



STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

TEACHING GUIDE

UNIT 2: Ancient Africa — Nile Valley Civilizations (5,000 B.C.E. – 332 B.C.E.)

CLASS 1: The Racialization of Ancient Egypt

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- ✓ Analyze artifacts, monuments, and images of Ancient Egyptians
- ✓ Compare and contrast the observations made by the Ancient Greeks and 19th century Western scholars regarding the origins of Ancient Egyptians
- ✓ Explain how race shapes contemporary depictions of Ancient Egypt in Hollywood films and popular culture
- ✓ Define scientific racism and explain its impact on the shaping of historical narratives

MATERIALS

- EFLA Quiz 2.1
- EFLA Document: Ancient Testimony on the Origins of Egypt (8-10 minutes)

UNIT 2 CLASS 1: QUIZ 2.1 (with answer key)

(35 – 45 minutes)

Instructions

- Distribute EFLA Document: Quiz 2.1 (below), which is based on the homework assignment from the previous class, Unit 2 Class 1. Give students approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the quiz. The answers are provided. Some answers may vary.
- Once the quiz is complete, call on student volunteers to provide the answers to each of the questions. Facilitate a class discussion by reviewing the answers together. Allow students the opportunity to grade their own quiz. Collect and review graded quizzes for accuracy and place in student folder.

1. What is scientific racism? Name at least two people who promoted scientific racism.

Scientific racism is the use of scientific techniques and hypotheses to support or justify the belief in racism, racial inferiority, or white racial superiority. Samuel Morton, Josiah Nott and George Gliddon all promoted scientific racism in the U.S. in the mid-19th century. ("Egyptology and Scientific Racism")

2. What is craniology and how did Egyptology contribute to the expansion of craniological studies?

Craniology is the study of human skulls, which were used to measure intelligence, character, and racial differences. Egyptology provided human skulls from archeological digs in Egypt to craniologists who used them to argue non-African origins of Egypt.

"In this study, Morton measured the dimensions and characteristics of 137 human crania from Egypt and concluded, 'The valley of the Nile, both in Egypt and in Nubia, was originally peopled by a branch of the Caucasian race.' He suggested the Egyptians were a race in between the Indo-European and Semite races, and as the descendants of Ham they were therefore "affiliated with the Libyan family of nations." (Egyptology and Scientific Racism)

3. What is the Melanin Dosage Test? What does it prove?

Cheikh Anta Diop invented a method for determining the level of melanin in the skin of human beings. Melanin is the chemical responsible for skin pigmentation and it is preserved for millions of years in the skins of fossil animals.

Diop conducted the melanin test on Egyptian mummies at the Museum of Man in Paris, and determined the levels found in the dermis and epidermis of a small sample would classify all ancient Egyptians as “unquestionably among the Black races.” (“10 Arguments that Prove the Ancient Egyptians Were Black”)

4. How did the ancient Greeks describe the ancient Egyptians?

Early eyewitness accounts described the ancient Egyptians as black-skinned with woolly hair. Several ancient Greek historians noted that Egyptians and Ethiopians had complexions that were “melanchroes,” which most scholars translate as black, while some scholars translate it as “dark” or “dark skinned.”

Some of the most-often quoted historians are Diodorus Siculus and Herodotus.

According to most translations, Herodotus wrote that a Greek oracle was known to be from Egypt because she was “black,” that the natives of the Nile region are “black with heat,” and that Egyptians were “black skinned with woolly hair.” The Ethiopians were also described in favorable terms such as “handsome.”

(“Ancient Testimony on the Origins of Egypt”)

5. How do Hollywood depictions of Ancient Egypt compare to how the Ancient Egyptians portrayed themselves?

Answers will vary. Students should receive full credit for completed answer.

6. Do these images confirm or dispel your previous conceptions of Ancient Egyptians?

Answers will vary. Students should receive full credit for completed answer.

