

# Deconstructing Pseudo-Scientific Anthropology: Anténor Firmin and the Reconceptualization of African Humanity

by

Gershon Williams

bennuinstitute@yahoo

Adjunct Professor of African-American History and African-American Studies,  
Mesa Community College, Mesa, Arizona;  
Co-founder, The Bennu Institute of Arizona

*“The science of inequality is emphatically a science of White people. It is they who have invented it, and set it going, who have maintained, cherished and propagated it, thanks to their observations and their deductions.” –Jean Finot-Race Prejudice (1907)*

*“A preponderance of (fossil) and genetic evidence has revealed, virtually beyond a doubt, that the same Europeans who created the idea of race and White supremacy are the genetic progeny of the very Africans they devalued.” – Salim Muwakkil – Chicago Tribune*

## Abstract

Euro-American ideas and assumptions regarding African innate inferiority and racial inequality are central to the pseudo-scientific ‘race myth’ of White supremacy. In their search to find an expedient explanation, rationalization and justification for the horrific holocaust of enslavement, Europeans and later White Americans developed the international thesis and concept of African biological and intellectual inferiority.

In this exploratory essay, I am endeavoring to present a critical review of the anti-racist, vindicationist tradition of African American and Haitian intellectuals who challenged, rejected and refuted the ‘scientific racism’ of Euro-American ethnologists, Egyptologists, anthropologists, historians, philosophers, and physicians.

In another essay that we discuss in the contents of this manuscript, anti-racist theorists Stepan and Gilman argue that those stigmatized and stereotyped by the ideology of ‘scientific racism’ published prolific counter narratives that remain obscured and unrecognized by the historians of mainstream science.

What did the men and women of African descent in the diaspora, categorized by the biological, medical and anthropological sciences as racially inferior have to say about the matter? How did they respond to the charges and claims made about them in the name of science? In seeking to provide credible answers to the latter questions, we are re-visiting the powerful and illuminating publications by Black American and Haitian writers of the pre-Antènor Firmin era which are viable proof of the vindicationist tradition inherent among diasporan Black intellectuals. This school or community of literate intellectuals boldly offers a passionate and consistent rhetoric of resistance to economic and psychological enslavement and the mis-education of their people.

This essay remembers and pays homage to those public intellectuals of the early and late nineteenth century who dared to disagree with popular opinion and proceeded to debate the dangerous discourse of race and the fallacy of White supremacy. Central to our narrative are the names and voices of David Walker, Lydia Maria Child, Frederick Douglass, Martin R. Delaney and George Washington Williams. All of the aforementioned writers preceded the publication of Haitian scholar and statesmen Joseph Antènor Firmin's *The Equality of the Human Races* in 1885. Haitian anthropologist, Egyptologist, Pan-Africanist and politician J. Antènor Firmin did not rise out of an intellectual vacuum to conduct study and research for his massive and masterful manuscript.

As I attempt to demonstrate in this paper, there is a long standing pre and post Firmin intellectual tradition in the United States and Haiti during the early nineteenth and continuing throughout the twentieth century. Like many of the intellectuals already mentioned, Antènor Firmin (a descendant of the Haitian intellectual Maroons) obviously did not possess an inferiority complex. He was not intellectually intimidated by the dominant thinking and behavior of the advocates of racial ranking and hierarchy.

A bold and brilliant thinker, he re-envisioned and re-conceptualized the image and pre-colonial cultural heritage of African descended people. Lastly, my essential purpose in presenting this paper is to convey to the reader(s) that prior to the invention and propagation of the 'race myth', the concept and belief in Black inferiority was non-existent.

As classicist historian Frank M. Snowden Jr. writes in his iconic text, *Before Color Prejudice; The Ancient View of Blacks*, "...Nothing comparable to the virulent color prejudice of modern times existed in the ancient world. This is the view of most scholars who have examined the evidence and who have come to conclusions such as these: The ancients did not fall into the error of biological racism; Black skin color was not a sign of inferiority..." (Snowden 1983: 63) By confronting and deconstructing the multitude of racial myths and stereotypes fashioned by Euro-Americans centuries ago, Antènor Firmin and others who believed in liberty, equality and fraternity could dismantle and destroy the foundational pillars of scientific racism. It is indeed instructive to remember what anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits stated a half century ago. "...The myth of the Negro (African) past is one of the principal supports of race prejudice in this country..."

## Introduction

In studying the post 1492 Western intellectual heritage and tradition, one can easily discern the centrality of White racial superiority, operating as a collective core value in Euro-American life and culture. This clearly manifested reality of Caucasian de-spirituality and psychic imbalance is well documented in articles, essays and textbooks authored by both the oppressor and the colonized oppressed.

From the leaders of early slave resistance and revolts in the Caribbean, Brazil, and the United States to David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Dubois, Woodson, Garvey, Malcolm and Fanon, they have all been correct in stating that “the key to the White man’s impact has been in his influence on other people’s minds.” The aforementioned writers have been eloquent in documenting the subversion of their people’s minds and lives. The premise of so-called third world authors says that the most devastating impact of the White man was fundamentally psychological. (Gladwin and Saidin 1980, introduction) As author Toni Morrison has so succinctly stated, “A good deal of time and intelligence has been invested in the exposure of racism and the horrific results on its objects...That well established study should be joined with another, equally important one: the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it...The scholarship that looks into the mind, imagination, and behavior of slaves is valuable. But equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters.” (Morrison 1992: 11-12)

As though she was instinctively anticipating the intellectual recommendation of Morrison, anthropologist and author Marimba Ani has written one of the most comprehensive and elucidating African centered studies of Euro-American consciousness and worldview. Her text is titled, *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (1994). From the introduction written by the late Professor John Henrik Clarke, we extract the following: “...In their conquest of the minds of most of mankind, they have been able to convince themselves and others that they were indispensable to civilization and without them, it would not have existed...In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Europeans not only colonized most of the world, they colonized information about the world. They developed monopoly control over concepts and images. The hallmark of their colonization in this regard was the colonization of the image of God.”

In *Yurugu*, Ani attempts to uncover the roots of anti-Africanism and European imperialistic consciousness in the discipline of anthropology. In her introduction to the text she writes, “The secret Europeans discovered early in their history is that culture carries rules for thinking, and that if you could impose your culture on your victims, you could limit the creativity of their vision, destroying their ability to act with will and intent and in their own best interest...This book discusses the evolution of that process of imposition as well as the characteristics of cultural beings who find it necessary to impose their will on others. It is not a simple process to explain since the tools we need in order to dissect it have been taken from us through colonial mis-education.” (Ani 1994; 1-3)

or military weapons. “The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one vast wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves...with other people’s languages rather than their own.” (Mills 1997: 88-89, Asante 1990: 119-120)

Racism (White Supremacy) as an ideology, needs to be understood as aiming at the minds of non-White, people of color, as well as the mindset of White folks inculcating subjugation. Religious and philosophical racism in the early era of the American republic soon blossomed into scientific and institutional racism visibly apparent in the social science disciplines of history and anthropology.

