# From Diop to Asante: Conceptualizing and Contextualizing the Afrocentric Paradigm

by

Abdul Karim Bangura, Ph.D.

Professor of Research Methodology and Political Science, Howard University; Researcher-In-Residence of Abrahamic Connections and Islamic Peace Studies, Center for Global Peace in the School of International Service at American University

*Abdul Karim Bangura* is Professor of Research Methodology and Political Science at Howard University. He also is a Researcher-In-Residence of Abrahamic Connections and Islamic Peace Studies at the Center for Global Peace in the School of International Service at American University. He holds a PhD in Political Science, a PhD in Development Economics, a PhD in Linguistics, a PhD in Computer Science, and a PhD in Mathematics. He is the author of 66 books and more than 550 scholarly articles. He is fluent in about a dozen African and six European languages, and studying to increase his proficiency in Arabic, Hebrew, and Hieroglyphics. He is the winner of many teaching and other scholarly and community service awards. He also is a member of many scholarly organizations and has served as President and then United Nations Ambassador of the Association of Third World Studies.

## Abstract

Employing a descriptive case study approach, this article presents and analyzes the essentiality of conceptualizing and contextualizing Africancentricity based on works by African-centered scholars ranging from Cheikh Anta Diop to Molefi Kete Asante. This is important because many of the concepts and contexts used in works dealing with Africa and its Diaspora employ Eurocentric concepts and contexts that often do not capture the essence of the phenomena being discussed. To call a thing by its precise name is the beginning of understanding, because it is the key to the procedure that allows the mind to grasp reality and its many relationships. The systematic discussion that follows demonstrates why and how Africancentricity promotes a greater comprehension of African phenomena.

## Introduction

In this article, I provide a conceptual and contextual analysis of the Afrocentric paradigm as postulated from Cheikh Anta Diop to Molefi Kete Asante. Correspondingly, the major question probed is the following: What are the major concepts and contexts that undergird the Afrocentric paradigm? Thus, a descriptive case study approach is employed in this essay, as the method helps a researcher to answer the "What is" type question posed here. Before doing all this, however, I begin by grounding the discussion in this paper on the importance of conceptualizing and contextualizing major theoretical thoughts.

In essence, this article explores the Afrocentric paradigm to determine its scientific import. This is vital because it will help to demonstrate the applicability of Afrocentricity as a systematic form of analysis by identifying the general postulates that make this paradigm explainable and predictable.

## The Importance of Conceptualizing Major Theoretical Thoughts

To call a thing by its precise name is the beginning of understanding, because it is the key to the procedure that allows the mind to grasp reality and its many relationships. It makes a great deal of difference whether an illness is conceived of as caused by the Evil Spirit or by bacteria on a binge. The concept *bacteria* is part and parcel of a system of concepts in which there is a connection to a powerful repertory of treatments—i.e. antibiotics. Naming is a process that can give the "namer" great power.

Old movies about Africans often have an episode featuring a confrontation between the local "medicine man" or "witchdoctor" and the Western "doctor" who triumphs for modern science by saving the chief or his child. The cultural agreement that supported the "medicine man" is shattered by the scientist with a microscope. Sadly, for the children of modern medicine, it turns out that there were a few tricks in the "medicine man's" or "witch doctor's" bag that were ignored or lost in the euphoria of such a "victory" for science. Even less happy was the arrogance with which many of the cultural arrangements expressed in the African languages were undermined through the supposition of superiority by conquering powers. To capture meaning in a language is a profound and subtle process, indeed.

Furthermore, as Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias point out, "Thinking involves the use of language. Language itself is a system of communication composed of symbols and a set of rules permitting various combinations of these symbols. One of the most significant symbols in a language…is the *concept*."[1] With this excerpt as backdrop, Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias define a *concept* as "an abstraction—a symbol—a representation of an object or one of its properties, or of a behavioral phenomenon."[2]

Concepts are generally defined as abstract ideas or mental symbols that are typically associated with corresponding representations in languages or symbologies which denote all of the objects in given categories or classes of entities, events, phenomena, or relationships between them. Concepts are said to be abstract when they omit the differences of the things in their extensions, treating them as if they are identical; they are said to be universal when they apply to everything in their extensions. Concepts are also characterized as the basic elements of propositions, much the same way words are the basic semantic elements of sentences.[3]

As opposed to being agents of meaning, concepts are bearers of meaning. Consequently, concepts are arbitrary. For example, the concept of TREE can be expressed as *tree* in English, *shajar* in Arabic, *mti* in Kiswahili, *kənt* in Temne, *àrbol* in Spanish, *albero* in Italian, *arbre* in French, *árvore* in Portuguese, *дерево* in Russian, and *baum* in German. The fact that concepts are arbitrary, i.e. they are independent of language, makes translation possible—words in various languages have identical meaning, because they express one and the same concept.

