

IN MEMORIAM: CHEIK ANTA DIOP

BY

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There are, in contrast, real works of art translated from the Peul and Wolof dialects of Senegal, and I have found great interest in following the linguistic studies of Cheik Anta Diop.

-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

The recent passing away of Cheik Anta Diop has undoubtedly not only impoverished African historiography which he himself had assisted in establishing by clearing large sections of its landscape which had been hidden by the then dominant colonial historiography, but it has also in many ways weakened and debilitated the strong foundations of African intellectual culture. For Cheik Anta Diop belonged with, among many others, Frantz Fanon, Alioune Diop and Aime Cesaire, to that generation whose task it was to liberate Africa from imperial and colonial domination, and to define culturally and politically the historical uniqueness of Africa in a culture of nations. The historical works of Diop, the political works of Fanon, the poetry of Cesaire and the founding of *Presence Africaine* by Alioune Diop belong together in the historical effort to recover the strong forces of the African genius whose expressiveness and originalness had been silenced and traumatized by three hundred years of colonial domination. Consequently, the contribution of Diop through his historical works should not be seen only in and of itself, in isolation from the contributions of other great and outstanding African intellectuals, but should be seen as part of a historical movement around the Negritude poetic school. The colossal nature of the historical works of Diop demand their being situated within the comparative perspective of black historiography which has recently flourished in Africa and in the African diaspora. In short, the writings of Diop belong in the same temporal and cultural space as the writings of C.L.R. James, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and W.E.B. DuBois. Together they constitute the intellectual space of black historiography. With the exception of Ki-Zerbo, the other historians have developed their historical enterprises within, or adjacent to, historical materialism. Cedric J. Robinson is seriously mistaken when he argues in his huge book of 500-pages, *Black Marxism*, that the structure of African historical experience is absolutely incompatible with the constructs of historical

materialism.(1)

No matter how much Hugh Trevor-Roper may fulminate against the views expressed by E.H. Carr in *What is History ?*, the fact is that Carr in many ways has assisted in establishing a consensus among historians as to what is the object of historical inquiry. According to Carr the essential task of a historian is to find the median ground between history as the objective compilation of facts and history as the subjective product of the mind of the historian.(2) That is, centering history in the present or in the past. In many ways the historian has to establish the interconnection between fact and interpretation. As Carr writes: "... the historian is engaged on a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts."(3) Within this perspective then, history cannot be but an inquiry, which is a process, into the past of man in society.(4) Carr concludes his theorization on the nature of history by observing that history is a science in which its subject and object reciprocally interact with each other. In short, history is not only an endless chain in which past, present and future are inter-linked, but it is also a process by which humanity progressively attains rationality with the aim of understanding and acting upon the environment.(5) It is this lucidity of argumentation and presentation which has compelled assent from many historians representing diverse tendencies. Lucidness is one of the principal characteristics of his greatest work, the fourteen-volume study of the Russian Revolution, which parallels the multi-volume study of the Chinese science and society by Joseph Needham. Within the same intellectual space of English historiography, E.P. Thompson has argued that history as a tradition rather than science possesses its own logic, unique to itself because of the nature of its object and the method of its inquiry. For Thompson history cannot be, and can never be, a science since by its very nature it always approximates, incapable of establishing definitive knowledge. E.P. Thompson taking as his point of departure Sartre's statement to the effect that history is a rational disorder which constructs a structure and in the process of its movement deconstructs it in order to establish it anew and so on, he sees historical logic embodied in the concepts or notions of causation, contradiction, mediation and systematic organisation of social, political, economic and intellectual life.(6) It is the dialectical interaction of these concepts with empirical reality that establishes the nature of historical logic. Not necessarily disputing with the historical logic proposed by Thompson, Perry Anderson contests the view that history cannot be a science, or that historical materialism is not a theory and science of history. In vigorous terms, Anderson indicates that although the object of history continually changes, it is by developing the systematicity of concepts proven by empirical reality in order to capture and fix the structure of invariance ("however much internal variation such a structure may allow"), that any historical discipline can constitute itself as a science of history.(7) Correctly, for him historical materialism is the only science of history. In consequence, and from this

perspective, the object of historical inquiry is the unity of structural changes and the infinity of human behaviour.(8) For any historical discipline, deserving the designation as a scientific enterprise, has to explain as to how conflicting rational interests nonetheless support a coherent social order.(9)