EFLA QUIZ 2.1

Name: _____

Date: _____

- 1. What is scientific racism? Name at least two people who promoted scientific racism.**

- 2. What is craniology and how did Egyptology contribute to the expansion of craniological studies?**

- 3. What is the Melanin Dosage Test? What does it prove?**

- 4. How did the ancient Greeks describe the ancient Egyptians?**

- 5. How do Hollywood depictions of Ancient Egypt compare to how the Ancient Egyptians portrayed themselves?**

- 6. Do these images confirm or dispel your previous conceptions of Ancient Egyptians?**

Class Activity 1

(30 – 35 minutes)

Allot time for students to read a compilation of ancient Greek testimony on the origins and status of the Ancient Egyptians. Break students into small groups to discuss the significance and implications of these observations.

MATERIALS

- EFLA Document: Ancient Testimony on the Origins of Egypt (8-10 minutes)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Access the short biography and picture of Dr. Cheik Anta Diop through the EFLA website. Be sure to review the proper pronunciation of Dr. Diop's name.
2. Ask students to recall facts about Dr. Diop's life from the biography provided with their homework assignment. After reviewing aspects of Diop's life and work, note his meticulous engagement with evidence proving the African origins of Ancient Egypt.
3. Distribute the EFLA Document: Ancient Testimony on the Origins of Egypt. Allow students about 5-8 minutes to read the quotations to themselves.
4. Display or distribute the questions below and break students into small groups of 2-3. Refer back to the overview for references and ask each group to share its responses to the following (possible answers are provided):

- **How did the ancient Greeks describe the Ancient Egyptians?**

Many of the writers described the Egyptians as "black" with "wooly" or "curly hair."

- **What was the general tone used to describe Ethiopians?**

The writers used a positive and admirable tone when describing the Ethiopians, often referring to them as the "tallest and handsomest." They describe their cultural practices in terms that suggest the Ethiopians lived in abundance.

(Herodotus: "There gold is obtained in great plenty, huge elephants abound, with wild trees of all sorts, and ebony; and the men are taller, handsomer, and longer lived than anywhere else...")

- **According to Herodotus, what elements of civilization did Greece receive from Egypt?**

Herodotus suggests that the Egyptians were the originators of Greek religion, including astrology.

(Herodotus: “The names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt . . . for the names of all the gods have been known in Egypt from the beginning of time...It was the Egyptians too who originated, and taught the Greeks...ceremonial meeting, processions and liturgies...The Egyptians were also the first to assign each month and each day to a particular deity, and to foretell the date of a man's birth, his character, his fortunes, and the day of his death...The Egyptians, too have made more use of omens and prognostics than any other nation...”)

- **How do Greek writers compare the Egyptians and Ethiopians? According to their observations, what binds the two groups?**

The two groups share physical features as well as some customs such as circumcision. Aristotle described the Egyptians and Ethiopians as black and “bandy legged” and said they both have curly hair. Diodorus Siculus contemplated whether the Ethiopians were the originators of Egypt and Egyptian culture.

(Aristotle: “The condition of their hair supports this theory; for it is curlier than that of other nations, and curliness is as it were crookedness of the hair.”)

Diodorus Siculus: “Now they relate that of all people the Aithiopians [Ethiopians] were the earliest, and say that the proofs of this are clear. That they did not arrive as immigrants but are the natives of the country and therefore rightly are called autochthonous is almost universally accepted...The Aithiopians [Ethiopians] say that the Egyptians are settlers from among themselves and that Osiris was the leader of the settlement. The customs of the Egyptians, they say, are for the most part Aithiopian, the settlers having preserved their old traditions. For to consider the kings gods, to pay great attention to funeral rites, and many other things, are Aithiopian practices, and also the style of their statues and the form of their writing are Aithiopian. Also the way the priestly colleges are organized is said to be the same in both nations. For all who have to do with the cult of the gods, they maintain, are [ritually] pure: the priests are shaved in the same way, they have the same robes and the type of scepter shaped like a plough, which also the kings have, who use tall pointed felt hats ending in a knob, with the snakes that they call the asp (aspis) coiled round them.”)

- **According to the testimonies, what were the contributions of the Egyptians and Ethiopians?**

Religion, writing, spirituality, circumcision

- **What do these observations tell us about race and racial ideas during the era of ancient Greek engagement with Ancient Africa?**

The ancient Greek and Latin writers did attempt to racially categorize the Egyptians and considered the Egyptians and Ethiopians as belonging to the same race. Yet, the category “black” did not carry the mark of inferiority.