For scientific purposes, as social scientists Kenneth Hoover and Todd Donovan posit, concepts are "(1) tentative, (2) based on agreement, and (3) useful only to the degree that they capture or isolate some significant and definable item in reality." Thus, for these scholars, concepts are important because (a) thought and theory develop through the linking of concepts, and (b) science is a way of checking on the formulation of concepts and testing the possible linkages between them through references of observable phenomena.[4]

Thus, the scientific functions of concepts, according to Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, are fourfold. First, concepts are the foundation of communication. Without a set of agreed-upon concepts, scientists could not communicate their findings or replicate one another's studies. Second, concepts introduce a *perspective*—i.e. a way of looking at empirical phenomena. Concepts enable scientists to relate to some aspect of reality and identify it as a quality common to different examples of the phenomena in the real world. Third, concepts allow scientists to classify and generalize. Stated differently, scientists employ concepts to structure, characterize, order, and generalize their experiences and observations. Finally, scientists use concepts to serve as components of theories and, therefore, of explanations and predictions. Consequently, concepts are the most critical elements in any theory because they define its content and attributes.[5]

The correct or objective use of concepts is essential for successful communication because the latter involves two or more participants in an interaction who must share similar meanings of the former.[6] In order to fully grasp this essence, we must turn to the works of linguists.

For linguists, the essence of concepts in communication rests on the notion of *conceptual dependency*, defined by Gillian Brown and George Yule as the relationship between attitudes and behavior; but, when applied to understanding discourse, it incorporates a particular analysis of language.[7] Roger Schank sets out to represent the meanings of sentences in conceptual terms by providing a conceptual dependency network he terms a *C-diagram*. He defines a *C-diagram* as a network that contains concepts, which enter into relations he describes as dependencies. He also provides a very elaborate, but manageable, system of semantic primitives for concepts, and labels arrows for dependencies,[8] which I will not describe in this essay. Instead, I will simply consider one of Schank's sentences and his non-diagrammatic version of the conceptualization underlying that sentence in the same manner as Brown and Yule do.[9]

(1) John ate the ice cream with a spoon.

(2) John ingested the ice cream by transing the ice cream on a spoon to his mouth.
(The term 'transing' is used here to mean 'physically transferring.')

One benefit of Schank's approach is quite obvious. In his conceptual version (2) of the sentence (1), he represents a part of our comprehension of the sentence which is not explicit in the first sentence (1), that the action described in (1) was made possible by 'getting the ice cream and his mouth in contact.' In this way, Schank incorporates an aspect of our knowledge of the world in his conceptual version of our understanding of sentence (1) which would not be possible if his analysis operated with only the syntactic and lexical elements in the sentence.

In a development of the conceptual analysis of sentences, Chris Riesbeck and Roger Schank describe how our comprehension of what we read or hear is very much "expectation-based." Stated differently, when we read example (3), we have very strong expectations about what, conceptually, will be in the x-position.[10]

(3) John's car crashed into a guard-rail.
    When the ambulance came, it took John to the x.

Riesbeck and Schank point out that our expectations are conceptual rather than lexical and that different lexical realizations in the x-position (e.g., *hospital, doctor, medical center*, etc.) will all fit our expectations. Brown and Yule add that evidence that people are "expectation-based parsers" of texts hinges on the fact that we can make mistakes in our predictions of what is to come next.[11]

John Lyons introduces the notion of conceptual field by relying on Jost Trier's general definition of "fields." According to Trier, "Fields are living realities that intermediate between individual words and the totality of the vocabulary; as parts of a whole they share with words the property of being integrated in a larger structure (*sich ergleiden*) and with the vocabulary the property of being structured in terms of smaller units (*sich ausgliedern*)"[12]