The tradition of black historiography was founded in the African diaspora by two exemplary texts published approximately at the same time: W.E.B. DuBois' *Black Reconstruction in America* and C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*. If Edward W. Blyden's *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* could be designated as a moment in the pre-history of these texts, then undoubtedly Cheik Anta Diop's *Nations negres et culture* and *Anteriorite des civilizations negres* constitute their post-history. It could be mentioned in passing that it was not accidental that at the World Festival of the Black Arts held in Dakar in 1966 Diop and DuBois shared an award as to the writer who had exerted the most profound influence on the development of African-Negro thought in the 20th century. It was an expression of the recognition of the complex interrelationships that these historical works constitute as different intellectual systems. DuBois, in a series of magnificent historical studies, which represent a small portion of his prodigious productivity, beginning with *The Negro* (1915) through *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) to *The World and Africa* (1947), attempted to establish the fundamental historical and cultural patterns and forms of the symbiosis between Africa and the African diaspora. That he succeeded beyond all expectations is attested to by the fact that in the literary sphere, as an example, the literary and cultural criticism of two African scholars, Lewis Nkosi and Ezekiel Mphahlele is involved in a literary discourse with the literary theoretical works of the Afro-American scholar, Houston A. Baker, Jr. *Home and Exile and Other Selections*, *Voices in the Whirlwind* and *The Journey Back*, by the above respective authors, have followed on the pathway opened by the writings of DuBois.

That *Black Reconstruction in America* is one of the historical masterpieces produced by American historiography in the 20th century is beyond dispute. It is not accidental that C.L.R. James has said of it: "... it is likely to continue to be one of the finest history books every written."(10) This is the authoritative judgement of one great historian on the work of another great historian. Among the new things that this book established was to trace at a conceptual level the morphological patterns of the American class structure in the 19th century. In chapters such as "The Black Worker", "The White Worker", "The Planter", and "The Transubstantiation of a Poor White", DuBois situates the phenomenological experiences of the white working class and the black plantation workers within the sociological coordinates of American history, the Civil War, the contradictory nature of the capitalist formation in America, -between the industrializing states of the North and the plantation states of the South, and the peculiar nature of

American state institutions, which were then in the process of embryonic development. Within this complex context, DuBois traces the political consciousness and cultural formation of both the black and white workers. The vicissitudes of this political consciousness is related to the differential tempo and form in the splay of the capitalist mode of production across the American landscape. The temporal and the geographical spaces of Slave revolts is cartographed. This 700-page masterpiece ends with an examination of the politics of the Civil War and of the Reconstruction as they affected the fate and fortunes of the African peoples in America. What is even more remarkable, is that DuBois connects this complex American historical tableaux to the Paris Commune of 1871 and the formation of Marx's International Workingmen's Association. The counter-revolution that followed Reconstruction is interwoven into the nature of American property system. Black Reconstruction in America was truly innovative within American historiography in its wedding together of a brilliant theoretical structure, intuitive realism, empirical evidence and statistical data. The stony silence it received upon its publication was partly because of its Marxist provenance. In it, the facts and their interpretation formed an exemplary unity. It is because of the absolute brilliance displayed in it, that the leading American Marxist historian today, Eugene Genovese, has said something to the effect that wherever he has been in his books in the study of the slave system in the antebellum South, DuBois was there before him. There could hardly be a greater tribute than this.

