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"AFRICAN ROOTS EXPLORE NEW WORLDS:

PRE-COLUMBUS TO THE SPACE AGE"

PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

The African experience in the Western World was one of moral and spiritual degradation. Easily identified by their dark bronze complexion and distinct physical features, it was virtually impossible to blend into the Western European population and escape bondage. Africans arriving in the New World were denied the right to practice their culture and forced to adapt parts of a new culture. The description of the Afro-American was (and is today by some) one of inferiority and low intellect.

Historians have failed to acknowledge the truth concerning Africa's descendants, but African/Black awareness has heightened in the last quarter of a century or more. Afro-Americans are ecstatic about the rebirth of African culture. According to the *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America*, "Much of Africa's flourishing culture was debased or totally destroyed through the ruthless exploitation of the continent by Europeans." (2:46) The importation of African slaves in the past has resulted in "African cultural components' having renewed roots in the United States." (2:46)

The Afro-American has made contributions in almost every

area of development in the New World, and recognition of these contributions must not be denied. The time has come to silence the myths concerning Africans and Afro-Americans. It is time to acknowledge their contributions and impact from pre-Columbus times to the present.

AFRICA--THE BEGINNING OF MAN

Afro-Americans have always been depicted as subservient to their European (White) counterparts, and their ability as political and military leaders has always been questioned; however, the ancestors of Afro-Americans were great rulers and warriors.

The history of Afro-Americans began well before their ancestors arrived on slave ships in the New World. Historians and anthropologists were forced to withdraw their condescending views of Africa and its people after Dr. L.S.B. Leaky's discoveries in 1959. He discovered man's closest predecessor, Proconsul, at Lake Victoria in Tanzania. Proconsul lived 30 million years ago. At Olduvai Gorge, Dr. Leaky discovered the 600,000-year-old remains of the first man. These findings confirmed that man had his beginnings on the continent of Africa. (2:9) According to Ebony, enough evidence is available today to prove that civilization was advanced in much of Africa.

...A growing number of scientists are beginning to conclude--however reluctantly--that while Caucasoid man was living a relatively primitive existence, his dark-skinned counterpart in Africa was already solving mathematical problems, drawing and writing messages, building temples and homes of brick, growing crops, raising cattle, mining metals and fashioning them into useful objects such as weapons, utensils, tools, ornaments, and objects of art. ...Africans organized social communities, then cities, states and, finally, empires with complex political structures, laws, and religious institutions. (2:10)

The empire of ancient Ethiopia is known as the first African state to reach significant prominence and power. Its name is derived from the Greek work "Aithiop," meaning dark-skinned, referring to its inhabitants. (2:10) The Republic of Sudan, Somalia, and modern Ethiopia comprise what was known as the

ancient Empire of Ethiopia. To the north was Egypt, which was viewed as inferior by Ethiopia. The cultures combined somewhat, due to trade and intermarriage. According to Ebony,

It is also important to remember that ancient Egypt was an African civilization and that Blacks played an important role in its development as soldiers, laborers, officials, and rulers. (2:11)

Egyptians were a combination of Mediterranean, Semitic, and Ethiopian. John Hope Franklin, in *From Slavery to Freedom*, stated that the characteristics depend on "the source of the description and the period for which the observation is made." (3:4) They were also described as Black by Homer and other Greek writers. Franklin related that evidence (art pieces) reclaimed by archaeologists shows both Negroid features and Mediterranean features that are associated with Caucasians. (3:4)

There is no conclusive evidence, as has been contended, that the "feat of building up the civilization of Egypt was chiefly that of the Mediterranean race." ...They contributed heavily, but the constant infiltration of Negroid peoples from the South and domination by Negroes of the country's political life in later stages of development cannot be regarded lightly in any final evaluation of the sources of culture and civilization in ancient Egypt. (3:5)

THE RULE OF ETHIOPIA AND EGYPT

Ethiopia and Egypt coexisted for over five thousand years, although there was occasional warfare between them. Independent kingdoms also developed within the region. The Egyptian Empire of Kush (providence) and the Ethiopian Empire of Axum were two independent kingdoms that developed in the region.