Lyons illustrates the notion of conceptual field by employing the continuum of color, prior to its determination by particular languages. According to him, color terminology provides a particularly good illustration of differences in the lexical structure of different language systems. He notes that, actually, there are problems attaching to the recognition of a conceptual area, and in this case psycho-physical definable, field of color, neutral with respect to different systems of categorization. He notes that if we are to accept for the moment that it is reasonable to think of the continuum, or substance, of color in this manner, then different languages and different synchronic states of what may be regarded, diachronically, as the same language evolving through time, can be compared in respect of the way in which they give structure to, or articulate (*gliedern*), the continuum by lexicalizing certain conceptual (or psycho-physical) distinctions and thereby giving lexical recognition to greater or less areas within it. He adds that considered as a continuum, the substance of color is (in our distinction of 'area' and 'field') a conceptual area; it becomes a conceptual field by virtue of its structural organization, or articulation, by particular language-systems. He then concludes that the set of lexemes in any one language-system which cover the conceptual area and, by means of the relations of sense which hold between them, gives structure to it as a lexical field; and each lexeme will cover a certain conceptual area, which may in turn be structured as a field by another set of lexemes (as the area covered by 'red' in English is structured by 'scarlet,' 'crimson,' 'vermillion,' etc.). Thus, the sense of a lexeme is a conceptual area within a conceptual field; and any conceptual area that is associated with a lexeme, as its sense, is a concept.[13]

## The Importance of Contextualizing Major Theoretical Thoughts

Without the notion of *context*, there would be no theory of pragmatics, much less a theory of ethnomethodology. This is one reason pragmatics calls for some explicit characterization of the concept of context, despite the difficulty encompassed in such an activity. This truism is captured by Deborah Schiffrin when she posits in her examination of those factors that aid pragmaticists in "discovering the context of an utterance" that

Discourse markers, contextualization cues, and sociolinguistic variables all have a contextualizing function. The markers are clues to the local contexts of utterances, contextualization cues to the interpretive schemes within which communicative intent is situated, and sociolinguistic variables to the social and expressive meanings of self, other, and situation. But because discourse markers are functionally linked to these other devices, the study of all these devices together can provide an emic guideline to speakers' contextualization of language at several different levels at once.[14]

For ethnomethodologists, the analyzability of actions in context as a practical accomplishment is a must. As Harold Garfinkel insists, this must be the case because "not only does no concept of context-in-general exist, but every use of context without exception is itself essentially indexical."[15] Ethnomethodologists are interested, therefore, less in the contribution to the conversational system made by the specific identities of the speakers and more in the contribution of immediate conversational context.

As John Heritage notes, the significance of a speaker's communicative action is doubly contextual in being both *context-shaped*: i.e. "its contribution to an ongoing sequence of actions cannot adequately be understood except by reference to the context—including, especially, the immediately preceding configuration of actions—in which it participates;" and *context-renewing*: i.e. "the character of conversational actions is directly related to the fact that they are context-shaped…the extent of a next action is repeatedly renewed with every current action."[16] Furthermore, Heritage suggests that while these aspects of context are traceable to Garfinkel's notions of indexical and reflexive characteristics of talk and action, they have also found some parallel expression in Erving Goffman's more ethnographically-oriented studies.[17]

For Goffman, context helps us to rule out unintended meanings and suppress misunderstandings (but even more primary, it is the role that context helps to create). For him, the immediate surrounding could not have this power apart from the cultural competence of interpreters. In addition, he notes that the correct interpretation of any statement may have as one of its implications the saving of the interpreter from exposure as someone who presumes cultural and linguistic competence s/he does not possess.[18]

This way of conceptualizing context can be thought of as a process whereby the native speaker of a given language produces contextually appropriate and internally coherent utterance—a process which involves a lot more than knowledge of the language system. Thus, the factors identified by a systematic ethnomethodological framework as contextual must be those factors that determine the native speaker's production and interpretation of utterances in actual activities of use.

Another notion of context in Goffman's discussions, even though he does not call it so, is a *physical* one: the role of "setting" in *performance*. According to Goffman, "setting" includes furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which provide the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action. Setting stays put, geographically speaking, so that those who use it as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must end their performance upon their departure.[19] Context then, as formulated by Goffman, is *pragmatic*: i.e. context covers the identities of participants, the temporal and spatial parameters of speech events, the knowledge and meta-knowledge, intentions and beliefs of the participants in those speech events. This makes context paramount in any discussion of the Afrocentric paradigm.