In a duo of booklets on Africa, which are not widely known and prefigure *The World and Africa*, DuBois deals with two central issues of African historiography which have found continuation in the historical works of Cheikh Anta Diop. These two nodes are: the contribution of Africa to world civilization and culture, and the reasons for Africa's cultural stagnation from the 16th century onwards. In these booklets of 1930, respectively *Africa, Its Geography, People and Products*, and *Africa--Its Place in Modern History*, he indicates the configuration of these issues. In one of the texts he writes: "Africa is an old and storied continent. It is probable that out of Africa came the first civilization of the world, and certainly, in that continent the tragedy of the history of mankind has played its greatest part. To the Grecian world, to the Roman Empire, as well as to the American and modern European world, Africa has been of supreme importance, and it is well worth while to know something of its peculiar situation, history and meaning."⁽¹¹⁾ In the other text he says: "It would be conservative, then, to say that the slave trade cost Negro Africa 1000,000 souls. And yet people ask today the cause of the stagnation of African culture since 1600! Such a large number of slaves could be supplied only by organized slave raiding in every corner of Africa. The African continent gradually became revolutionized. Whole regions were depopulated, whole tribes disappeared; villages were built in caves and on hills or in forest fastness; the character of

peoples like those of Benin developed their worst excesses of cruelty instead of the already flourishing arts of peace. The dark, irresistible grasp of fetish took firmer hold on men's minds. Further advances toward civilization became impossible."(12) DuBois in *The World and Africa* deepened this thesis by supporting it with irrefutable historical evidence and writing in part: "Despite this, it is one of the astonishing results of the written history of Africa, that almost unanimously in the nineteenth century Egypt was not regarded as part of Africa. Its history and culture were separated from that of the other inhabitants of Africa... The Greeks looked upon Egypt as part of Africa not only geographically but culturally, and every fact of history and anthropology proves that the Egyptians were an African people... It is especially significant that the science of Egyptology arose and flourished at the very time that the cotton kingdom reached its greatest power on the foundation of American Negro slavery. We may then without further ado ignore this verdict of history, widespread as it is, and treat Egyptian history as an integral part of African history."(13) Indeed, it would be interesting to investigate the parallels between Egyptology and Orientalism, the Orientalism which Edward W. Said in his impressive study *Orientalism* showed it falsifying in many ways the history and culture of the Near Eastern peoples as part of imperialist penetration in the early nineteenth century to the present. Of course, it does not follow that all scholars in the fields of Orientalism and Egyptology are/were of this dubious calibre. Continuing to elaborate on his argument, DuBois further writes: "We conclude, therefore, that the Egyptians were Negroids, and not only that, but by tradition they believed themselves descended not from the whites or the yellows, but from the black peoples of the south. Thence they traced their origin, and toward the south in earlier days they turned the faces of their buried corpses."(14) Cheikh Anta Diop follows in this great tradition of black historiography.

But before situating Diop within this tradition, it is necessary to say a few observations about another colossal figure who precedes him, and occupies a preeminent position in it: I refer to C.L.R. James. E.P. Thompson, the great English historian has said of James: "What an extraordinary man he is! It is not a question of whether one agrees with everything he has said or done: but everything has had the mark of originality, of his own flexible, sensitive and deeply cultured intelligence. That intelligence has always been matched by a warm and outgoing personality."(15) It is this sharp intelligence that C.L.R. James has applied with tremendous vigour to the historical and cultural problems that have faced Africa and the African diaspora. Perhaps only a small coterie of people would dispute the view that James' book of 1938, *The Black Jacobins*, which is a historical masterpiece, is his greatest work. Though the book concerns itself with the events surrounding the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803, the only successful slave revolt in human history, in an essay of 1976, "George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary", James indicates that the real reason for writing the

book was to show Africans what they would possibly have to do in order to liberate themselves from colonial and imperialist domination.(16) Surely, this has to be the one supreme instance in which a particular past is seriously studied in order actively to influence and intervene in the present. The historical works of Cheikh Anta Diop follow this pattern of black historiography. For James history was an interlocked process of the dialectical unity of the past, present and future. It is not for nothing that one of his collection of essays is called, *The Future in the Present* .

