamic, complex, and complicated nature and character of the African and black Diaspora worlds. As Jack Greene describes it

the flow and mixture of peoples and cultures and implied a process of social and cultural formation that, far from being imposed from the top-down, derived from a continuing process of negotiation or exchange among the various peoples and cultures involved (Greene, 1999: p. 332).

The emphasis here is on the growing complexity of the Diaspora and the need to interrogate the complexity in different locations. As some critics contend, “At the general and specific levels of African Diaspora formation, there is variation by geographical location, by generations, by material and institutional conditions, and by socio-economic and demographic patterns” (Hamilton, Simmons, Familusi, & Hanson, 2007: p. 8). In fact, more recent studies of the global black experience underscore the imperative of transcending both the traditional Diaspora and Black Atlantic frames, and the homogeneity-heterogeneity discourse (Smithers, 2011). The shift is towards acknowledging expansive and complex terrains of the human experience, as well as undertaking micro-analytical studies of new forms of Diasporas within and without Africa; Diasporas that grew out of what Manger and Assal describe as “the decay in the contemporary African post-colonial state” (Manger & Assal, 2006: p. 10). These micro analyses focus on New Diasporas such as Eritrean refugees in Germany, Southern Sudanese in the United States, and Somali and Sudanese refugees in Norway, among many others (Conrad, 2006: pp. 104-139; Abusharaf, 2006: pp. 140-164; Assal, 2006: pp. 165-196). This illuminates the complex and multilayered nature of the global black diasporic world; the consequence of what Ruth Hamilton and others call “proliferations of departures across time and space, conditioned by, and within, a changing global culture and political economy” (Hamilton, Simmons, Familusi, & Hanson, 2007: p. 12). There are undoubtedly shared experiences relating to “persistence of oppression, racialization, prejudice and discrimination, political disenfranchisement, and hostile social environment” (Ibid: 7). However, as Ruth Hamilton and others suggest, “such *continuity* should not be interpreted to mean *fixed*. Collective identities are contested, negotiated, conflictual and dynamic. They are paradoxical and contradictory, generating internal “differences” (Ibid: 8).

The black Diaspora is neither monolithic nor culturally isolated and distinct. The Afrocentric construction of an isolationist black world is, therefore, ahistorical. The construction of a distinct community “We” is a relational category. “We” cannot exist without “They.” In Ruth Hamilton words,

Even the extent to which the mobilized actions of a people can be conceptualized as “acts for itself” implies a contradiction: people stand (act) in opposition to the forces that have conditioned their existential reality and material circumstances (Ibid: 1-40).

In their attempts to construct a uniform and monolithic black world, Afrocentric scholars deemphasize complexities and paradoxes of the African and black Diaspora worlds. A major challenge “in any project to construct a global identity and hence a global culture,” Anthony Smith opines, “is that collective identity, like imagery and culture, is always historically specific because it is based on shared memories and a sense of continuity between generations” (Smith, 1990: p. 180). This generational continuity should not be construed in isolation

from the broader human experiences. It does not, and should not be presumed to, privilege isolation, racial and cultural essentialism.

6. Conclusion

Afrocentric scholars assumed leadership of the ideological and intellectual struggle to authenticate African/ Diaspora black history and culture with crusading zealotry. Blinded by ideology, they saw racial conspiracy in almost every historical lens, and responded with an equally conspiratorial worldview. To combat Eurocentric historiography, Afrocentric intellectuals position blacks on an essentialist ahistorical pedestal. To effectively contest and unravel Eurocentric historiography, it was necessary to revisit and re-fight old battles, the most critical and urgent of which was the epic battle over history and civilization. Paradoxically, Afrocentric intellectuals assume their own countervailing historical burden (the Black Man's Burden?), the burden of reconstructing a counter hegemonic history, a regenerative and empowering history with which to obliterate the negative, oppressive, and debilitating consequences of Eurocentrism. Emboldened, Afrocentric intellectuals assumed this burden of history and strove to establish a credible and legitimate foothold for Africa and Diaspora blacks in the sands of history. For this, they turned to antiquity.

