

African understanding of literature and culture in relation to african american p...

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Africans and African Americans have always struggled due to their black identity. James Baldwin was one writer who tried to lift the heavy burden of blackness from their blackness and to end the oppression which was thrust on them due to their blackness. He said powerfully, " Negroes want to be treated like men".

Even such simple words were misconstrued by opponents like Mr. Parker. Chinua Achebe says that oppression does not automatically produce meaningful struggles. There can be a wide range of responses between silent acceptance and violent rebellion. There can also be intermediate type responses such as a vague unfocused dissatisfaction or savage infighting among the oppressed.

To answer oppression with appropriate resistance, one needs knowledge of two kinds: self knowledge and knowledge of the enemy. The victim must know the exact name of the oppressor. There should be no false name. " If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go" James Baldwin.

He thus stressed on the need for African Americans to know where they came from, what their real roots were. Many African Americans believe that Africans sold them as slaves for cheap trinkets and Africans have made nothing of which we can be proud of. Baldwin regrets that African history has nothing much to offer in way of literature, sculpture or arts. There is no documented history of Africa in itself.

This is the plain truth and James Baldwin says that African American must first admit this to themselves and to their children. So far, the history of

black people has been known only through white people to suit their white interests.

More recently, about A. D. 1600, a Dutch traveler compared the city of Benin in modern Nigeria to Amsterdam. However, the British named Benin "The City of Blood", accused it of human sacrifice practice, dispatched a huge army to overwhelm it and looted its royal art gallery. During the second half of the 19th century, when diseases in West Africa such as Malaria proved to be a threat to British officials, the British appointed a Black man as the governor of Prestown in the 1850s.

They also allowed the consecration of a black man as Bishop of the diocese of West equatorial Africa and several Caribbean Blacks were recruited as missionaries and artisans in West Africa. But when the British, through Ronald Ross found a way to combat Malaria, they came back to West Africa and removed from power all the black officials therein.

The white people continued to dominate till the independence came to British West African colonies due to collapse of the British Empire.

The anti-Black period in modern colonial West African history was followed by a racist literature. When Durham University agreed to affiliate with Fourab College in Freetown, Sierra Leona, the Times of London asked if it might consider affiliating to the zoo.

At the same time, a colonial genre of writing that was serious developed thanks to Kipling, Conrad, E. M. Forrester, Joyce Cary and Graham Greene. John Buchen was neither vulgar nor serious. He wrote, "As long as we know

and practice it, we will rule not in Africa alone but wherever there are dark men who live only for their bellies". Thus, Baldwin points out that history of black men as told by white men cannot be trusted.

There are also several historical stories that are not commonly known to African Americans. There is the sad story of King of Bukongo who converted to Christianity, changed his name to Dom Alfonso I from 1506-1543. He built schools and churches and renamed his capital San Salvador. Portuguese missionaries whom this king trusted and let into the kingdom, changed into slave traders when Brazil needed slaves.

These stories of oppression are not found in regular history books. They are found in books such as Chancellor William's " Destruction of Black Civilization" and Chinwetu's " The West and the Rest of Us and Chelk Diop's The African Origin of Civilization.

Dr. Diop's work is enormous in scope and quality and took forty years to complete. This book gives Black people a foundation on which to begin a reconstruction of their history. It is not commonly known that Black people created the world's first and longest lasting Egyptian civilization on the banks of the Nile.

Before the Greeks named the land " Egypt", the blacks had called it Kemit which means " Black". There is further evidence if one noticed that the early pharaohs had negro faces, the first Pharaoh looked like Nigerian chief and the Great Sphinx has clear Bantu profile. However, European scholars explain that Kemit refers to the black soil of the region.

Where can Black People in North America look for likeness and how can they find their roots?. Two concepts need to be discussed in this context: ethos and worldview. Ethos refers to the emotional substance of a cultural group and collective emotional tone. The Ethos of African Americans has to do with the things in life that excite them, and about those which they share laughter. Ethos explains why they ignore some things and why others make them cry.

The African Diasporic ethos refers to their unique spirit and spiritual being. It is a result of their shared cultural history that is derived from Africa. The term worldview is related to religion. All groups of people who are historically related over long periods of time share a way of viewing the world and the realities with which it presents them.

The world-view of African Americans is especially significant to understanding them as this world-view is responsible for the way African Americans perceive nature, perceive each other as human beings, and perceive relationship to others. It even encompasses Metaphysics. A people's worldview affects and tends to determine their behavior.

The African universe is based on spiritual totality. While the western world-view is that of power, control and destruction, the African worldview is that of harmony. A people's world view affects the behavior. Thus, we find that the African world view is religions and that spiritual truths are thought to create the essence of things. Africans tend to live life robustly because of this worldview.

There are many rituals and sacrifices in the African culture. Africans believe that spirits and ancestors who have the spiritual power help to strengthen the life force. They also believe in reincarnation and the Eternal Cycle of Life.

While the European mindset tends to be literal the African mindset tends to be symbolic. Thus, the African American represents two diverse world-views.

A spiritual ethos inheriting a sacred, cosmic world-view forced to adjust to a materialistic society in inhuman circumstance.