The importance of the Haitian revolution within the Latin American context, was to indicate that colonial domination could be overthrown through force of arms. It was the ignitor or detonator of the liberation struggles in the early nineteenth century history of South America. Consequently, when Simon Bolivar was defeated in his first attempt to liberate Latin America from Spanish and Portuguese domination, it was in the newly liberated Haiti that he received material assistance in the form of arms, and from there that he launched the liberation struggle.(17) The Haitian revolution requested of him that wherever he was successful in liberating a country, he should abolish slavery. Simon Bolivar never went back on his promise. Within the Pan-African context, as James makes clear in his book, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* , the revolution of Toussaint Louverture was an inspirer, of the slave revolts in the 1840's of the American South led by Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, of the Kimbangu movement in the Congo of 1921, of Clement Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of South Africa in the early 1920's, and of the Mau Mau national uprising in the colonial Kenya of the 1950's.(18) In other words, the Haitian revolution, its form and nature, and its subsequent tragic history, is a central element of any African historiography. The lessons of the Haitian revolution have not as yet exhausted themselves as we approach the looming revolution in South Africa. Hence, the perspective from which C.L.R. James wrote *The Black Jacobins* was to distill the lessons of the Haitian revolution for the African revolution. For James, undoubtedly also for Cheikh Anta Diop, one of the principal roles of African historiography is political and cultural demystification. This is in view of the pernicious role of colonial historiography which continues to the present, albeit in disguised forms.

Without necessarily entering into the complex structure of *The Black Jacobins* , one may observe that what makes it compelling reading is its tremendous narrative drive which places it next to Garrett Mattingly's *Renaissance Diplomacy* . In both works, it is the narration of individual lives and social forces which propels their structure, in contradistinction to Perry Anderson's *Lineages of the Absolutist State* , which has inaugurated a new era in modern historiography in examining the genealogy of the international State institution of Absolutism that emerged at the dusk of the Carolingian era and approximately

traversed six centuries to collapse at the dawn of the socialist era signaled by the October revolution. The Black Jacobins is a central emblem in contemporary historiography. But more of immediate relevance to us is its contemporaneousness with Aime Cesaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Return to My Native Land), published within a year of each other in the middle 1930's. What James says of Cesaire's great hymn celebrating the wanderings of the black historical imagination equally applies to his historical works: that it connects the African sphere of existence with the Western sphere of existence; that the past of mankind and future of mankind are historically and logically interconnected; and that Africa and Africans should express their historical uniqueness in the process of integration into world culture.(19) Need it be doubted that this great legacy is carried forth to our generation through the historical works of Cheikh Anta Diop! The intonation that needs repeating is this: "The foundation of all that we are doing, the intellectual foundation, is the work, for the most part, of a distinguished American scholar, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois."(20) Its continuation takes different and complex forms, but its origins in him is incontrovertible.

It has been Africa's great fortune to have had two great historians in Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Cheikh Anta Diop. Whereas the former's incomparable contribution is in broaching the complex methodological issues and problems in African history, the latter's unsurpassable contribution has been in demystifying a contentious zone of African history by giving it to the African peoples. In three superlative essays in Unesco General History of Africa volume one, whose editor he was, Ki-Zerbo articulates the historical and philosophical principles that ought to critically guide the writing of African history. In the "General Introduction" to this particular volume, he writes the following statement: "The history of Africa, like the history of mankind as a whole, is really the story of an awakening. The history of Africa needs rewriting, for up till now it has often been masked, faked, distorted, mutilated, by 'force of circumstance' - i.e. through ignorance or self-interest. Crushed by centuries of oppression, Africa has seen generations of travellers, slave traders, explorers, missionaries, governors, and scholars of all kinds give out its image as one of nothing but poverty, barbarism, irresponsibility and chaos. And this image has been projected and extrapolated indefinitely in time, as a justification of both the present and the future."(21) Joseph Ki-Zerbo indicates the severe difficulties attendant upon the writing of African history: the nature of the physical geography of the continent; the severe demographic drain caused by slave trade; and the very vastness of the continent itself.(22) Nonetheless, he specifies the three main sources of historical knowledge of Africa: written documents, archaeology and oral tradition.(23) It is in view of these complications and difficulties that he proposes four research principles that could possibly push African historiography towards new frontiers: African history should be undertaken in an interdisciplinary form or within such a

structure; it must uncompromisingly be viewed from an inner perspective; and it must unquestionably be the history of the peoples of the African continent; and it must avoid being too narrative, its point of approach should be conceptual and systematic.(24) Written in such a manner, or within such a perspective, African historiography would be able to show the great contributions of African history to world civilization, and the essential links between African history and world history. In such a form African history would become and constitute the fundamental right of the African peoples.(25)

