



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants Curriculum

EFLA STUDY GUIDE

UNIT 1: Ancient Africa (200,000 B.C.E. – 476 A.C.E.)

CLASS 3: Early African Civilizations

OVERVIEW

As you have learned, modern human history began in Africa. Quite naturally Africa is also where human development began. It is the first people of Africa who gave rise to the first and most powerful civilizations in the world. Along the Nile River, these early civilizations thrived, producing the Egyptian and Nubian empires beginning around 6000 BCE.

Before the first wave of Africans migrated out of Africa they had already developed the tools and survival skills to survive and thrive under challenging conditions. They knew how to make boats, plant crops, hunt small and large prey, manipulate fire and the environment, and create sustainable shelter out of a variety of material. They also knew how to look to the stars, sun and moon for direction and planning for agriculture. Furthermore, they had developed a spiritual foundation and a family structure that consisted of a male and female head of household with a division of labor and hierarchy that respected the status of each member. They also gleaned invaluable wisdom from the numerous animals they observed and herds they followed, which revealed new sources of water and food. Thus, the beginnings of what one would call “civilization” was started in Africa before the first Africans migrated to Asia, Europe and the rest of the world.

The wonderment of Ancient Egypt, the oldest civilization in world history, has sparked controversial debates and theories regarding the origin of the Ancient Egyptians. Since the late 18th and 19th centuries, Western scholars refused to accept an African origin of Ancient Egypt due to the racist ideologies that helped to shape the making of the modern world.

But in ancient times and through the period referred to as the “Middle Ages” in Europe, it was understood that Africans originated Ancient Egyptian civilization and were the architects of extraordinary advances in astronomy, agriculture, art, medicine and engineering. These advances, however, did not just appear out of nowhere. Egyptian/Nubian civilizations were rooted in the intelligence, inventiveness and migration patterns of African populations from the south and the regions of Central Africa, where the earliest evidence of human existence have been found. Thousands of years before there was ever contact with foreign populations in Asia or the “Middle East,” people from Central Africa migrated northward, following the current of the Nile River, to establish organized communities. Their **cumulative** genius and resourcefulness gave rise to Nile Valley civilizations that were **insulated** from foreign influences and protected from foreign invasion for ages. Archeological evidence, cultural artifacts and customs all confirm African origins.

This lesson includes an episode from the documentary series on Africa by renowned British historian Basil Davidson. “In his effort to counter Western ignorance and stereotypes about Africa, Davidson emphasized its role in world history, educating readers about the invention of iron-working in sub-Saharan Africa, for example. An Afrocentrist, he rejected colonialist scholarship which separated ancient Egypt from the rest of the continent, showing that Egypt was an African civilization.” In this first episode, “Different but Equal,” Davidson introduces Ancient Egyptian and Nubian civilization and underscores their African origins. In the end, he firmly concludes what scores of African scholars and historians have been saying for over a century, that, “The Egypt of the pharaohs did not spring whole and complete from its local genius. It owed much to inner Africa.”

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- ✓ Analyze the prevailing scientific theories on the origins of human beings
- ✓ Describe the reasons the first humans (homo sapiens) migrated out of Africa
- ✓ Discuss the contributions to civilization made by the first humans in Africa
- ✓ Chart the path of human migration out of Africa and discuss its impact on human variation (i.e. skin/eye color, height, hair texture, etc.)

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Read/View the following:

1. Timeline of early Hominid and Homo sapiens sapiens (modern human beings) origins and contributions to human civilization (10 min)
2. Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire, by Drusilla Dundee Houston (Intro, Chapters I & II) (15 - 20 mins)
3. Documentary: Africa: A Voyage of Discovery, Episode 1/8 - Different but Equal (53:09 min)

STUDY QUESTIONS

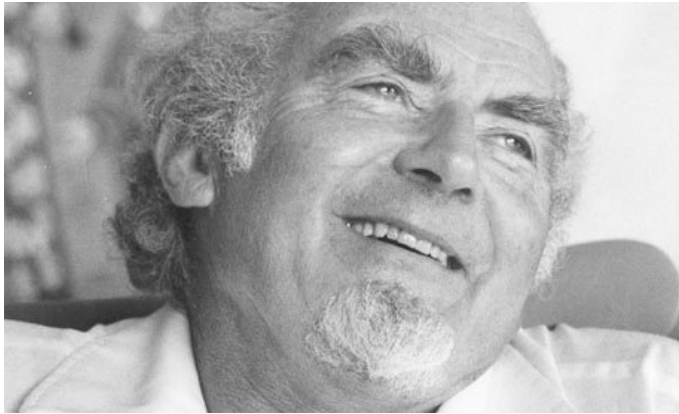
From AFRICA, A Voyage of Discovery: Different but Equal - Episode 1/8 - Basil Davidson