The dogma and doctrine of the Euro-American ‘race myth’ was crafted, disseminated and embraced by mainstream academics and laypersons, all whom ingested and internalized the venomous rhetoric of racial ranking and hierarchy. African American, Haitian, Brazilian and diasporan intellectual resistance and rejection of scientific racism has also been constantly prevalent. Once Africans exiled and enslaved in the Western world achieved competent levels of literacy in the colonial language, they struggled to vindicate their humanity and to aggressively combat the dominate culture’s attempts to disrespect, misrepresent and de-humanize them.

## **Black Intellectual Resistance to Scientific Racism in History and Anthropology**

According to renowned author and anti-racist theorist, Toni Morrison, African-Americans despite their enslavement and oppression in America, collectively have voiced counter-arguments that passionately attempted to venerate their humanity and combat the ‘race’ myth. She writes, “For three hundred years Black Americans’ insisted that ‘race’ was no usefully distinguishing factor in human relationships. During these same three centuries every academic discipline...insisted that ‘race’ was the determining factor in human development.” (Morrison 1989: 3)

Speaking at the annual meeting of *The Organization of American Historians*, Leon Litwack professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley indicted past historians for perpetuating racism. He called on his present day colleagues to help heal this intellectual wounding of American minds. “No group of scholars was more deeply implicated in the mis-education of American youth and did more to shape the thinking of generations of Americans about race and Blacks than historians...whether by neglect or distortion, the scholarly monographs and textbooks they authored perpetuated racial myths and stereotypes.” (Litwack 1987: 2)

racism and imperialism...Every Eurocentric social institution conspires with Eurocentric historiography to handcuff and incarcerate Afrikan consciousness.” However, I would hasten to include another significant group of highly influential academics, who must also bear the blame and share the shame for propagandizing pseudo-scientific racism.

Anthropologists, particularly since the mid nineteenth century and beyond, have written and spoken in favor of racial hierarchies and socio-economic inequalities. Since the genesis of the Euro-American school of anthropology, numerous proponents of the White superiority/Black inferiority ‘race myth’ have articulated racist dogma and data that attempted to provide a convenient rationalization for the enslavement and colonial oppression of African and Native American people.

Beginning in the mid nineteenth century, the racist theories of Arthur de Gobineau *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853-1855) and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, (an intellectual mentor of Adolph Hitler) and numerous others sought to give the stamp of scientific approval to theories of mental and intellectual differences according to race. According to the false and fabricated ideology of the latter racist thinkers, people of African ancestry have long been regarded in the Western tradition as biologically and intellectually inferior to Whites and Asians.

These early ‘hereditarian’ theories followed the belief also propagated by the ‘polygenist thesis’ that racial differences had existed from the beginning of humanity. Initiated by the influential French anatomist Georges Cuvier, who in the early nineteenth century classified or categorized modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) as divided into three major subspecies; Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian. Each of these was further subdivided on the grounds of geographic, linguistic and physical differences. In 1817, Cuvier, commenting upon the French description of Egyptian antiquities said that the ancient Egyptians had skulls resembling Europeans. Judging by cranial capacity, Cuvier also stated that the Mongolian race had reached a plateau of development sometime in the past and that the Negro race had never progressed beyond barbarism. (Hoover 1976: 122) Cuvier represented the races as constituting a natural hierarchal ladder. This same line of reasoning was further developed in an international school of racial typology publically expressed in Britain by Charles Hamilton Smith (1848), and Robert Knox (1850), in France by Arthur de Gobineau (1853), in the United States by Samuel Morton (1839, 1844), Josiah Clark Nott and George Robbins Gliddon (1854) and in Germany by Karl Vogt (1863). This school has often been referred to as that of ‘scientific racism’.

Another prominent contributor to the early American school of ethnological anthropology was the Harvard naturalist Louis Agassiz who joined the university faculty in 1846. While teaching at Harvard, Agassiz developed an intense interest in the origins of the human species. Initially he subscribed to the single origin or monogenetic theory. After four years in the racially charged

antebellum climate, he underwent a significant intellectual conversion that led him to believe Negroes were a separate species altogether.

According to Professor of Anthropology Lee D. Baker in his landmark text, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race* (1896-1954), two important events led to Agassiz's conversion. The first was meeting Samuel Morton and viewing his collection of human skulls in Philadelphia. Morton had curated for his private use, one of the world's foremost collection of skulls and he also taught anatomy to medical students. Morton used his extensive collection as a data base to write two major publications: *Crania Americana; or A Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America* (1839), and *Crania Egyptiaca; or Observations on Egyptian Ethnography, Derived from Anatomy, History and the Monuments* (1844).

In his analysis of certain Egyptian skulls, Morton proceeded to claim the ancient Egyptians of the Nile Valley- Nubian civilization as Caucasoid Whites. He also inaccurately linked cranial capacity with moral and intellectual endowments (as Gobineau and other racial thinkers would do). Morton established a racial ranking scheme that placed the larger brained Caucasians at the apex and Africoid people at the very bottom of his cranial ladder. Recently, Harvard biologist Stephen Jay Gould, author of *The Mis-Measure of Man* (1981, 1996), re-examined Morton's conclusions and determined his racially flawed findings "stand as one of the most important revelations of the fallacy of objectivity in science." (Gould 1996: 87-98) The second event that impacted the conversion of Agassiz also occurred in Philadelphia. Apparently, Agassiz had his first encounter with African-Americans in a Philadelphia hotel and was deeply disturbed by their Africoid features. When a Black waiter approached his table, it is said that he wanted to flee. "What unhappiness for the White race," he exclaimed, "to have tied their existence so closely with that of Negroes...this is a degraded and degenerate race." (Baker1998: 15-16).

I feel the need to momentarily digress a bit to address the issue of 'first encounters' between Africans and Europeans from an African centered point of view. The following commentary written by literary giant James Baldwin captures and expresses this experience in a brilliant and elucidating manner. "I thought of White men arriving for the first time in an African village, strangers there, as I am a stranger here, and I tried to imagine the astounded populace touching their hair and marveling at the color of their skin. But there is a great difference between being the first White man to be seen by Africans and being the first Black man to be seen by Whites. The White man takes the astonishment as tribute, for he arrives to conquer and convert the natives whose inferiority in relation to himself is not even to be questioned, whereas I, without a thought of conquest, find myself among a people whose culture controls me, has even in a sense, created me, people who have cost me more in anguish and rage than they will ever know, who yet do not even know of my existence.

The astonishment with which I might have greeted them should they have stumbled into my African village a few hundred years ago, might have rejoiced their hearts. But the astonishment with which they greet me today can only poison mine." (Hooks1992:166-167).

The early American school of anthropology subscribed to strong pro-slavery views while laboring to scientifically prove their racist claims with biased and distorted data. The origins of American anthropology coincided and developed ironically in the midst of the social, political and ideological unrest that culminated in the horrific Civil War. As a matter of fact, between 1830 and 1860, both pro-slavery and abolitionist arguments gained momentum and support from religious and scientific sources.