The other two essays by Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "The Place of History in African Society" and "Africa's pre-historic Art" are part of the monumental edifice that he has contributed to the theorizing and constructing of African history. They are part of the many essays that Ki-Zerbo has written on our history, some of which appeared in the early 1960's issues of *Presence Africaine* and his great book, *Die Geschichte Schwarz-Afrikas* (26). Together these historiographical works of his have made African history, for the first time in modern times, to be African centered and not European centered, as it had been in the past. That is, when African history was acknowledged to exist at all. For it must be remembered that the great Hegel had contested the existence of African history, writing to the effect that Africa was not a historical continent because it lacked change and development. In the same book, *Philosophy of History*, he also said that the African people were not capable of development nor of being educated. In many ways, Hegel was reinforcing the historical prejudices planted in the European mind against Africa by David Hume. In our time, the same Hugh Trevor-Roper, whom earlier we saw fulminating against Carr's brilliant exposition on the nature of the historical project, has written that Africa possesses no creditable history since it is an area of darkness, and darkness is not a subject of history.(27) If there is any history at all, it is the history of Europeans in Africa. The congenital prejudice of some European scholars is amazing and breath-taking, perhaps not so amazing when it is remembered that it is a continuation of a tradition founded in modern times by Gobineau. But then, whatever doubts some of his constructions might bring to a mind of a scholar of African history, the writings of Frobenius on African history, culture and civilization have irrefutably established its existence. It is not surprising that Frobenius had at one time a great influence on Aime Cesaire(28), perhaps indirectly also on Cheikh Anta Diop. The case of Hugh Trevor-Roper is puzzling for in his country, England, A. H.M. Jones, perhaps the foremost twentieth-century scholar on Roman history, had written a book called, *A History of Ethiopia*, in which he presented a short but comprehensive account of Ethiopian history.(29) The political context of the writing of this book, which Jones himself does not mention, was in indirect to refute the absurd claims of Mussolini that Ethiopia was part of Italian soil. What A.H.M. Jones achieved here, was to integrally situate Ethiopia at the center of African history and to trace the longevity of its dynasticism. In other words,

Jones had drawn the elementary forms of African history of a particular country a full three decades before Trevor-Roper made his asinine remarks.

An equally puzzling instance is that of J.D. Fage, whose essay "The Development of African Historiography" also forms part of volume one of Unesco General History of Africa , neglects to mention A.H.M. Jones' contribution to the emergence of African historiography. But then, there are many things fage does not mention or does not seem to know, in spite of the fact that in some European liberal circles he is taunted as one of the leading scholars of African history. In his vast survey, Sheikh Anta Diop is conspicuous by his absence. His work is passed over in silence, a silence that refuses to acknowledge its originality and greatness. J.D. Fage, in this same essay, insinuates darkly about the intellectual integrity of these outstanding sons of Africa, J.A.B. Horton, E.W. Blyden, J.M. Sarbah, J.E. Casely-Hayford and J.B. Danquah, for he feels that their writings on African history were merely propaganda.(30) The absurdity of this charge does not deserve a response. This same Fage over the last six years, in the review pages of The Times Literary Supplement , reviewing practically each publication of the Unesco General History of Africa as they appeared, has been waging a furious battle against the contributions of Africans to African historiography. He has lodged several unsupportable claims: that the historical writings of Cheikh Anta Diop were false and fabrications that the latest published volume of Unesco General History of Africa , covering the period approximately from the partitionings of Africa to the 1930's, was too much falsely influenced by the historiography written from the perspective of African nationalism; and lastly, that the recent Nobel Prize winner in Literature, Wole Soyinka, was unqualified to make a contribution to a volume concerned with historical matters, even though his essay was on the historical development of the arts in Africa. Concerning the matter on Wole Soyinka, in a recent letter to the Editor of The Times Literary Supplement , Chinweizu has effectively put that charge to waste, even winning the accent of a later English contributor. Concerning the matter in relation to Diop, Fage has been unable to dislodge the historical finds of Cheikh Anta Diop, precisely because they are irrefutable scientific findings. One thing is absolutely certain, and that is, contemporary European liberal historiography on Africa, at least large portions of it, is merely a continuation, though subtle and hidden, of imperial colonial historiography on Africa.