1. What was the stone structure that a German prospector stumbled upon?
2. Why would Europeans fabricate explanations for who built the stone structure?
3. What were some of the views of 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Hegel?
4. Richard Burton, an English explorer of the time, had similar views. What were some of the words/phrases that he used to describe Africans?
5. How were black people represented in early European Renaissance art?
6. Who was considered to be a revered saint in Central Europe during the Renaissance?
7. There was a dynamic shift in European attitude toward black people. What was it and why did it occur?
8. How long the coast of West Africa was the scene of organized and systematic cruelty? How was the sense of equality between black people and white people destroyed?
9. What was found on the high plateau in Central Africa, the Matopo Hills rock formation? What is the evidence that humans inhabited this place? What is the name of the rock shelter where the rock paintings found in this particular film?
10. What are some motives, which historians believe, for why this rock art was created?
11. Name two easily recognizable animal figures that were painted on the rocks in the Nsvatuke Cave.
12. What evidence is there that water once flowed, in abundance, through the Sahara desert?
13. Based on these ancient African rock paintings, what was the ethnic origin of the people? What type of people was this community? What else was depicted in these rock paintings?
14. How old do historians believe these early rock paintings are?
15. What else is depicted in the rock paintings? What other types of activities was this community involved with?

16. What initiated the migration from the Sahara? Where did the people go?
17. Why is the Nile considered to be a “library” of African history?
18. What was the Egypt of the Pharaohs? How long did it exist?
19. What did the double crown represent?
20. What were some of the ways that ancient Egyptians portrayed themselves in ancient paintings and sculptures?
21. How did the early Greek historians view the various races of the known world? Including Africans?
22. Why would King Ramses II build a huge temple so far to the south?
23. Who was the Egyptian king of the south was so highly regarded, considered a master of the world Gods and was also mentioned in the Bible, in the Book of Kings?
24. What is the significance of the city of Meroe?
25. What is the relationship between the ancient people of Meroe and the modern day Nubians?
26. What is the significance of the inscribed stone that was found near the Meroitic Temple of Amun?
27. What is Davidson’s theory of what the large complex of stone buildings, found in the Butana Desert, were used for? Why does he think this? What evidence is there?
28. Evidence shows that once the Kingdom of Kush collapsed, many of its people migrated toward the Nuba Hills. The modern Nubian men engage in a specific sporting event that can be directly traced to 2500 B.C. What is this? What evidence is there to prove this?
29. In what other ways does modern Nubian society reflect ancient customs?

30. Describe how the medieval Nubian Christian paintings, found by archaeologists in the 1960s reflect faith and spirituality. Were Africans portrayed among this ecclesiastical artwork? If so, how?
31. What brought the fall of the St. Simeon Monastery?
32. What was the reaction to the Great Crusades? Who was the leader of this response?
33. Who was St. Maurice? What is his significance?

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL



Basil Davidson, the radical journalist whose books introduced a mass audience to Africa's history, died on July 9 at the age of 95.

Davidson was a participant in, witness to, and chronicler of people's struggles against imperialism, fascism, and racism. He battled alongside partisans in Europe during World War II, traveled with guerrillas fighting for independence in

Portuguese colonies, and campaigned against apartheid in South Africa. Davidson was a true scholar-activist who was as determined in the combat zone as he was behind a desk.

Born in Bristol, England, Davidson left school at 16 to pursue a career in journalism. He worked as a foreign correspondent for notable London publications such as the *Economist*, before joining Britain's anti-Nazi Special Operations Executive in the late 1930s. Multilingual, imposing, and daring, Davidson coordinated resistance activities in several countries. He parachuted into Yugoslavia, where he joined Tito's Communists in 1943-44, then led a band of partisans who liberated Genoa in neighboring Italy.

After the war, he returned to reporting, based in Paris and writing for leading British newspapers, and he was active in labor causes. In the 1950s he traveled to Africa, the continent to which he devoted his research skills, literary talents, and political militancy for the remainder of his life. Inspired by the anti-colonial movement sweeping Africa and committed to the Pan-Africanist program of Africa's new leaders, Davidson immersed himself in writing about Africa's present and past. His early, now classic, studies of Africa were published at a time when much of the continent was under colonial occupation, Jim Crow racism prevailed in the American South, and most Western intellectuals dismissed African history as nonexistent.