After the legal emancipation of enslaved Africans, with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865, a new wave of extreme fear, hatred and violence was unleashed in the American south. Accompanying the latter racial bitterness and strife, were a number of popular books, articles and research papers promoting new theories of race. Many of these ideas were far more extreme than those widely circulated and embraced during the antebellum era. It was now dangerous emotions and not rational thinking that drove biased researchers toward this new narrow path of anti-Black, anti-African racial pseudo-science.

According to writer Hannah Arendt, racial ranking and classification might have disappeared over time if European imperialism had not taken its exploits and adventures into “dark and mysterious” Africa during the advent of academic anthropology. During the season of what’s referred to as the “scramble for Africa”, (1884-1885), the racist notion of the ‘White man’s burden’ and ‘Social Darwinism’ emerged with the supposed sacred duty to rescue and save the primitive, savage and uncivilized Africans from their barbarism.

Arendt states, “It is highly probable that the thinking in terms of race would have disappeared in due time with other irresponsible opinions of the nineteenth century, if the ‘scramble for Africa’ and the new era of imperialism had not exposed Western humanity to new and shocking experiences. Imperialism would have necessitated the invention of racism (scientific) as the only possible ‘explanation’ and excuse for its deeds even if no race-thinking had ever existed in the civilized world.”(Mudimbe1988:108)

Arendt’s optimistic supposition regarding the phasing out of racial ranking may be applicable to the nations of Europe who aggressively maneuvered to gain colonial control over most of the African continent, except for Ethiopia and Liberia. But, in the United States, the post-reconstruction period roughly from 1880 to 1920, has been properly termed the ‘Nadir’, the lowest point in the African-American experience since the abolishment of Chattel Slavery. Coined by historian Rayford Logan, this forty year time span saw the unprecedented reality of racially motivated hate crimes of violence, such as brutal mob attacks and public lynchings targeting thousands of Black men and women.

This domestic racial terrorism against the Black community is clearly illustrated with the ‘Red Summer’ race riots of 1919 and by the Tulsa, Oklahoma and Rosewood, Florida town massacres (or holocausts) of 1921 and 1923. Whether the ‘scramble for Africa’ would have taken place or not, racial hatred and hostilities in America wouldn’t have lessened or abated, and moreover, there is one last comment that should be shared on the subject.

In 1915, the Ku Klux Klan experienced a phenomenal national re-birth after President Woodrow Wilson viewed and approved D.W. Griffith's propaganda motion picture film, "*Birth of a Nation*", which was based on Thomas Dixon's book, *The Klansmen*. It told a most sordid and obviously distorted story of Black emancipation, enfranchisement and debauchery of White womanhood. This film did more than any other single thing to nurture and promote the race myth of Black domination and debauchery during Reconstruction. The film was seen and embraced by millions of Northern and Southern Whites. In its wake, lynching and other forms of violence against African-Americans increased tenfold. (Franklin and Moss 2002: 359).

Authors, Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman in a highly instructional essay, *Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism*, survey the African American and Jewish intellectuals who refute and reject the Euro-American claims of their racial inferiority in the biological, medical and anthropological sciences.

Stepan and Gilman launch their thorough and intriguing analysis of the body of literature written by oppressed people of color that has virtually been untouched by historians of science. They begin their insightful paper by proposing a series of thought provoking questions to the reader. "What did the men and women categorized by the biological and medical sciences as racially distinct and inferior say about the matter? How did they respond to the claims made about them in the name of science? One place one encounters a 'critical tradition' in relation to scientific racism is in the writings of those stereotyped by the sciences of the day. These writings had a problematic relation to the mainstream, since by the very definition of racial science the stigmatized were largely outside, or at the margins of science...There is far more writing by such individuals than is generally recognized by historians of science."(La Capra 1991: 72-103)

Indeed, African-American, Haitian, Jamaican and other diasporan writers have vigorously challenged the charges and claims of their biological and intellectual inferiority. They have published extensive anti-racist literature which sought to combat and defeat racist assaults on their humanity and intelligence.

Beginning with the inaugural writings of Briton Hammon, Jupiter Hammon, Phyllis Wheatley, Oloudah Equiano and Benjamin Banneker during the Revolutionary war period and the political philosophy that arose in its wake, Blacks joined other prominent White Americans in the war of words and professed ideals. This vindicationist intellectual tradition as it is viewed by some scholars continues in the nineteenth century, pre-Ant  nor Firmin era with the powerful publications of David Walker (1829), Lydia Maria Child (1833), James W.C. Pennington (1841), Robert Benjamin Lewis (1844), Frederick Douglass (1854), James Mcune Smith (1859), William Wells Brown (1863, 1874), Martin R. Delaney (1879) and George Washington Williams (1882).

On July 12, 1854 in an address delivered at Western Reserve College, abolitionist leader, author and orator Frederick Douglass attacked the scientific racist camp head on by questioning their logic, their data and their conclusions concerning the supposed perpetual gulf separating the White and Black races.



Douglass brilliantly challenged the claims of the polygenesis school of thinkers (particularly Morton, Nott, Gliddon and Agassiz). In *Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered*, Douglass proved to his audience that anatomically and craniologically the similarities between the Negro and the White race far outweighed the differences. Douglass pointed out that the cornerstone of polygenist thinking and of American slavery was the erroneous idea that the Negro race was somehow not a part of the human family. Douglass meticulously examined both the scientific methodology and the political aims of the polygenist theorists and correctly articulated that the human species was one, and that the Negro people could therefore claim full membership in the universal human family.

In a critical section of his address, Douglass examined the specific claims of Samuel Morton as documented in *Crania Americana (1839)*. He took particular exception to Morton's claims concerning the racial ethnicity of the ancient Egyptians. For Morton as with Arthur de Gobineau and others, none of the accomplishments of ancient Nile Valley Egyptian civilization could be attributed to Negroes (Africans), for that would clearly grant intellectual power and capacities to enslaved Africans' ancestors unaccounted for in the inferior race pronouncements of the polygenetic theorists. Douglass reasonably advanced the idea that in fact ancient Egypt was a multiracial society lacking the modern skin color prejudice that has existed for centuries in Europe and the United States. None of the Egyptologists and few anthropologists of his time supported him on this assertion, but thanks to the research and scholarly rigor of African centered thinkers from Anténor Firmin to Cheikh A. Diop, the idea of an African presence and fundamental contribution to Egyptian civilization has been raised to the level of an operative scientific concept. Time has proven Douglass to be correct.

Dr. Martin R. Delaney, a Harvard trained physician and Pan-Africanist in 1879 authored the booklet *Principia of Ethnology: The Origins of Races and Color with an Archeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization, from Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry*. At the time of its publication, *The Origins of Races and Color* presented a bold and beautiful Black challenge to the racist myth and view of African inferiority.