Around 1100 B.C. the Egyptian empire began to weaken for unknown reasons. (5:23; 2:12) King Kashta of Kush announced his independence from Egypt during the middle of the eighth century. Egypt's passive response to the formation of a new kingdom led King Kashta to invade Egypt with his mighty army. The Kush now ruled northward to Thebes, the capitol of Egypt. From this time, the military might, skill, and knowledge of the African warrior/soldier can be documented in unbiased mediums.

King Kashta's son, Piankhy, continued the conquest of Egypt until it encompassed the Mediterranean shores and borders of modern Ethiopia. Almost a fourth of Africa was under the authority of one man. The Twenty-fifth Dynasty of distinguished pharaohs of Egypt was established by the Kings of Kush. (5:23; 2:13) According to Margaret Shinnie in *Ancient African Kingdoms*, "The Kushites were the first truly African people to achieve a position of power and importance and to win the respect of the civilized world as it was at that time." (5:31)

King Piankhy ruled on the throne for 25 years. The story of King Piankhy's military expedition to Memphis is inscribed on a granite stele (pillar) in the Temple of Amen. It is thought "to be the clearest and most rational account of a military expedition" to survive from ancient Egypt, according to J. A. Rogers in *World's Great Men of Color*. (4:92-93) Memphis was heavily fortified with high walls, a large food supply, and many warriors. Landing on the northern side of the town, King Piankhy noticed that the west entrance wall had been raised higher. The east side was surrounded by water and probably not protected as well as the west. The high floating ships in the harbor had their bow ropes attached to houses in the city. King Piankhy's ships gained control of the harbor's activity. The captured ships and Piankhy's ships were aligned next to the east wall. A footing for his assaulting lines was established. They ascended the wall, captured the city before a defense from the west could rally into action, and Memphis' commander, Tefnakhte, surrendered calmly.

Kushite power moved south to Meroe in 540 B.C. when the royal family relocated. By the end of the third century B.C., Meroe had developed its own alphabet. The culture in Meroe was more advanced than others on the African continent. Its towns were built of masonry, and palaces and pyramids were similar to structures in Egypt. The end of Kush is estimated to have occurred in about A.D. 350 and is as vague as its origin.

King Malequerebar (A.D. 320), the seventy-second monarch, was the last recorded ruler. It is theorized the demise of Meroe and Kush was due to the invasion by the Axumites, the ancestors of modern-day Ethiopians.

GHANA

The ancient empire of Ghana emerged after the downfall of Kush. It was the first West-African State and was also known as Kumbi and Walata. Ancient Ghana was located over one thousand miles north of modern day Ghana and it was the first of three powerful states to arise. It was not until about A.D. 734 that the first written accounts of Ghana appeared. The Arab writer, EL-Fazari, discusses the expedition sent from Morocco to raid Ghana, "the land of gold." (5:44-45)

The Arabs wanted to gain control of Ghana because of its resources--gold. The Ghanaians traded gold to the Arabs in exchange for salt, which was in limited supply in the south. The Arabs sold or traded the gold to the Europeans. Europe depended on gold from Africa for its financial enterprises and Africa was the main source of gold before the discovery of America. Many Arab writers and travelers have given many accounts of life in Ghana. Al Bakri, an Arab born in Spain gave some of the most detailed descriptions of Ghana. In his book, completed in A.D. 1067, Al Bakri details the gold-wealth of the land. According to John Hope Franklin,

The records seem to bear out the view that most of the expansion of Ghana was not the result of military conquest and that the people were, on the whole, devoted to the pursuits of peace. (3:12)

Ghana was at its peak under the Sisse dynasty. King Tenkamenin (11th century) became wealthy through the collection of taxes and tributes by provincial rulers. Judicial actions for the people of the land were handled by King Tenkamenin himself. He was also the leader of religious belief. Ghana adhered to a religion based on a belief that every earthly object contained good or evil spirits that had to be satisfied if they were to prosper. (3:13)

Ghana's demise was the result of a religious uprising by a sect of Muslims in North Africa. This group became known as the Almoravids. They felt the people were not following the firm beliefs of the prophet Mohammed. Almoravid rule resulted in a weakened state, which allowed Ghana to become a captured State of the Sosso ruler Sumangura, in 1203.

