



The Education for Life Academy

Cultivating the next generation of Black leaders

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

EFLA TEACHING GUIDE

UNIT 2: Ancient Africa – Nile Valley Civilizations (3800 B.C.E. – 5 A.D.E.)

CLASS 1: The Racialization of Ancient Egypt

OVERVIEW

Note: Words or phrases in blue are glossary terms that students should know.

Around 3800 – 3500 B.C.E., Africans founded one of the first and most advanced civilizations in world history in the Nile Valley region of Africa, which included modern day Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. In fact, the oldest human remains ever found were discovered in Africa, specifically in Ethiopia. According to Ethiopians and other historians of [antiquity](#), Ethiopia is the oldest civilization on earth. It fostered the civilization of Nubia to the west, which in turn influenced the civilization of Egypt in the north. Although Egypt represents some of the highest cultural achievements of Nile Valley civilizations, it is the product of the collective African genius. For example, pyramids were built in Nubia before they were built in Egypt, and the foundations of Egyptian religion can be found in Ethiopia. The Nile River, the longest in the world, connected Africans in the south to those in the north and the interior. Together, these Africans shared and expanded their knowledge and resources and practiced similar cultural and religious rituals.

Egypt, by its location, had the highest contact with the non-African world, and was subsequently invaded and conquered in ancient times by the Hyksos, the Libyans, the Nubians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Turks, the French and the British. Thus, Egyptian society was always a melting pot of African and foreign cultures, resulting in a population with highly varied skin colors. Yet the people who established Egypt – its first Dynastic Pharaohs and those who built the Great Pyramids, were from southern and eastern Africa – Nubia and Ethiopia respectively.

Because of the splendor and [unequivocal](#) brilliance of Ancient Egypt, those who cultivated the modern racist theories of the 17th – 19th centuries began to claim that Egypt was actually established by Caucasians – not Africans. Therefore, the first class of this unit will explore the [racialization](#) of Ancient Egypt. The Greeks referred to this extraordinary civilization as *Aegyptos*, the origin of the name *Egypt*. But Africans called their land “KMT” or *Kemet*. The people of Ancient

Kemet/Egypt invented one of the oldest writing systems, including paper made out of [papyrus](#), and established the world's first libraries and universities. They [pioneered](#) the arts and sciences and provided the foundations for many different fields including religion, philosophy, astronomy, agriculture, mathematics, architecture, medicine, government and engineering. To preserve their legacy and reflect their accomplishments, they built remarkable statues, monuments and temples that continue to astound the modern world. When the rest of the world remained in what has been called "the Dark Ages," the people of the Nile Valley region in north and east Africa were living in a period of [enlightenment](#), prompting [archeologists](#) to refer to Africa as "the cradle of civilization."

The racial characterization of the Ancient Egyptians has been one of the most controversial aspects of [Egyptology](#) – a branch of archeology founded in the 1800s, which focuses exclusively on the study of Ancient Egyptian history and culture. Despite overwhelming evidence that confirms the African origins of Ancient Egypt, Egyptologists and [cultural producers](#) have portrayed Ancient Egyptian civilization as Mediterranean, Asian, or Caucasian. More recently, in order to [disassociate](#) Egypt from the African continent altogether, many scholars have begun to claim (and teach) that Egypt is a part of the "Middle East" – a fairly recent geographical invention – rather than part of the African continent. Most of the artifacts and images of Ancient Egypt that are commonly shown in history books, documentaries and Hollywood films emphasize an era of Greek and Roman rule following the reigns of Alexander the Great through Cleopatra VII, 336 – 30 B.C.E. By this time the Egyptian population had intermixed with foreign people for over 1,000 years, creating a multi-racial population.

Ancient Kemet – or Ancient Egypt under African rule, lasted for well over 2,000 years before Greek and Rome were established as nations. All of the major monuments, statues and temples in Ancient Egypt were constructed under African rule. Yet rarely are the contributions and images of Ancient Egypt before foreign invasion highlighted in historical studies and popular culture. Images of the original architects of the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx, as well as statues and tomb paintings, for instance, reflect men and women of African descent in varying shades of black and brown, affirming their identity as African people.

It is important to note that the ancient world did not subscribe to the same racial concepts we use today. Racism as we know it did not exist. Many of the most prominent ancient Greeks and Romans openly acknowledged the genius of the Egyptians and spent many years studying in Egypt. However, throughout the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, Egyptologists, scientists and intellectuals challenged this established knowledge by claiming that Egypt should be classified as a "Caucasian" civilization. We call this process [racialization](#) – the act of imposing a racial meaning to a relationship, social practice or group where one did not previously exist. This preoccupation with racializing the Egyptians as non-African and non-Black has had a lasting impact on both the shaping and erasure of African history, and by extension world history.