Delaney wrote in opposition to a hostile, oppressive intellectualism that utilized Social Darwinist theory to support its pseudo-scientific ideology of inherent Black inferiority. Skillfully integrating biblical history, archeology and anthropology, Delaney offered sobering evidence to the 'serious inquirer' suggesting that the first members of the human family (homo sapiens) were Africans and that these sophisticated Africans were builders of the great pyramids, sculptors of the colossal sphinxes, and the original God kings (pharaohs). With such radical assertions of African autonomy and agency, Delaney advanced a model of African history and humanity that impressively contradicted the very foundational pillars of scientific racism.

### **Pre-Anténor Firmin Haitian Intellectual Resistance (Maroonage)**

An early and outstanding example of Haiti's noble intellectual heritage is surprisingly recorded in a provocative issue of *Freedom's Journal*, America's first Black newspaper founded by Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm in 1827. Early issues of *Freedom's Journal* and its successor, *Rights of All*, featured historical articles with far reaching coverage of various issues

and events. One article that appeared was written by a former Haitian slave named Baron Pompeé de Vastey. Vastey, a well read, highly informed, self-taught scholar and diplomat, was also an official in the post 1804 independent government of Henri Christophe.

Baron de Vastey merged his knowledge of the classical past with his participation in the present triumphs of Haitian sovereignty and proud nationalism. His editorial '*Africa*' used eighteenth century ideas about the origins of civilization, but placed Africa in a more favorable and positive light than contemporary historical discourse had done. He wrote, "The enemies of Africa wish to persuade the world that for five out of the six thousand years the world has existed, Africa has long been sunk in barbarism. Have they forgotten that Africa was the cradle of the Arts and Sciences? If they pretend to forget this, it becomes our duty to remind them of it." (Hall 2009: 33-34)

Haitian erudite scholar, Baron de Vastey's intimate and profound knowledge of African antiquity, let the reading audience of *Freedom's Journal* know the enormous intellectual debt that Western civilization owes to African Philosophy, Religion, Art and Science. From the writings of Vastey in the 1820's, it is self-evident and instructive that roughly two full generations prior to the publication of Anténor Firmin's *The Equality of the Human Races* in 1885, a highly capable and qualified school of Haitian teachers and writers were alive and flourishing.

Regarding Vastey's reference to Euro-American collective historical amnesia, I am immediately reminded of a quite similar passage from the French savant and traveler C.F. Volney. Volney wrote in his *Ruins of Empires* (1787) that "...There (in Nubia) are a people now forgotten, discovered while others were yet barbarians, the elements of the Arts and Sciences. A race of men, now rejected from society for their sable skin and frizzled hair, founded on the study of the laws of nature, those civil and religious systems which still govern the universe."

As can be expected, Volney had his detractors, especially in the United States. When *Ruins* was first published in an American English edition, three entire pages were omitted from the text which listed positive references and information relating to Black people and their African cultural heritage. Indeed we are indebted to Count Volney for his refusal to obscure the obvious evidence of African contributions to the world civilization.

### **Gobineau's American Intellectual School**

The first American edition of Arthur de Gobineau's *Inequality of the Human Races* appeared in 1856. It just so happens that at this very time, American courts were hearing the case of an enslaved man who believed he should be freed. Dred Scott was indeed considered chattel property, but he had also resided in free states and territories with his so-called master, and on

these grounds was asking the courts to grant him his much deserved freedom. The following year (1857) the Supreme Court of the United States ruled against Scott.

According to Professor of Philosophy Charles W. Mills in his excellent book *The Racial Contract*, a classic statement of the slavery contract was based on doctrines of the inherent inferiority of African people, and is illustrated in the 1857 Dred Scott vs. Sanford U.S. Supreme Court decision, rendered by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney. Taney stated that “Blacks had far more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the White race either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the White man was bound to respect...” (Mills 1997: 24- 25)

Racist idea's much similar to Arthur de Gobineau's were now enshrined in American law and condoned by the highest court in the land. Although the American English version of Gobineau's text published by Josiah Nott and Henry Holtz, contained serious flaws and omissions, an antebellum Southern reading audience was now introduced to Gobineau's racist propaganda of human history, and the role he felt race mixing played in the rise and fall of civilizations.

While conducting research for his four-volume, *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* completed between 1853 and 1855, Gobineau drew upon the most respected scientific studies of his day. He not only greatly influenced the racial thinking of his contemporaries, but his theories would be embraced and echoed in the racist ideologies of the next 100 years. In his influential race theory, Gobineau articulated that race and only race explained everything in the origin and evolution of civilization. Race was the key to all of human history, and his conclusions propagated the belief that superior races produced superior civilizations, and that racial intermixture resulted in the degradation and degeneration of the superior racial stock.

In his *Essay*, Gobineau presented a racial ladder occupied by Caucasian, Mongoloid and Negro races. In this hierarchy, Negroes are located on the bottom rung as the least developed race within the species of existing racial types. He writes, “The Negroid variety is the lowest, and stands at the foot of the ladder. The animal character that appears in the shape of the pelvis is stamped on the Negro from birth, and foreshadows his destiny...We now come to the White peoples. These are gifted with reflective energy, or rather with an energetic intelligence. When they are cruel, they are conscious of their cruelty; it is very doubtful whether such a consciousness exists in the Negro.

The principle motive is honor. I need hardly add the word honor, together with all the civilizing influences connoted by it, is unknown to both the Yellow and the Black man.” He further states, “The various branches of the human family are distinguished by permanent and ineradicable differences, both mentally and physically. They are unequal in intellectual capacity, in personal beauty and in physical strength.” (Webster 1992: 39-40)

Gobineau's pseudo-scientific equation of 'race' and 'honor' crosses the boundary line constructed in the academic disciplines of biology and psychology. In other words, what does intelligence, beauty or honor have to do with the size of genitalia or buttocks; the shape of one's head, nose or lips; or the color of one's skin?

Former Arizona State University evolutionary biology professor, Dr. Joseph L. Graves, has authored two very profound and insightful books which critically examine the race concept. These are, *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the New Millennium* (2001), and *The Race Myth: Why we pretend Race Exists in America* (2004).

In chapter six of *The Emperor's New Clothes* titled, *Pseudo Science and the Founding of Eugenics*, there is a sub-section with the theme '*Gobineau, Race and Civilization*'. Within the latter section, Graves analyzes the publications and racist views of the influential French theorist. As Graves notes, "Gobineau's metric of a race's worth was its ability to found a 'great civilization'. He listed seven Caucasoid civilizations in the old world (East Indian, Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek, Roman and Nordic/Aryan), three Mongoloid civilizations in the New World (Alleghanien, Mexican and Peruvian). Like many other scholars before and after him, Gobineau denied that any Negroid race had ever produced a great civilization". (Graves 2001: 88-89)

As the dominant mainstream intellectual argument goes, the African has always either been an exotic primitive, backwards savage, or a slave. The majority of the historians and anthropologists of the nineteenth century denied or ignored any evidence of African influences in ancient Nile Valley, Egypto-Nubian civilization. The view that there were no great 'Negro-Black civilizations', has also been held by many of Gobineau's ideological descendants of the twentieth century. Arnold Toynbee in his multi volume treatise *The Study of History* (1934) sadly echoes the racist sentiments of Gobineau. "When we classify mankind by color, the only one of the primary races, given by this classification, which has not made a creative contribution to any one of our twenty-one civilizations, is the Black race."