The quest for legitimacy in antiquity became the driving force of much of Afrocentric historicism. Civilizations in the Nile Valley and other parts of West and Central Africa became building blocks for establishing legitimacy in antiquity and constructing what Shavit aptly described as "Afrocentric Universal History", characterized by claims of originality, preeminence and superiority buttressed by a "Stolen Legacy" theory. For Afrocentric scholars, the claim to antiquity became a means of affirming "distinctiveness, uniqueness and self-proclaimed central role in the world's history" (Shavit, 2001: p. 23). However, in their quest for authenticity in antiquity, Afrocentric scholars made bogus and dubious claims of historical preeminence and universality. In the process, they created a black replica of the racist Eurocentrism they opposed. They theorized about the antiquity of civilization in Africa, and Africa's civilizational superiority. They developed a conspiratorial and Manichean historicism derived from slavery, racism, colonialism and their legacies. Though slavery and colonialism ended, Afrocentric scholars insisted that blacks in the United States and peoples of African descent globally continued to suffer from their destructive legacies. More than ever before, they contend, Africans and Diaspora blacks remain threatened by the same historic enemy. While Africans languish in the cesspool of neo-colonialism, blacks in post-slavery and post-civil rights in America, and globally, continue to endure the debilitating legacies of slavery and racism. Given this reality, Afrocentric scholars advocate Africa-Diaspora black unity in order to better combat these historic and shared challenges. They justify this "Pan-African" unity also on the basis of shared identity that they advance as perhaps the key historical force for developing a unified framework for global struggle. This monolithic global Afrocentric identity was premised on the conviction that the essential *Africanness* of blacks survived the vicissitudes of slavery, and centuries of transplantation in different regional locations. Invoking and building on this supposedly immutable and unifying *Africanness*, Afrocentric scholars suggest, would enable blacks to not only rehabilitate their maligned heritage, but also unleash an effective counter-hegemonic resistance.

The construction of a monolithic identity for blacks in the United States logically led Afrocentric scholars to a global unifying "Pan-African" identity for Africans and Diaspora blacks. However, solidifying this global, "Pan-African" monolithic and supposedly homogeneous identity and consciousness equally required homogenizing of the "Other". That is, Europeans (the ideological enemy) had to be homogeneous in order to fully expose the magnitude and potency of their threat. Thus, to appeal for global black unity, and to rationalize conflating and homogenizing the African and Diaspora black worlds and experiences, Afrocentric scholars portrayed the "Other", that was, the ideological enemy and nemesis (Europeans) as equally homogeneous and monolithic. The attempts to conflate the experiences of blacks in the United States, Africa and globally entailed de-historization, that was, deemphasizing or refusing to acknowledge historical changes and transformations both within the United States and globally. Likewise, the homogenizing of Europe, even in the face of obvious and glaring complexities, is a curious and inexplicable a historic exercise. Thus, assuming the burden of history led Afrocentric scholars to everything but respect for, and acknowledgment of, the complexities of the histories of Africans, Diaspora blacks, and Europeans. They chose to manipulate history, and discount with the forces of history. In consequence, they compromised the very force that could in fact have validated and authenticated their work; the one, as John Hope Franklin recognized, would have provided a clearer glimpse into the realities of the complex experiences and issues they engaged.

It is the primal responsibility of historians to offer interpretative insights into historical events from a critical study of historical data and facts. This does not suggest the total nullification of personal biases. As humans, historians bring to their vocation shades of personal biases and experiences. Yet, the measure of “objective” history is not the absolute elimination of biases but the degree to which the historian succeeds in making those biases secondary to the fundamental task of historical interpretation. This is what John Hope Franklin underscored and reflected in his scholarship. Afrocentric scholars, however, define the duty of the black historian as essentially ideological—to use historical data and facts to affirm, legitimize, and advance a socio-economic, cultural, and political agenda. In other words, they advocate subordinating historical interpretation to the ideological agenda of the black struggle. This explains Asante’s almost pathological disdain for objectivity, prioritizing consciousness (subjectivity) instead. In his view, black historians could not afford the luxury of objectivity. As he explains it:

The... relationship between our consciousness and our history is the true character of Afrocentricity. If we are Afrocentric, then we know that objectivity and subjectivity while not arbitrary designations are not ironclad. We determine what constitutes objectivity and subjectivity by deciding what is necessary in order for the relationship between history and consciousness to work (Asante, 1988: p. 51).

Concurring, Terry Kershaw, another Afrocentric scholar writes, “Praxis must be observed first and then explained as theory if the discipline of Black Studies wishes to maintain its ties to the struggles of Black people” (Kershaw, 1990: p. 19). This disregard for objectivity is reflected in Afrocentric romanticized, mythologized, simplified, and simplistic interpretations of African and Diaspora black historical and cultural experiences. The resultant “feel-good” history serves a fundamentally ideological function and is of little intellectual relevance. Though “Applied Negro History”, as the late Earl Thorpe described it, has some purpose, its ultimate value as history, however, is very much dependent on acknowledgment of, and respect for, established and recognized canons of historical inquiry. Though Afrocentric de-legitimizing of objectivity and prioritization of praxis has produced “good popular history”, it has yet to produce “good history”.

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