Some of the most explicit testimony regarding the race of Ancient Egyptians came from Ancient Greeks. Many Greek scholars including Pythagoras, Aesop and Plato traveled to Egypt for study, and they credited Egypt as the model for classical Greek civilization. At that time, the race or color

of the Egyptians was not a mystery. For instance, Herodotus, often celebrated as the “father of history,” described the Egyptians as “black-skinned and wooly-haired.” Similarly, the famed Greek philosopher, Aristotle referred to both the Egyptians and Ethiopians as “very black.” In fact, the name “Ethiopia,” a term that was used to describe Africans more broadly, derives from the Greek words *ethios* and *ops* meaning “burnt faces.” In ancient times, black skin did not carry the negative [stigma](#) it does today. Racism and white supremacy are modern inventions with origins in late 18th century Europe and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

The Legacy of Racial Theories

The images of Ancient Egypt as a Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Asian or Caucasian civilization are so common in historical and popular imagination that it is difficult for many to believe that Black Africans are responsible for its founding and development. Rarely are Ancient Egyptians depicted as Black unless they are portrayed as slaves. Why do dominant historical and cultural narratives deny African origins of Ancient Egyptian civilization? And why do many scholars continue to omit and [distort](#) evidence of African rule over Ancient Egypt?

In this lesson students will [contemplate](#) the merits of the “great race debate” by examining a range of physical evidence including statues, papyri, tomb paintings and monuments; eyewitness testimony of the ancient Greeks; archeological and historical research; and the personal testimony of the Ancient Egyptians themselves. Students will reflect on their own perceptions of Ancient Egypt and identify how education and culture have influenced their perspectives.

UNIT 2 CLASS 1: HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Read the following materials (approximately 1 hour):

- EFLA Document: Egyptology and Scientific Racism (15 minutes)
- A Brief Biography Of An African Champion: Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop (5 minutes)
- 10 Arguments That Prove Ancient Egyptians Were Black (15 minutes)
Link: <http://atlantablackstar.com/2013/10/25/10-arguments-that-proves-ancient-egyptians-were-black/>
- Ancient Black Egypt 101 (Excerpts) (15 minutes)
Link: <http://wysinger.homestead.com/blackegypt101.html>

View the following materials (approximately 10 – 15 minutes):

SLIDESHOW: Ancient Depictions of Egyptian Rulers (6-10 minutes)

SLIDESHOW: Hollywood Depictions of Ancient Egyptians (2-5 minutes)

Access the slideshow: *Ancient Depictions of Egyptian Rulers*. As you view the slideshow, take notes on how ancient Egyptians depicted themselves in monuments, carvings and other artifacts.

Access the slideshow on the EFLA website: *Hollywood Depictions of Ancient Egyptians*. As you view the slideshow, take notes on how ancient Egyptians are portrayed in film and popular culture as opposed to how they portrayed themselves.

UNIT 2 CLASS 1: STUDY QUESTIONS

From Egyptology and the Foundations of Scientific Racism

1. What is the significance of C.F. Volney's book *The Ruins*? After visiting Egypt what was Volney's central argument?
2. What is scientific racism? Give examples.
3. Why did George R. Gliddon dismiss the ancient texts written by Herodotus and others who described the Ancient Egyptians as Black?
4. What did Samuel Morton say about the social position of the "numerous" Black people in Ancient Egypt?
5. What is eugenics? How did W.M. Flinders Petrie contribute to the eugenics movement?

From Cheikh Anta Diop Biography

1. What are the three areas of Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop's expertise? What are his credentials?
2. Where was Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop born?

From "10 Arguments That Prove the Ancient Egyptians Were Black?"

1. What are 5 of the "10 arguments that prove the Ancient Egyptians were Black?"
2. What is the Melanin Dosage Test? What does it prove?

From Ancient Black Egypt 101 (Greek Testimony)

1. How do the ancient Greeks describe the ancient Egyptians (skin color, hair texture, physical features, etc.)?
2. What are some of the elements of civilization Herodotus said Greece received from Egypt?

From Slideshows:

3. How do the Hollywood depictions compare to how the Ancient Egyptians portrayed themselves?
4. Do these images confirm or dispel your previous conceptions of Ancient Egyptians?
5. What role does race and racialization play in popular representations of Ancient Egyptians?
6. What political purpose does the racialization of Ancient Egypt serve? Be prepared to share your responses in class.