Although the Scottish philosopher David Hume expresses his racist views towards Africans at a much earlier period, his tainted remarks also powerfully help to demonstrate the black inferiority and civilization connection. "I am apt to suspect the Negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than White, nor even an individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no Arts, no Sciences." (Gould 1981: 40-41)

In 1854 at the dawn of the Civil War, an intellectual disciple of George Morton, Josiah C. Nott along with George R. Gliddon, published *Types of Mankind*. This book soon became the most important and influential text on race published during the tumultuous antebellum period. The available anthropological data on species variation compiled by Nott and Gliddon was used by those who wished to strengthen the pro-slavery argument. During the highly politicized antebellum era, the intellectual efforts of the polygenesis school were aimed at advancing racial

apartheid; setting Negroes apart from Whites and defining the so-called Negroes natural position of inferiority in nature.

The doctrine of ‘polygeny’ was one of the first theories of largely American origin that won the attention and respect of European scientists so much that Europeans referred to polygenesis theory as the ‘American School’ of anthropology. Polygeny had European antecedents, but Americans developed the data to solicit popular support based on a large body of research they conducted to formulate its tenets. (Gould 1981: 42-72) An excellent comprehensive history of the entire ‘American School’ of polygenist ideology can be found in William Stanton’s *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America (1815-1859)*.

Josiah C. Nott, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Louisiana, also a member of the polygenist inner circle, was well known for his public lectures on ‘Niggerology’, resided in Mobile, Alabama. In 1844, after gaining some notoriety, Nott delivered “*Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races.*” Originally presented as oratory addresses in Mobile, they were published in pamphlet form later that same year. Nott sought in the orations and manuscript to prove that Blacks and Whites were two permanently distinct and unequal species, he remarks, “Before entering upon the natural history of the human race, it is indispensably necessary, as a preliminary step, to examine some points in chronology, and to take a glance at the early history of Egypt. I must show that the Caucasian or White, and the Negro were distinct at a very remote date and that the Egyptians were Caucasians. Unless this point can be established the contest must be abandoned”. He continues, “Egypt is the earliest point of civilization of which we have any records: The history of this country is doubly interesting to us as it has been asserted by most historians, it was originally inhabited by Negroes, and that from this race all the Arts and Sciences have been derived. I shall however be able to show satisfactorily, that recent investigations have overthrown all previously received opinions on the subject, and that the Egyptians were a Caucasian race...Shem and Ham were twin brothers – the word Shem, means White, and Ham, means dark or swarthy, but not Black...many have supposed Ham to be the progenitor of the Negro race. There was no curse upon him, and there is nothing in the Bible which induces such a belief; but this point is settled by the fact which I shall prove, that the Egyptians were not Negroes.” (Faust 1981: 206-222)

Nott interprets mummies, paintings, and sculptures and draws the racially biased conclusion that the ancient Egyptians were Caucasians and that the civilization of Egypt was originally peopled by the Caucasian race. In Nott’s seriously flawed opinion, if Africans were present in Egypt they are represented as captives and slaves; “And as evidence of the estimation in which this Black race was held, even at this remote date, the inscriptions designated their country as ‘barbarian’ and their race as perverse”. (Faust 1981: 215)

As has already been mentioned, most historians, anthropologists and Egyptologists did not acknowledge any African cultural or intellectual influences in Egyptian civilization. This same denial of African ability to produce a great civilization is seen in the early treatment of the South African Shona City now known as Great Zimbabwe. The German explorer Karl Mauch first viewed Zimbabwe in 1871 and believed that the site (particularly the architecture and stone cutting) was too sophisticated to have been constructed by Africans and that it must have been built by Phoenicians or Israelite settlers. The ideological descendants of Arthur de Gobineau all believed there were no great Negro (African) civilizations until 1905 when David Randall-MacIver became the first European to recognize that Great Zimbabwe was contiguous with the indigenous culture of the Shona people, who still inhabited the region.

This prejudicial treatment of archaeological finds in sub-Saharan Africa was typical of nineteenth and early twentieth century European anthropologists. The latter misrepresentations of Africans and their continental history are closely connected to the racial politics of the last 500 years and the myths of the superiority of European culture over non-European ones.

## **The Egyptian Ethnicity Question and Race Vindication**

*“It is a curious withal, that the earliest known civilization was, we have the strongest reason to believe; a Negro civilization. The original Egyptians are inferred, from the evidence of their sculptures, to have been a Negro race: It was from Negroes, therefore, that the Greeks learnt their first civilization; and to the records and traditions of these Negroes did the Greek philosophers to the very end of their career resort as a treasury of mysterious wisdom.”- John Stuart Mill (1850)*

The intellectual debate and discourse over the racial identity or ethnicity of the ancient Egyptians begins about two centuries ago, and has been at the center of the pre-American African civilization controversy. According to professor of history, Dr. Darlene Clark Hine, “The argument began in the nineteenth century (about 1830) when African Americans and White liberals sought the means to refute claims by racist pseudo-scientists, that people of African descent were inherently inferior to Whites...those who believed in human equality used evidence to show that the Egyptians were Black to counter negative assertions that African-Americans were incapable of building a civilization.” (Hine 2006: 6-7)

The major reason why the racial identity of the Egyptians is still a much heated and controversial issue in American academia, is the fact that it touches on the question of who really invented that magnificent classical civilization, Blacks or Whites? Oxford University Professor Robert Young has suggested, “The equation of the White race with civilization makes it clear why it is so important during the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the Egyptians not to have been Black: This gives a more immediate context and specific rationale for Bernal’s argument in *Black Athena* that in the nineteenth century there was concerted effort to turn the civilization of ancient Egypt from a Black one to a White one, than his suggestion of a general conspiracy of European racism.

Although Bernal does not discuss them, in fact, as we shall see, the most ardent proponents of the White Egypt thesis were Americans seeking to defend the institution of slavery in the American south. There are thus many debates about whether or not there have been Black civilizations..." (Young 1995: 95)

Richard Poe, author of the monumental treatise *Black Spark, White Fire: Did African Explorers Civilize Ancient Europe?*, wrote the following comments in the Arizona Republic Newspaper during Black History Month. "If the Egyptians were Black, then it was Blacks who built the first great civilization. Even in our liberal age, such claims still have the power to stir up passions." According to anthropologist St. Claire Drake and historian Sylvia M. Jacobs, the African countries of Egypt and Ethiopia have long been cherished symbols for many vindicationists writing and speaking about African-American history.