## Conceptualizing the Afrocentric Paradigm

While Diop himself did not use the term Afrocentricity, his well-documented research laid the foundation for Afrocentric research. In his groundbreaking work titled *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (1974), Diop offered the argument that historical, archeological, and anthropological evidence support the theory that ancient Egypt and its citizens were Negroid in origin. He put it as follows: "In contemporary descriptions of ancient Egyptians, this question is never raised. Eyewitnesses of that period formally affirm that the Egyptians were Blacks."[20]

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, many, and consistent, definitions of Afrocentricity were proffered by Africanists. The first definition was by Asante who defined "Afrocentricity [African-centered] as the placing of African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior."[21] His definition inspired four other major Africanists to offer variations of his. The second definition was by C. Tsehloane Keto who defined the "African-centered perspective [as an approach that] rests on the premise that it is valid to position Africa as a geographical and cultural starting base in the study of peoples of African Descent."[22] The third definition was by Wade Nobles who defined "Afrocentric, Africentric, or African-Centered [as being] interchangeable terms representing the concept which categorizes a quality of thought and practice which is rooted in the cultural image and interest of African people and which represents and reflects the life experiences, history and traditions of African people as the center of analyses. It is therein that the intellectual and philosophical foundation [with] which African people should create their own scientific criterion for authenticating human reality" exists.[23] The fourth definition was by Maulana Karenga who defined "Afrocentricity...as a quality of thought and practice rooted in the cultural image and human interest of African people [and their descendants]. To be rooted in the cultural image of African people is to be anchored in the views and values of African people as well as in the practice which emanates from and gives rise to these views and values."[24] Finally, Lathardus Goggins, II defined "African-centered [as being able] to construct and use frames of reference, cultural filters and behaviors that are consistent with the philosophies and heritage of African cultures in order to advance the interest of people of African descent."[25]

From the preceding definitions, it is evident that Africancentrism presupposes knowledge of a commonality of cultural traits among the diverse people of Africa which characterize and constitute a worldly view that is somehow distinct from that of the foreign world views that have influenced African people. Africancentrism simply means that the universe is a collection of relationships, and an individual or a group being in that universe is defined by and dependent upon these relationships. Africans, prior to European and Asian dominance, and still to some degree now, considered the Cause or God as being a part of His creation while Europeans on the other hand considered God separate from His creation. A poignant question that emerges here, then, is the following: What inspired these definitions for Afrocentricity? A brief historical account of the paradigm will address this question.

The sun that once illuminated the socio-cultural landscape of Africa is once again approaching its zenith after having set for hundreds of years. Seeking understanding of the universe from an African-centered perspective was in existence long before the term Afrocentricity was coined by Asante. The separation of the African mind from its body was a result of the Holocaust which African people endured at the hands of both Asians and Europeans. This thousand-year tragedy, having its birth in Kemet and its culmination along the western coast of Africa, would take its toll on the minds, bodies and souls of Africa's children, resulting in the separation of Africans from their cultures and history. The actual focus of the following paragraphs is on the rebirth of the African consciousness of which Afrocentricity is the totalization.

Even before its conceptualization, there was a period prior which helped to determine the character and created the context in which the two following stages could be born. There were individuals whose scholarship was pivotal in the establishment of Afrocentricity. These intellectual giants helped not only to raise the consciousness of their people, but they also were instrumental in the creation of a mode of analysis that had an African character. In total, the rebirth of the African mind can be seen through three stages: (1) the pre-conceptualization period, (2) the conceptualization period, and (3) the concretion period.

During the pre-conceptualization period, African scholars, particularly in the United States and the Caribbean, became increasingly aware of their physical and cultural origins in Africa. These scholars/activists would focus their energy on understanding the conditions of their people, albeit from a Eurocentric perspective initially, in the United States and the rest of the world to aid them in their fight against the oppression and subjugation of African peoples. One of these great pioneers was W. E. B. Du Bois, a sociologist, poet, historian, and activist who sought to raise his people's awareness of their potential to transform their reality. Du Bois was a prolific writer and researcher. As a sociologist, he asked very pertinent questions about the validity of his White contemporaries' conclusions on the mental state and capabilities of African peoples. In his attempts at showing the fallacies inherent in these conclusions due to the influence of racism, Du Bois would also shed light on the ancient past of Africa, destroying one of the most pernicious fallacies about African peoples, which is they have no history.