MALI (MELLE)

Mali's emergence closely parallels the demise of Ghana.

Ancient Mali covered the general area currently occupied by the modern states. It was often referred to as Mellestine and Mandingolanda. Mali is thought to have begun around 1235, but the core of its political organization dates back to the start of the 7th century.

A Mandingo King, Sundiata Keita, sometimes called Mari Jata, is recognized as the catalyst for Mali's maturation into a powerful nation. The Sossa King, Samangura, had previously conquered Ghana and regarded the Mandingo State of Mali as his rival. To insure his succession to the throne he had 11 of the 12 heirs to Mali's throne killed. Sundiata Keita was spared because he was ill and not expected to live, but he reached manhood, intercepted his people's declaration to Sosso's allegiance, and defeated and killed Sumanguru in 1235 during a battle. Eventually Sosso became part of Mali's kingdom.

In order to extend his territories to the West and at the same time compile an army when a battle threatened, Sundiata organized a group of professional soldiers. Mali became the richest and most powerful nation in the Sudan by the end of the 13th century. Its success continued under the rule of Mansa Musa, Sundiata Keita's grandson, who came to power in 1307. Mansa Musa became well known in the Mediterranean region and Europe for his pilgrimage to Mecca and his majestic caravans.

When Mansa Musa was returning from Mecca, he learned that the town of Gao, Songhay's capital, had fallen under his rule. He traveled to Gao himself to receive the King's surrender. Mansa Musa took the king's two sons back to Mali to insure his obedience to Mali's rule.

Map-makers in the Mediterranean and in Europe began to place Mali on their maps. On one of the maps Mansa Musa is described:

This negro lord is called Musa Mali, Lord of Negroes of Guinea. So abundant is the gold which is found in his country that he is the richest and most noble king in all the land. (5:55)

Mali was a diverse and well organized nation having cultural centers, political influence, and commerce and trade, particularly gold. Mansa Musa died in 1332 and was succeeded by his son Maghan. Maghan was not able to protect and control the nation in the manner equal to his father, and Mali's borders were

invaded by the Mossi of the Upper Volta region. Betrayal was rampant within the empire, and it came to an end by the middle of the 17th century, returning to the original Mandingo State of Kangaba.

SONGHAY (SONGHAI)

The people of Songhay were farmers and fishermen who lived on the Niger River's middle banks in the 7th century. They were ruled by the Dia, a Berber tribe. They acknowledged the Islamic faith during the 11th century. The capital city was Gao, which was captured by Mansa Musa of Mali and was a State of Mali from 1325 until 1335. One of the sons, Ali Kohlen, who was taken hostage from the Songhay king during Mansa Musa's reign, betrayed King Maghan (Mansa Musa's son), returned to Gao, and liberated the people.

Seventeen kings struggled to rule the nation from 1355 to about 1646. It was difficult to remain an independent nation due to neighboring factions wishing to expand their kingdoms. In 1464, Sonni Ali came to power over Songhay. He was a ruthless, ambitious, ruler. He envisioned controlling the entire Niger region through the military might of a river navy. News of discord in the region of Timbuktu tempted Sonni Ali to invade the town. Later he attacked and conquered the kingdom of Jenne, a center for trade and learning, and the kingdom of Mali.

King Sonni Ali drowned in the Niger River in 1492, but his ruling power resulted in Songhay becoming a major force in West Africa. Sonni Ali's son ruled after his father's death for a few months. Askia Mohammed, a military strategist and general in Sonni Ali's army, became the next ruler with the backing of the people of Songhay.

Askia Mohammed organized the kingdom into provinces with governors in charge of each State. His organization of the provinces was similar to modern day governments. A regular army consisting of a reserve unit was formed to increase commerce. The kingdom was protected by a cavalry army and the harbors protected by a navy stationed in the middle of the Niger River.