The historical works of Cheikh Anta Diop have aroused violent responses against them in many European historical circles. Since these responses are hardly ever substantive and lack the most elementary forms of scientific procedures, they need not detain us here nor worry us unduly. They are manifestations of European intellectual uncertainties and premeditated ideological confusions. The works of Diop demand a dispassionate evaluation and appraisal. In fact, he

always requests this of his European colleagues, but to no avail. It should perhaps be stated here in passing that the historical works of Cheikh Anta Diop find supportive evidence in the work of the American black scholar, Frank Snowden's *Blacks in Antiquity*. Diop in the preface called "The Meaning of Our Work" to *Myth or Reality* (an integration of ten chapters from *Nations negres et culture* and three from *Anteriorite des civilisations negres : mythe ou verite historique ?*), writes that three factors form the collective personality of a people: the psychic factor, the historical and the linguistic factor.(31) The last two factors have been at the center of his historical enterprise. The primary aim of Diop's historical project was to scientifically and historically prove that ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. The rest of the book is dedicated to proving this thesis. That he succeeds is beyond a shadow of a doubt, that is, given our present state of historical knowledge. What is interesting is that in the middle of the book Diop states that this thesis was accepted as a self-evident truth for millenia stretching from classical antiquity to Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt in 1799.(32) It was at this political and historical juncture that Egyptology emerged on the back of imperialism to retroactively deny that ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. In its stead, a new thesis was formulated, to the effect that ancient Egypt has always been and will ever be a part of white civilization. The endeavour of Cheikh Anta Diop has been to dislodge this false thesis.

In an essay of bravura brilliance Diop displays for the benefit of the scientific community and public forum the nature of his scientific and historical procedures in formulating his thesis and proving that ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. In this essay, "Origin of the Ancient Egyptians", in the second volume of *Unesco General History of Africa*, Diop gives reason and methods for establishing his thesis: melanin dosage test, osteological measurements, blood-groups, the Egyptian race according to the classical authors of Antiquity, the Egyptians as they saw themselves, the divine paths, witness the bible, cultural data and linguistic affinity.(33) These procedures vary in their cogency and complexity, and it would not serve any particular purpose to tabulate the procedural structure for each of them. A few will suffice here. Concerning how the classical authors of Antiquity viewed the Egyptians, these two examples assembled by Cheikh Anta Diop are interesting in and of themselves. Herodotus, the father of history, has written: "It is in fact manifest that the Colchidians are Egyptian by race..... several Egyptians told me that in their opinion the Colchidians were descended from soldiers of Sesostrius. I had conjectured as much myself from two pointers, firstly because they have black skins and kinky hair... and secondly and more reliably for the reason that alone among mankind the Egyptians and the Ethiopians have practised circumcision since time immemorial."(34) Equally Aristotle in his book *Physiognomy*, has this: "Those who are too black are cowards, like for instance, the Egyptians and Ethiopians. But those who are excessively white are also cowards as we can see from the example of women,

the complexion of courage is between the two."(35) The prejudice of Aristotle against women and blacks should not detract us from the central point at issue here. It would be difficult to disagree with Goerg Lukacs when he says that Aristotle with Marx and Hegel is one of the greatest philosophers known in human history. Diop also assembles the views of Lucian and Diogenes Laertius, among many others. Concerning osteological measurements, Diop writes: "Among the criteria accepted in physical anthropology for classifying races, the osteological measurements are perhaps the least misleading (in contrast to craniometry) for distinguishing a black man from a white man. By this criterion, also, the Egyptians belong among the black races."; and in relation to melanin dosage test, Diop says: "In practice it is possible to determine directly the skin colour and hence the ethnic affiliations of the ancient Egyptians by microscopic analysis in the laboratory....Either way let us simply say that the evaluation of melanin level by microscopic examination is a laboratory method which enables to classify the ancient Egyptians unquestionably among the black races."(36) Through a complex analysis of the Egyptian symbolic system, which is beyond the competence of our understanding, Diop shows that the Egyptians viewed themselves as Negroid. All in all, the historical findings of Diop are incontrovertible.