Davidson highlighted the magnificence of Africa's distant past, from the ancient city of Meroe to the powerful empire of Mali, in award-winning books such as *Lost Cities of Africa* (1959). In his effort to counter Western ignorance and stereotypes about Africa, Davidson emphasized its role in world history, educating readers about the invention of iron-working in sub-Saharan Africa, for example. An Afrocentrist, he rejected colonialist scholarship which separated ancient Egypt from the rest of the continent, showing that Egypt was an African civilization. His books also explored the negative consequences of Africa's more recent engagement with Europe, most notably in *The African Slave Trade* (1961), one of the first comprehensive studies of the subject.

Davidson covered current events in Africa, too, especially the fight for self-determination. His articles and books written on the front lines of the anti-colonial struggle in Africa helped raise awareness around the world. He shaped British public opinion in favor of decolonization and his publications were devoured by civil rights activists and proponents of ethnic studies in the U.S. His first African monograph, *A Report on Southern Africa* (1952), was an eyewitness account of the implementation of the newly enacted policies of racial segregation known as apartheid. His 1951 trip was arranged by the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa and during his visit he met with Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and other leaders of the African National Congress. Later he was deemed a "prohibited immigrant" by the apartheid government and denied entry to South Africa and other white-ruled colonies. Unbowed, he continued to speak out about the crimes of apartheid and he served as vice-president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain from 1969 to 1984.

Davidson celebrated the independence of Ghana in 1957 and the policies of its president, Kwame Nkrumah, who welcomed liberation fighters from throughout Africa to study and train in his country. In 1964, Davidson taught at the University of Ghana and later he published a biography of the Ghanaian leader entitled *Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah* (1973).

Davidson was the first Western journalist to travel to the liberated zones of the Portuguese colonies of Guinea-Bissau and Angola. Amilcar Cabral, the leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde who in 1967 invited him to the freed areas of Guinea-Bissau, wrote that Davidson "accepted every risk and fatigue that could bring him into personal touch with the way our people live now." Davidson later recounted his trip in the book *No Fist is Big Enough to Hide the Sky* (1981).

At the height of the armed struggle, Davidson walked 300 miles on foot to eastern Angola to visit the zone liberated by the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. His account of this epic journey, called *In the Eye of the Storm: Angola's People*, was published in 1972.

In more recent years, Davidson explored the problems of postcolonial Africa which he principally attributed to the imposition of Western institutions such as multiparty liberal democracy. His most important work on this topic was titled *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (1993), in which he argued the solutions to Africa's troubles must come from Africans themselves rooted in a keen sense of their own history and cultures.

Although Davidson was never a member of any communist party, he often was labeled a "communist" and at times he was blacklisted like many leftists during the Cold War era. A decorated military veteran, his own country nevertheless vetoed his appointment as an editor at UNESCO, as punishment for his radical politics.

But, Davidson remained true to his principles. He once described his work as "obviously anti-imperialist." He championed Marxist organizations and leaders - including Nkrumah and Cabral - who fought against colonialism and apartheid. And he condemned the hypocrisy of Western liberals who turned a blind eye to the crimes of imperialism.

Davidson is remembered for the sacrifices he made and the role he played in liberating Africa. The MPLA, which now governs an independent Angola, issued a statement this week mourning his death. "At this moment of grief and sorrow," it reads, "the Politburo, on behalf of all party members, bends before the memory of so eminent personality and forwards to the bereaved family and the Mozambique-Angola Committee, of which he was a member, the deepest condolences."

At the presentation of an honorary degree from the University of Bristol in 1999, Davidson was recognized as "one of the great radical figures of the 20th century." The presentation continued, "He has pursued, throughout his life, a just cause, without fear for his own personal safety. He has provided an inspiration for millions, through his books and television work, and by his academic writings gave us African history, when many denied there could be any African history."

Davidson's impact is evident in the high school and university classrooms across Africa and beyond where his textbooks, such as *West Africa before the Colonial Era: A History to 1850* (1998), as well as his acclaimed eight-part documentary series, *Africa: A Voyage of Discovery* (1984), are required learning materials.

Enter any bookstore or library with a section devoted to Africa, and you certainly will find several of Davidson's works on display. Pay homage to this great scholar-activist by reading one of those books, and follow his example by committing yourself to the struggle against imperialism in its many forms today.