Askia Mohammed focused on strengthening his kingdom by conquering other West African kingdoms, increasing the wealth of his people, and encouraging education. His reign lasted from 1493 to 1529, during which he was recognized as Songhay's most

brilliant ruler for his efforts in making Songhay the largest and most powerful West African state. He was dethroned by his oldest son, Faria Mousa, in 1592. The kingdom survived many power struggles for the throne. In 1589, Emperor Mansour of Morocco invaded Songhay and the kingdom began to decline.

DESTRUCTION OF A PROUD CULTURE

The Sudanese Empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay are only three examples of African culture and the ability of African people to be great warriors and/or leaders. Not only did these African leaders conquer, but they established governmental systems for their land, encouraged cultural and educational growth for their people, and built temples (mosques) that were structurally superior to those built on other continents. Remnants of them remain today. The African people, particularly those on the Eastern Coast of Africa, had also established a trade and commerce system that was superior to their European counterparts.

In West Africa, the region where most Afro-American ancestors originated, agriculture was the foundation for economic existence. Along the coast, fishing was the basis for existence, while in the grassland region livestock provided the economic base. Established intricate socioeconomic institutions existed before the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived seeking unexplored land. He was startled by the advanced civilization he found as he sailed around the Cape of Good Hope. The African people were living in multiple level stone houses, their sailors were extremely advanced navigators (some boats built better than the Portuguese) who had sailed across water not yet explored by their European counterparts.

American history was carved by the infiltration of Europeans into Africa. During the 15th century the African slave trade reached new heights. Europeans took advantage of the conflict between the Sudan Empires and Arab invaders. The Europeans sold guns to both sides, and gold and slaves were taken for payment. Ebony describes this time:

Apologists for the slave trade and European penetration of Africa are apt to point to the many "blessings" which white civilization bestowed on the "Dark Continent." The truth, which has gained increasing acceptance since the emergence of modern

independent African states, stands in stark contradiction to the Peace Corps image which the colonial powers have tried to project. As unflattering as this truth may be to their collective egos, it is a fact that Europeans did not arrive in Africa as builders and healers but--quite to the contrary--as degraders and destroyers of human lives and cultural systems that were in many instances superior to their own. (2:40)

The Europeans discovered land that was unknown to them and started the colonies which would become the 50 states of America. A rich land requiring hours of cultivation placed a heavy demand on owners for laborers to maintain the field. American Indians and White indentured workers were initially used. Their population numbers and the difficulty encountered in confining them indefinitely were some of the factors that made them unfavorable resources for long term laborers. The burden eventually fell on the people of Southwestern Africa. Most were taken as prisoners of tribal wars or deceived by Europeans. The dealing of black flesh became a prosperous industry for the New World Colonies.

MILITARY COMMITMENT

The American colonies expanded and demanded freedom from England. Afro-Americans were present in battles as the colonies fought for their freedom. Controversy often arose as to whether slaves should be allowed to enlist in the Revolutionary Army and take up arms against the British. Crispus Attucks preceded the involvement of Afro-Americans in the Revolutionary Army. He was involved in a conflict between Boston citizens and garrison soldiers from Great Britain's Army. Attucks was a runaway slave who became a sailor and the first person to die for the colonies' struggle for freedom.

During the late 1700's Afro-Americans served proudly in the Colonial Militias. They met great opposition to enlisting in the newly-formed Continental Army after the Revolutionary War. Opposition ranged from fear of Afro-Americans with guns (slave uprising) to the concern that the Army would become a haven for runaway slaves. In 1775, only free Afro-Americans that had previously served could re-enlist in the Continental Army. All others were excluded. In 1777, this exclusion clause was deleted by General George Washington, possibly because his army had

suffered the desertion of nearly three thousand men. By the end of the War, over five thousand Afro-Americans had fought in every major battle for the freedom of men (White men).

The presence of Afro-Americans in every battle fought in the name of the United States of America can be documented throughout history. In most instances, Afro-Americans' capabilities during battle have been, and in some instances are today, unjustly questioned. Afro-Americans have given their best efforts and lives for America. They have not always been recognized to the utmost, but they have been committed from the earliest beginnings (pre-Revolutionary War) to the present (Desert Shield/Storm).