As Drake notes, "Egyptology became a crucial arena in the persisting struggle between anti-Black racists and those Black intellectuals who considered themselves as vindicationists." Indeed, all vindicationist scholars, Black or non-Black have stressed the role of ancient Egypt as a powerful, advanced and sophisticated African civilization. (Drake 1987: 130-142)

Jacobs writes, "Egypt, like Ethiopia, had a special place in the hearts of all Black Americans. In the writings of Afro-Americans beginning in the early nineteenth century...Egypt functioned as a conspicuous refutation of the racist Black inferiority argument. Egyptians were described as Black or Colored people. Egyptians and Ethiopians were viewed as cousins, of one and the same people. Africa, so the (vindicationist) argument went, was the cradle of mankind, and the Black man, born in the land of Egypt, was the father of civilization...Afro-Americans were thus descendants of the progenitors who ruled Egypt centuries ago. In an address in 1854, Frederick Douglass emphasized that 'Egypt is in Africa' and the ancient Egyptians were not White people." (Jacobs 1981: 179-180)

In November, 1982, *The Journal of African Civilizations*, edited by the late Guyanese scholar, Ivan Van Sertima, published the first volume in a series revising the history of Egypt. This inaugural issue is dedicated jointly to Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop and Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan, who by their writings and speeches, have striven harder than any Blacks in their generation to revise scholarly opinion and popular opinion concerning the African contribution to Egyptian civilization. The *Journal* opens with a tribute to the entire life work of Dr. Ben and lists his most significant and extensive publications on Africans in Nile Valley civilization:

## 23

*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.7, no.2, August 2014

- *Black Man of the Nile* (First Edition, 1968)
- *African Origin of the Major Western Religions* (1970)
- *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization* (1971)
- *Black Man of the Nile and His Family* (1972)
- *Black Man of the Nile and His Family* (Tenth Anniversary Edition (1978)

In opening his editorial for *Egypt Revisited* (Vol. 4, No. 2), Van Sertima borrows a familiar passage from C.A. Diop's last book titled *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* (1981). "For us the return to Egypt in every domain is the necessary condition to reconcile African civilization with history, to build a body of modern human sciences and to be able to renew African culture...Egypt will play the same role in the rethinking and renewing of African culture that ancient Greece and Rome play in the culture of the West." (Van Sertima 1982: 5) The first scholarly essay in the special edition of J.A.C. is written by Diop and titled, *Origin of the Ancient Egyptians*. We should also mention that Dr. Diop's first major literary work published on the subject of Africans in Egypt is titled, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (1974).

Lastly, Professor Cheikh A. Diop and colleague, Professor Théophile Obenga, participated in the only scholarly symposium on the race of the ancient Egyptians held in Cairo, Egypt in 1974. The conference was attended by 20 of the world's leading Egyptologists, but dominated by Dr. Diop and Dr. Obenga. A summary report published by UNESCO states, "Although the preparatory working paper...sent out by UNESCO had particulars of what was desired, not all participants had prepared communications comparable with the painstakingly research contributions of Professors Diop and Obenga. There was consequently a real lack of balance in the discussions. (UNESCO 1978: 102)

## **UNESCO and the Race Myth**

From March 30<sup>th</sup> until April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1981, the *United Nations Economic Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) convened an international symposium in Athens, Greece. The stated purpose of this intellectual gathering was to critically examine the pseudo-scientific theories invoked to justify racism and racial discrimination. The conference proceedings were published by UNESCO in 1983 under the title, *Racism, Science and Pseudo-Science*.

In 1950, 1951, 1964, 1967 and 1978, UNESCO has issued formal declarations on the subject of race. On each occasion, it has asserted and affirmed the fundamental unity of mankind and declared that all humans belong to the same species. The latter declaration is strongly supportive of the monogenetic theory of human origins and evolution in Africa, the continental cradle land. The 1967 statement on race addresses the historical roots of racism and its contingent nature. It points out that "many forms of racism have arisen out of conditions of conquest...the justification of Negro slavery and oppressive exploitation".

The 1978 *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* was the first to be adopted by *The General Conference of UNESCO*. It defines racism as, "any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgments on racial differentiation."

A portion of the UNESCO 1965 statement on racism is actually closely aligned with the contents of this essay. "Racism is the result of different pseudo-scientific theories claiming that there are



several races among human beings and which ranks these so-called races hierarchically. These theories are scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous.”

Returning to the international symposium of scientists held in Athens, one of the scholars invited to participate was the multidisciplinary Senegalese, anthropologist, Egyptologist, linguist and physicist, Dr. Cheikh A. Diop. Diop’s informative presentation to the attendees was themed *The Unity of the Origin of the Human Species*. In the closing section of his paper, Diop remarks, “The origin of man is most probably monogenetic. The adaptation of *African Homo Sapiens*, *Sapiens* to the different paleo-environments brought a number of changes, including the modification of the appearance of the human population from one continent to another, and established the external features of the races as they exist today.” (Diop 1983: 133-137)

The revisionist school of anti-racist anthropologists from A. Firmin to C.A. Diop, had only the skeletal material from human bones and fossils to argue their case for the monogenetic and African origins of modern humanity. It has been common knowledge for several decades that mankind originated in Eastern/Southern Africa near the equator and most certainly they possessed the melanin Black skin cover.

A recent news article published in *The Hartford Courant* in December, 2005 is titled *Scholars: White Skin a Mutation*. The following excerpt from the latter article yields powerful reinforcement to the single origin thesis of Firmin, Diop and other credible scientists. “The skin color of Europeans might have turned White after their ancestors migrated from Africa...scientists reported. The mutation explains part of the lingering mystery of how human skin colors evolved during the last 50,000 years as modern humans migrated across the world after leaving Africa, according to research published in the journal *Science*. ‘This really calls into question our ideas about race’ said Mark Shriver, professor of anthropology and genetics at Pennsylvania State University and co-author of the paper.”

Beginning in 1986, a century after A. Firmin published his book, and the year C.A. Diop made his transition to join the ancestors, a provocative series of magazine and newspaper articles emerged discussing the revolutionary findings made by several international scientific teams analyzing four different types of human genetic (DNA) material. These studies investigated what has been labeled the ‘Out of Africa’ or out of ‘the Garden of Eden’ hypotheses.

## 25

*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.7, no.2, August 2014

Although space will not allow a lengthy discussion of each news article published in the *Arizona Republic*, I will list titles and dates for readers interested in further study:

- DNA Researchers Trace all Humans to a Single Woman in Ancient Africa (March 30, 1986)
- Maleness Traced to One Common Ancestor (Nov. 23, 1995)
- Study Traces Genetic Origins of Chinese Back to Africa (Oct. 2, 1998)

- Mankind's Family Tree (May 28, 2000)
- The Search for Adam and Eve; *Newsweek* magazine cover story (Jan. 1988)

In the second opening quote of this essay borrowed from *Chicago Tribune* writer Salim Muwakkil, we allude to the overwhelming abundance of fossil and genetic evidence that absolutely obliterates and dispels the mythology and ideology of Euro-American White supremacy.

White Supremacists cannot deny or ignore their genetic or ancestral roots in ancient Africa. How can an ethnic group be racially superior to the parental population that spawned it? It is self-evident for all serious scholars, that a founder population many, many seasons ago migrated from their birthplace in Africa and subsequently gave rise to all non-African population groups. If we as modern humans are going to be about eliminating racist ideas from our consciousness and our academic institutions, then this is the history and social science we must teach. We are one family, a monogenetic family that shares a common ancestry 'out of Africa'.