This groundbreaking work would lay the foundation for generations to come by providing some of the data on Africa necessary to create a point of departure for the form of analysis that is Afrocentricity. One of Du Bois' contemporaries, Marcus Garvey, with his United Negro Improvement Association and his push for "Africa for the Africans," George Padmore, C. L. R. James, Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, etc. helped to raise the awareness of Africans in the United States and the rest of the Diaspora while laying the foundation for organization building as well as nationalism. These two giants, along with people like Booker T. Washington and others during the 1920s, ushered in a period of heightened consciousness for people of African descent, even though they were not totally able to free themselves of the effects of Eurocentric education on the character of their analyses.

It is said that in the beginning there was the "Word." But in ancient Kemet, it was the thought or conceptualization that came before word or form. The second stage of Afrocentricity was characterized by conceptualization. And during this period, scholars like Cheikh Anta Diop, Théophile Obenga, Yosef A. A. ben-Jochannan, John Henrike Clark and others contributed and shaped it. Diop, in particular, probably did more than anyone else, through his exhaustive and multi-disciplinary approach, to bring Kemet or Egypt back to its African home and even to a greater degree in proving the continuity of African culture despite the superficial differences. The most important aspect of this period, however, was that scholars like Diop recognized the distinct character of African socio-cultural constructs and the inability of a Eurocentric mode of analysis to correctly interpret these constructs. This period covered from the early 1950s on to the transitional 1960s and 1970s. During this period, African scholars placed Africa at the center of their analysis, making it not only the object of study but also that which determined understanding not clouded with the ethnocentrism of some alien culture.

Unlike the first two stages, the period of Afrocentricity's concretion saw the formation of the concept into a systematic mode of analysis. Even though many of those people who played a role in this period were contributing to the prior periods, especially the 1970s, their work had its most dramatic impact during the early 1980s. Scholars like Asante and Karenga, mentioned earlier, Ishakamusa Barashango, Jacob Carruthers, H. B. ("Barry") Fell, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, Runoko Rashidi, J. A. Rogers, Ivan Van Sertima, Chancellor Williams, Assa Hilliard, III and others helped to usher in the period of Afrocentricity's definition and formation into something tangible for use by generations to follow. In prior periods, it not only lacked the name Afrocentricity, but many African scholars, although they saw the importance of Africa and a deep understanding of it, either lacked a Afrocentric perspective or failed to present a clear definition of that which characterized their perspective. The scholars of this period not only looked from the proper perspective, they were also conscious of that perspective and could facilitate the understanding of it to African peoples through its definition. In Asante's own words, in *The Afrocentric Idea*, "Afrocentricity is the most complete philosophical totalization of the African being-at-the-center of his or her existence."[26] Once Asante spoke the word, a thought was now given form: i.e. Afrocentricity.

In the end, or should I say from that point forward, Afrocentricity would continue to evolve as more information about Africa is brought to light. From preconception to conception to concretion, Afrocentricity is a rebirth of the African being at its "center." In the first stage, the foundation was laid for the conception, which found its manifestation in Afrocentricity. Even though those scholars during the preconception stage were not Afrocentric, they still made it possible for Afrocentricity's rebirth. During the conception, those African scholars in their application of an African-centered perspective enabled those to follow to define and add structure to Afrocentricity. Ironically, the history of Afrocentricity can only be understood form an Afrocentric perspective, which applies a circular character to history instead of the linear character given to history by Europeans.

## Contextualizing the Afrocentric Paradigm

J. R. Firth, regarded by many as the founder of modern British linguistics, suggests that the context of a phenomenon for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:[27]

    A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.
            (i) The verbal action of the participants.
            (ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.
    B. The relevant objects.
    C. The effect of the verbal action.

Correspondingly, for contextualizing the Afrocentric paradigm, I examine in the following subsections (a) a sample of personalities/pioneers for the relevant features of participants; (b) major research questions, major theories and concepts for relevant objects; (c) academic areas, major journals and examples of works in which the paradigm has been employed for the effect of the action.