A brief summary of Afro-Americans' involvement/ impact in major wars/conflicts follows:

COLONIAL PERIOD

- o Free Afro-Americans allowed to enlist in the militia.
- o Afro-Americans bore arms during the Tuscarora War (1711) and Yamasee War (1715); they assisted the French in 1730 against the Natchez Indians in Louisiana.
- o Afro-Americans served as officers (first time) during the battle against the Natchez Indians in 1736. (1:9)

REVOLUTIONARY WAR

- o The Boston Massacre of 1770 claimed the life of Crispus Attucks, the first Afro-American to die for the colonial struggle.
- o Afro-American Minutemen fought in the Revolutionary War before the enactment of the "exclusion clause."
- o Lord Dunmore formed the "Ethiopian Regiment" to entice Afro-Americans to assist the British during the war. In return, they would be freed. (1:9)

CIVIL WAR

- o Afro-Americans initially not wanted in the armed forces according to Secretary of War Cameron (1861).
- o The Bureau of Colored Troops created in 1863 by the War Department.
- o Almost 35 percent of Afro-Americans that served in combat became casualties. (1:11-12)

INDIAN CAMPAIGN

- o Indians nickname the Afro-American soldiers serving in the western units "Buffalo Soldiers." (1866-1890)
- o Henry Ossian Flipper becomes the first Afro-American to graduate from West Point. Assigned to the Black regiments in the West. (1:12-13)

WORLD WAR I

- o Presence of the largest number of commissioned Afro-Americans in the Army since they were allowed to enroll.
- o 400,000 Afro-Americans served in WWI but only 10 percent were assigned to combat units.
- o Eugene Jacques Bullard served as an aviator in the French Foreign Legion, a position denied him in the American Armed Forces. (1:13-14)

WORLD WAR II

- o First Afro-American to become a Brigadier General in the regular Armed Forces was Benjamin O. Davis, Sr.
- o Tuskegee Institute became the training grounds for Afro-American fighter pilots. The result was the 99th Pursuit Squadron (99th Fighter Squadron), and 332nd Fighter Group.
- o At Pearl Harbor, on board a Navy ship in the harbor, messman Dorie Miller shoots down six enemy aircraft and is awarded the Navy Cross.

- o First Afro-American officer in the Navy assigned to a submarine chaser (1945). (1:14-16)

KOREAN CONFLICT

- o Integration throughout the Army became possible due to research results on integration and segregation in the Army in both Korea and the U.S. The findings showed that segregated units limited effectiveness and resulted in the last total Afro-American units being dissolved by 1954. (1:16-17)

VIETNAM

- o Larger percentage of Afro-Americans drafted, compared to the total national population.
- o General Daniel "Chappie" James becomes the first Afro-American promoted to four star general. Flew combat missions over Vietnam. (1:17)

DESERT SHIELD/STORM

- o General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest ranking person of the uniformed services.

VIII. AFRO-AMERICAN REPRESENTATION IN TODAY'S ARMED FORCES

The chart that follows outlines the presence of Afro-Americans serving in the military today.

BLACKS IN THE ARMED FORCES

as of September 30, 1991

	Number	Percent	
DOD	Officers	21,193	7.1
	Enlisted	386,609	22.6
	Total	407,802	20.3

USA	Officers	11,528	11.1
	Enlisted	191,358	31.8
	Total	202,886	28.7
USN	Officers	3,026	4.3
	Enlisted	87,488	17.7
	Total	90,514	16.0
USAF	Officers	5,484	5.7
	Enlisted	70,709	17.3
	Total	76,193	15.1
USMC	Officers	1,003	5.1
	Enlisted	34,781	20.0
	Total	35,784	18.5
USCG	Officers	152	2.2
	Enlisted	2,273	7.6
	Total	2,425	6.6

IX. EPILOGUE

This presentation is only a fraction of the impact and history concerning Afro-Americans from their earliest existence in their native homeland (Africa) to their present struggle to flourish in the New World. There are numerous heroes of every era, both known and unknown, that should be saluted. Afro-Americans today are proud of their ancestors' contributions from the Pre-Columbus era to the Space Age.

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