## **Decolonizing Anthropology: Anténor Firmin and the Elevation of African Humanity**

The late nineteenth century Haitian scholar and statesman, J. Anténor Firmin was blessed with one of the most astute and brilliant minds ever produced by the proud, independent Haitian people. Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), born and formally educated in Haiti was perfectly positioned by social and geographic proximity to become an intellectual benefactor of the noble and self-determined tradition of his people. Firmin's predecessors were among the first people of African blood and descent in the Western world diaspora to win their freedom from several European colonial powers. This much deserved emancipation from enslavement and brutal oppression occurred after twelve long years of revolutionary war and armed struggle.

In remembering and honoring his people, their political and cultural heritage, Firmin dedicates his ground breaking text, *The Equality of the Human Races*, to his beloved people and their glorious nation. To all of the readers of his book, Firmin records the following inspirational passage, "May readers of this book meditate on its contents, and may it help to celebrate the movement of regeneration in which my race is engaged, under the limpid blue skies of the Caribbean. May it inspire in all children of the Black race around this big world the love of progress, justice and liberty. In dedicating this book to Haiti, I bear them all in mind, both the down trodden of today and the giants of tomorrow." (Firmin 1885, 2002: dedication)

In 2002 thanks to the deep dedication and persistence of three specific individuals, Firmin's long obscured and little known text is now available to an English speaking audience. In giving thanks and praises to this intellectual trio, it is fitting and proper to mention their names to our readers; Jacques Raphael Georges, Dr's. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban and Asselin Charles. These individuals are the key players primarily responsible for the miraculous rediscovery and translation of Firmin's 1885 text, from the French language about ten years ago. It is a bitter sweet reality to finally have *The Equality of the Human Races* at the disposal of twenty first century scholars, students and lay persons. But, I am also pondering how wonderful and refreshing it would have been for the Black vindicationist thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Delaney, Blyden, G.W. Williams, W.E.B. Dubois, Carter G. Woodson, Marcus Garvey and others to have connected with Anténor Firmin and also read his monumental anti-racist treatise.

It is now well known that Firmin and Dubois met at the first Pan African conference held in London, England in 1900, convened by Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams. What a breath of fresh air for the Africans in America if Dubois, Woodson or even Garvey could have managed somehow to have gotten Firmin's book translated and published a century ago. Mainstream White scholars and academics, as we well know, would not have welcomed or embraced its contents but in the spirit of Pan African and diasporan writings, Firmin could easily have added his herculean voice to the American struggle to combat and defeat intellectual and scientific racism.

Although a total of twenty chapters comprise the 450 pages of the English edition, I would select the following chapter themes for their relevance and support to our overall discussion in this essay.

- Chapter 1: Anthropology as a Discipline
- Chapter 4: Monogenism and Polygenism
- Chapter 9: Egypt and Civilization
- Chapter 12: Intellectual Evolution of the Black Race in Haiti
- Chapter 17: The Role of the Black Race in the History of Civilization
- Chapter 18: Religious Myths and the Words of the Ancients

In chapter nine of his epochal text which is titled *Egypt and Civilization* Firmin begins with an eye opening and truly engaging topic, *The Ethiopian Origin of the Ancient Egyptians*. What is critically important for our readers to understand is that Firmin's Ethiopian or Nubian assessment for the racial origins of the ancient Egyptian (Kemetite) people is historically accurate, and has been the valid and viable opinion of eyewitness observers and writers since the time of the classical Greek chroniclers Herodotus, Diodorus and Aristotle.

Notable African descended scholars that have also utilized this common sense approach and assessment of Firmin in their historical writings are, George Wells Parker, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, William Leo Hansberry, John G. Jackson and Chancellor Williams. Complementing

the scholarly works of all the above intellectuals is the recent revolutionary archeological discovery by Dr. Bruce Williams of the University of Chicago. Professor Williams has published a detailed discussion of his scientific findings of the origin of the ancient Egyptians in an essay titled, *The Lost Pharaohs of Nubia* (Archaeology Magazine, 1980: 12 - 22)

As so many other vindicationist thinkers have done before and after him, Firmin passionately argues against the racist and pseudo-scientific assertion that claims Blacks are an intellectually inferior race. In order to give the reader Firmin's full fundamental counter argument against the anti-African civilization propagandists, we must quote him at length here: "When one asserts that the Black race is inferior to all others, one must prove that the fact is true now and was true in the past, that is, that not only is this the case today, but that things were never different in past history and that nothing happened in the past which could be in flagrant contradiction with the dogmatic views of the anthropologists or with the pretentiously self-assured conclusions of the scholars...Before proceeding to any argumentation aimed at showing that the present inferior status of the Black race to the Mongolian and White races is not a fact of nature about which some scientific law or doctrine can be formulated, we will consider whether, among the various peoples who have contributed the most to human progress, there had not been some Negro nations somewhere in the world. The existence of such a people would be enough to destroy the theory of the inequality of the races. One of the surest ways to refute such a theory would be to identify a period in history when the proud Europeans were absolute savages, while Black people were holding up the flame of early civilization. Let us then open the annals of humanity and question the past. Let us study the vestiges of antiquity, for they have much to teach us and they can shed much light on the debate and confirm the truth.

At the dawn of history we encounter one people whose civilization precedes all others: the ancient population of Egypt. This people, who were unquestionably the initiators of the White nations of the West in science and the arts, had created alone, on the shores of the Nile...the most impressive social organization that a human population had ever built."

He continues, "What was the state of Europe and Europeans during the same period and even much later? What were their achievements and how did they rank among nations?...If we could prove, on the basis of recent advances in our knowledge of history, that the Egyptian people were not a White race, as so many have constantly maintained through rigid adherence to systems of thought and a retrospective pride ever since Egyptology has shown the overwhelming importance of this ancient nation, what further argument could be mustered to salvage the doctrine of the inequality of the races? The answer is, none. The anthropologists and scientists who support such a theory realize its insanity to such an extent that they have resorted to all sorts of conceptual subtleties, construed all kinds of specious arguments into convincing reasons, accepted all types of scholarly ravings as serious probabilities, all in order to make people believe that the ancient Egyptians were White." (Firmin 2002: 227)

How in the world can Africans be perceived as intellectually or culturally inferior to Europeans when it was Africans in Egypt who are responsible for the original intellectual and spiritual achievements which constitute the very foundational pillars of modern Western civilization? In this same highly informative chapter, Firmin proceeds to praise the writings of non-African scholars who have been honest and objective in their opinions regarding the Ethiopian origins of Egyptian civilization. The noteworthy names of the French savants, C.F. Volney, Henri Abbe Grégoire and J.F. Champollion are celebrated and remembered.