UNIT 2 CLASS 1: QUIZ 2.1

Instructions

1. 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 10-15 minutes to complete the quiz.
2. 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.

From Egyptology and the Foundations of Scientific Racism

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

The use of scientific techniques and hypotheses to support or justify the belief in racism, racial inferiority, or racial superiority. Samuel Morton, Josiah Nott and George Gliddon all promoted scientific racism in the U.S. in the mid-19th century.

2. Why did George R. Gliddon dismiss the ancient texts written by Herodotus and others who described the Ancient Egyptians as Black?

Gliddon dismissed the ancient texts written by Herodotus as insignificant because Egyptologists, he argued, “know Egypt better now than all the Greek authors or the Roman.”

3. What is eugenics? What European dictator did the American Eugenics movement influence?

Eugenics was a racist social movement in which geneticists argued that the elimination of undesirables (including the poor, mentally challenged, disabled and others considered weak, unfit, or social failures) would lead to the creation of a superior human race.

The racial ideology had been popular in Britain and the United States before it influenced the policies of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Adolph Hitler, inspired by the eugenics movement, carried out a program of elimination in Germany that resulted in the murder of millions of people including gypsies, gays and lesbians, Jews and other non-whites.

From Cheikh Anta Diop Biography

4. What did Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop argue in his doctoral dissertation? How was his argument received?

His initial doctoral dissertation submitted at the University of Paris, Sorbonne in 1951, based on the premise that Egypt of the pharaohs was an African civilization~was rejected.

Regardless, this dissertation was published by Presence Africaine under the title Nations Negres et Culture in 1955 and won him international acclaim.

Two additional attempts to have his doctorate granted were turned back until 1960 when he entered his defense session with an array of sociologists, anthropologists and historians and successfully carried his argument. After nearly a decade of titanic and herculean effort, Diop had finally won his Docteur es Lettres! In that same year, 1960, were published two of his other works~the Cultural Unity of Black Africa and and Precolonial Black Africa.

From “10 Arguments That Prove the Ancient Egyptians Were Black?”

5. What are 5 of the “10 arguments that prove the Ancient Egyptians were Black?”

1. Physical Anthropology Evidence
2. Melanin Dosage Test
3. Osteological Evidence
4. Evidence From Blood Types
5. The Egyptians as They Saw Themselves
6. Cultural Unity of Egypt With The Rest of Africa
7. Divine Epithets
8. Evidence From the Bible
9. Linguistic Unity With Southern and Western Africa
10. Testimony of Classical Greek and Roman Historians
11. DNA Evidence (BONUS)

6. 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.”

From Ancient Black Egypt 101 (Greek Testimony)

7. How do the ancient Greeks describe the ancient Egyptians (skin color, hair texture, physical features, etc.)?

Virtually all of the early Latin eyewitnesses 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.”

8. What are some of the elements of civilization Herodotus said Greece received from Egypt?

Herodotus also asserted that "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. . ."

(Herodotus, The Histories, 149-150; 152; 159).

From Slideshows:

9. How do the Hollywood depictions compare to how the Ancient Egyptians portrayed themselves?

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

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

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

Grading Scale

Quiz 2.1 – 10 questions, 10 points each question. Partial credit may be given for questions with two or more parts. For example, question 5 requires 5 short answers. Each answer is worth 2 points for that question.

GLOSSARY

1. **Antiquity** – [an-tik-wi-tee] noun, plural antiquities.
 - A. the quality of being ancient; ancientness: a bowl of great antiquity.
 - B. ancient times; former ages: the splendor of antiquity.
2. **Unequivocal** – [uhn-i-kwiv-uh-kuh l] adjective.
 - A. not equivocal; unambiguous; clear; having only one possible meaning or interpretation: an unequivocal indication of assent; unequivocal proof.
 - B. absolute; unqualified; not subject to conditions or exceptions:
The cosigner of a note gives unequivocal assurance that it will be paid when due.
3. **Racialization** – the act of imposing a racial meaning to a relationship, social practice or group where one did not previously exist.
4. **Papyrus** – noun, plural papyri [puh-pahy-rah-y, -ree] (Show IPA), papyruses.
 - A. a tall, aquatic plant, *Cyperus papyrus*, of the sedge family, native to the Nile valley: the Egyptian subspecies, *C. papyrus hadidii*, thought to be common in ancient times, now occurs only in several sites.
 - B. a material on which to write, prepared from thin strips of the pith of this plant laid together, soaked, pressed, and dried, used by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans.
5. **Pioneer(ed)** – [pahy-uh-neer] noun
 - A. a person who is among those who first enter or settle a region, thus opening it for occupation and development by others.
 - B. one who is first or among the earliest in any field of inquiry, enterprise, or progress: pioneers in cancer research.
6. **Enlightenment** – [en-lahyt-n-muh nt] noun
 - A. the act of enlightening.
 - B. the state of being enlightened: to live in spiritual enlightenment.
7. **Archeologists** – [ahr-kee-ol-uh-jist] noun
 - A. a specialist in archaeology, the scientific study of prehistoric peoples and their cultures by analysis of their artifacts, inscriptions, monuments, etc.
8. **Egyptology** – a branch of archeology founded in the 1800s, which focuses exclusively on the study of Ancient Egyptian history and culture.