Nonetheless, given the fact that historical knowledge by its very nature is provisional and subject to constant revision, as E.P. Thompson has recently passionately and convincingly argued, the findings of Cheikh Anta Diop should be accepted with an element of caution. The carefully chosen words of the Egyptian historian Gamal Mokhtar, introducing the Unesco General History of Africa volume in which the above-mentioned Diop's essay appears, cannot be summarily dismissed out of hand, for he argues for the apparent lack of hard historical evidence in many matters concerning ancient Egyptian civilization.(37) He argues further, that because of the absence of firm documentary, many scholars in this area of African history have to work with many suppositions. Then Gamal Mokhtar writes: "Nevertheless, it is highly doubtful whether the inhabitants that introduced civilization into the Nile valley ever belonged to one single, pure race. The very history of the people of the valley refutes such a possibility....If an Egyptian race ever existed - and this is open to doubt - it was the result of mixtures whose basic elements varied in time as well as in space."(38) Now this disagreement with the views of Cheikh Anta Diop is legitimate within the climate of scholarly debate, however contentious the issue may be. What is curious about Mokhtar's exposition is that it lacks even minimum historical citations, very unusual in a controversial historical exposition. That speaks volumes. But then, that is legitimate, as I said. However, what is not legitimate, and totally unacceptable, is for Mokhtar as an editor a volume in which Diop's essay appears, to pin at the end of Diop's exposition that the historical findings of Diop were found unacceptable by a commission of

Unesco historians planning the form of Ancient Civilizations of Africa volume of the Unesco General History of Africa , which is questionable. Here then, unquestionably, Gamal Mokhtar becomes an instrument of discord to sow bitterness among African historians, if not among African intellectuals. Does Gamal Mokhtar for an instant, suppose that Europeans historians who constituted a majority in such an assembly and for whom they appear as a court of appeal, are completely disinterested in the historical writings of Cheik Anta Diop? If one can judge from J.D. Fage's tiresome fulminations against Diop, that does not seem to be the case. But it's pleasing to note that at the end of their respective essays, both Gamal Mokhtar and Cheikh Anta Diop agree on something. Mokhtar writes: "Despite the flaws in our knowledge of the Pharaonic civilization to which we have just drawn attention, that civilization nevertheless occupies a primordial place in the history of ancient Africa."(39) Diop equally writes: "Egyptian antiquity is to African culture what Graeco-Roman antiquity is to Western culture. The building up of a corpus of African humanities should be based on this fact."(40) One looks forward to that world when the great historical writings of Cheikh Anta Diop will no longer be necessary, that is a world beyond class oppression, free of all forms of oppression and racism. The works of Diop unquestionably bring that era much closer to us.

It is beyond doubting that the works of Diop will remain controversial for a long time to come, and some of its arguments will be definitely revised. In that sense, what E.P. Thompson says of historical materialism, would seem to hold true also for the historical writings of Cheikh Anta Diop: "The court has been sitting in judgement upon historical materialism for one hundred years, and it is continually being adjourned. The adjournment is in effect a tribute to the robustness of the tradition; in that long interval the cases against a hundred other interpretive systems have been upheld, and the culprits have disappeared 'downstairs'. That the court has not yet found decisively in favour of historical materialism is not only because of the ideological parti pris of certain judges (although there is plenty of that) but also because of the provisional nature of the explanatory concepts, the actual silence (or absent mediations) within them, the primitive and unreconstructed character of some of the categories, and the inconclusive determinacy of the evidence." (The Poverty of Theory , p. 237)

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