One final passage from the masterful pen of Firmin will suffice to complement and complete our essay. He writes, “The truth of the matter is so clear, so evident, that no further discussion is really necessary. Still, the issue deserves our full attention, for it constitutes a crucial argument against the doctrine of the inequality of the human races. Once we acknowledge the Ethiopian (Nubian) origin of the ancient civilizer of Egypt, we will necessarily acknowledge the innate capacity of all the races to develop their genius and their intelligence.” (Firmin 2002: 237)

As 19<sup>th</sup> century British scholar Gerald Massey has so profoundly proclaimed, “Africa the birthplace, Egypt the mouthpiece”

## **Antènor Firmin and Black Intellectual Self-Determination**

Of all the ideological roadblocks to equality facing Black intellectuals in the nineteenth century, the most challenging was the widely held belief that Blacks were mentally and biologically inferiors to persons of other races, particularly White Anglo-Saxons. According to the distinguished historian and author of *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers*, Dr. Vincent P. Franklin, White supremacy became a ‘core value’ that evolved out of the experiences of European peoples who colonized and settled in the New World and South Africa. The collective ‘core value’ that operated in a dialectical relationship with White Supremacy (racism) is the cultural objective of Black self-determination. (Franklin, 1984: 6-7).

### **29**

*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.7, no.2, August 2014

As a critical extension of the latter cultural objective which is also the second principle of the African American Kwanzaa holiday is the political, philosophical and social ideologies of Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Both are intellectual or psychological responses to White racial superiority and the centuries old struggle to overcome and defeat White racial oppression in the diaspora.

In mobilizing his pioneering, meticulous and rigorous arguments to eradicate the racial stigma and stereotype of inherent Black inferiority, Antènor Firmin utilized the best scientific data available in France during the late nineteenth century. Already equipped with an astute mind, a surplus of Haitian race pride, race consciousness and self-determination, he carried out his mission of study and research for eighteen difficult months before completing the massive 650 page work, *The Equality of the Human Races: Positivist Anthropology*. This groundbreaking text still stands today as it did over a century ago, as a stellar example of human sacrifice,

dedication, determination and intellectual resilience of one brilliant son of Africa who stood tall to champion the causes of liberty, fraternity and equality for all of humanity. Long live the work and legacy of Joseph Ant enor Firmin, a true and genuine African Griot in the best tradition and spirit of Sankofa. May the ancestors always be pleased! Ase!

## Works Cited

Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Africa World Press, Trenton N.J. (1994)

Asante, Molefi Kete. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Africa World Press, Trenton N.J. (1990)

Baker, Lee D. *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race (1896 – 1954)*. University of California Press, Los Angeles, CA (1998)

Daniels, Jessie. *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse*. Routledge Publishers, New York, NY (1997)

Drake, St. Claire. *Black Folk Here and There (Vol. 1)*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, CA (1987)

Faust, Drew Gilpin. *The Ideology of Slavery: Pro Slavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830 – 1860*. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge (1981)

Franklin, V.P. *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers*. Lawrence Hill & Company, Westport, Connecticut (1984)

Gladwin, Thomas and Saidin, Ahmad. *Slaves of the White Myth: The Psychology of Neo Colonialism*. Humanities Press Atlantic Highlands, N.J. (1980)

Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mis-Measure of Man*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, N.Y. (1981)

Hall, Stephen G. *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth Century America*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill (2009)

Haller, John S. *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority 1859-1900*. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Illinois

Hine, Darlene Clark. *The African-American Odyssey*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey (2000)

Hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press, Boston, MA (1992)

Jacobs, Sylvia M. *The African Nexus: Black American Perspectives on the European Partitioning of Africa, 1880 – 1920*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut (1981)

Lacapra, Dominick. *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York (1991)

Litwack, Leon. “Historians Blamed for Perpetuating Bias – Outgoing President Challenges Colleagues” *Black Issues in Higher Education* (April – 1987)

Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York (1997)

Morrison, Toni “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (Winter 1989)

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press (1992)

Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of the African: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington (1988)

Van Sertima, Ivan. *The Journal of African Civilizations (Egypt Revisited) Vol. 4, No. 2, Transaction Books, Rutgers University, New Brunswick – New Jersey* (1982)

Webster, Yehudi O. *The Racialization of America*. St. Martin’s Press, New York, N.Y. (1992)

## 31

*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.7, no.2, August 2014

Young, Robert J.C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge, London and New York (1995)

### **Additional References**

Burrell, Tom – *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority* (Smiley Books, New York City – 2010)

Eze, Emmanuel – Chukwudi – *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA. – 2007)

Goldenberg, David M. – *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity & Islam* (Princeton University Press – 2003)

Graves, Joseph L. – *The Race Myth: Why We Pretend Race Exists in America* (Dutton & the Penguin Group, New York – 2004)

Harris, Joseph E. – *Africans and Their History* (Meridian Books & the Penguin Group, New York – 1998)

Herskovits, Melville J. – *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Beacon Press, Boston, MA. – 1958)

Jordan, Winthrop D. – *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London – 1997)

Knowles, Louis & Prewitt, Kenneth – *Institutional Racism in America* (Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.)

Montagu, Ashley – *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (Altamira Press & Sage Publications, California & London – 1997)

Pieterse, Jan-Nederveen – *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London – 1992)

Shujaa, Mwalimu J. – *Too Much Schooling Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies* (Africa World Press, Trenton, N.J. – 1995)

## 32

*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.7, no.2, August 2014

Spring, Joel – *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States* (McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., New York/San Francisco – 1997)

Woodson, Carter G. – *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Africa World Press, Inc., Trenton, N.J. 1990) First published by The Associated Publishers, Washington, D.C. 1933.





Antoine Firmin also had a seminal impact on Jean Price-Mars, the 20th century founder of Haitian ethnology, and these ties extend further to the American founder of African and Afro-American anthropology, Melville Herskovits. Firmin grounded his scientific study of humanity and his anti-biological argument for the equality of humans in Comtean positivism. His book is subtitled *Positivist Anthropology*, because he argues, using August Comte's ideas, that the case for racial equality is to be made using scientific facts, not a priori assumptions about racial difference or philosophical assertions of racial difference (341-342). It was this empirical methodology and the placing of anthropology as a new social science in the natural sciences that was useful for Firmin.

The metaphysical ethics of human genome project and its impact on religion, society and culture. Current scientific research in the humanities and social sciences: central issues in educational research. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and its comparison with ethics from the perspective of Shia Islam. The literary genres and the interpretation of the Gospels. The duality of hedonism in the ambivalent world of polarities. The problem approach in historical and philosophical studies of the category "Non-existence". Historical Anthropology of African and African Diaspora. July 2019. Publisher: LRC Publishing House. This is a thought-provoking and comprehensive set of papers. Robert Launay Northwestern University Historical Anthropology of Africa and African diaspora is increasingly gaining a worldwide attention. This volume edited by Dmitri M. Bondarenko and Marina L. Butovskaya is a particular indication of the importance of the Past as far as Africa is concerned. The main objective of the volume is to present various manifestations of how the past influences the present in African societies and diaspora communities nowadays.