9. **Cultural Producers** – individuals or entities responsible for producing entertainment, educational and pop culture that influences how we view race, society and politics.
10. **Disassociate** – [dis-uh-soh-shee-eyt, -see-] verb (used with object), disassociated, disassociating.
- A. to dissociate.
11. **Stigma** – [stig-muh] noun, plural stigmata [stig-muh-tuh, stig-mah-tuh, -mat-uh], stigmas.
- A. a mark of disgrace or infamy; a stain or reproach, as on one's reputation.
- B. Medicine/Medical. A mental or physical mark that is characteristic of a defect or disease: the stigmata of leprosy.
12. **Distort** – [dih-stawrt] verb (used with object)
- A. to twist awry or out of shape; make crooked or deformed: Arthritis had distorted his fingers.
- B. to give a false, perverted, or disproportionate meaning to; misrepresent: to distort the facts.
13. **Contemplate** – [kon-tuh m-pleyt, -tem-] verb (used with object), contemplated, contemplating.
- A. to look at or view with continued attention; observe or study thoughtfully: to contemplate the stars.
- B. to consider thoroughly; think fully or deeply about: to contemplate a difficult problem.

PEOPLE TO KNOW

Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop



Biographical Information

“Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop: Anthropologist, Historian, Physicist and Scholar” by Jasmin K. Williams

Link:

http://www.raceandhistory.com/Historians/cheikh_anta_diop.htm

“A Brief Biography of an African Champion, Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop,” by Runoko Rashidi

Link:

http://www.raceandhistory.com/Historians/cheikh_anta_diop.htm

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Articles and Book Chapters:

Basil Davidson, “The Ancient World and Africa: Whose Roots?” in *Egypt Revisited* edited by Ivan Van Sertima. New Brunswick, NJ: *Journal of African Civilizations*, 1999.

James Brunson, “Ancient Egyptians: The Dark Red Race Myth” and “Ethnic or Symbolic: Blackness and Human Images in Ancient Egyptian Art” in *Egypt Revisited* edited by Ivan Van Sertima. New Brunswick, NJ: *Journal of African Civilizations*, 1999.

Cheikh Anta Diop, “Origin of the Ancient Egyptians” in *Egypt Revisited* edited by Ivan Van Sertima. New Brunswick, NJ: *Journal of African Civilizations*, 1999.

Aaron Kamugisha, “Finally in Africa? Egypt, from Diop to Celenko,” *Race & Class* 45, 1: 31-60
S.O.Y. Keita, “Studies and Comments on Ancient Egyptian Biological Relationships,” *History of Africa* Vol. 20 (1993): 129-154.

Books related to the African Origins of Egypt

Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Civilization*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

Anthony Browder, *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Karmic Guidance, 1992.

Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, edited and translated by Mercer Cook. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974.

Carter G. Woodson, *The African Background Outlined: Or, Handbook for the Study of the Negro*. Washington D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1936.

Carter G. Woodson and Charles H. Wesley, *The Negro in Our History* (1922)

Studies on Race and Ancient Egypt

Meghan Keita, *Race and the Writing of History: Riddling the Sphinx*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

On-Line Resources

John Henrik Clarke, *Why Africana History?* (1997)

Link: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/afprl/clarke/why-africana-history-by-dr.-john-henrik-clarke>

W.E.B. DuBois, "Ethiopia and Egypt" in *The Negro* 1915

Link: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/dbn/dbn05.htm>

Druscilla Dunjee Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire* (1926)

Link: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/we/>

C.F. Volney, *The Ruins or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires: and the Law of Nature* (1791)

Link: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1397/1397-h/1397-h.htm>

Molefi Asante, "Race in Antiquity: Truly Out of Africa" (2009)

Link: <http://www.asante.net/articles/19/race-in-antiquity-truly-out-of-africa/>