### Four Major Pioneers in Afrocentricity

Many have contributed to the conception and realization of Afrocentricity. Focusing on only four out of the many, this section introduces the reader to some of the most influential people in the development of Afrocentricity. In particular, W. E. B. Du Bois, Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah, and Gerald Massey are highlighted here.

One of the founding fathers of Pan-Africanism, a major component of Afrocentricity, and a pioneer in the same field, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, was ahead of his time in his vision and prolific in his scholarship. This life that shed light on the landscape of the African consciousness as well as the world spanned from 1868 to 1963. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts to what David Levering Lewis in his work, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader* (1995), called "peasant landholders," Du Bois entered into a United States of abject poverty and a racism that pervaded every aspect of life of a Black person. These beginnings were seemingly contradictory to one of the major contributors to Afrocentricity. Like a muscle's reaction to resistance, Du Bois, the sociologist, social and political activist, educator, poet, and warrior for African people, was strengthened by the resistance he faced in a world characterized by the negation of his African being. In Du Bois' book, *The Souls of Black Folks*, the dichotomy of the Black soul due to this negation is made clear: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness… One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[28]

Du Bois' education and professional history are a testimony to the greatness of the man. In 1895, being the first African person to receive a doctorate from Harvard, he was to establish a level of excellence that would characterize his life. In the years previous, Du Bois graduated from Fisk University in 1888 and then Harvard in 1890. Du Bois would demonstrate his consciousness of the particular problems faced by African peoples when he wrote his dissertation in 1896 entitled *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America.* Graduation would not end his dealings with higher education. As a professor at Atlanta University, Du Bois' relationship with information would go full circle from one who is taught to one who taught.

Through activism and scholarship, Du Bois would help to create the context that would allow those to follow to bring Afrocentricity to realization. As one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and contributors to the conceptualization of Pan-Africanism, this giant helped to strategize and bring organization to African people's fight for liberation. Du Bois' life is a story of evolution of consciousness. He went from starting the Niagara Movement and serving as director of the Peace Information Center to Marxism and Communism and then on to Socialism and Pan-Africanism. His scholarship was legendary in scope and prolific. These writings span from works of a sociological nature, *The Souls of Black Folk*, an autobiography, to other essays and works. Du Bois also started work on the *Encyclopedia Africana*, an encyclopedia on African peoples. Founding three major publications, *The Crisis*, *The Phylon*, and *Freedomways*, he kept his finger on the pulse of Black people in America. He lived long enough to write three autobiographies! In the end, this man would leave a legacy of pride, spirit, and intellectual greatness that forever shapes African people's view of themselves.

The second and one of the greatest minds in the annals of human history, Cheikh Anta Diop, was an example of Afrocentricity incarnate as the realization of the potential of the human mind in an African intellectual context. The life of this intellectual giant would represent a leap forward in the overall evolution of the human collective consciousness, spanning from his birth on December 23, 1923 to his period of transition on February 7, 1986. Like Du Bois, Diop would make his contributions to African liberation through both activism and scholarship. Born to peasant parents in Dioubel, Senegal, Diop was one of the many pioneers to Afrocentricity who was born on the continent.

The years of his education were the times of his highest development, and this development continued on throughout his professional career. Diop's work would be more of African-centered nature than Du Bois' would, even though Du Bois was no less influential than Diop in the rebirth of the African consciousness. Diop would go from Qur'anic school to the completion of his bachelor's degree in Senegal. He would later attend graduate school in Paris in 1946. Diop drew from a vast array of sciences to aid him in his efforts to understand and explain the African being and formulate a means to liberate Africans.

He was a "revisionist historian," anthropologist, physicist, sociologist, and linguist with an understanding and ability to apply chemistry and metallurgy. Egyptology could also be considered another one of the disciplines he mastered and in which he worked, but it actually cannot be separated from his overall study of Africa. In fact, one of his greatest contributions to Afrocentricity was to reconnect Egyptian civilization with Africa by demonstrating that it was of "Black" African creation. One of his greatest triumphs was when he and Théophile Obenga presented their research on the Egyptian language and its people at the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conference on "The Peopling of Ancient Egypt" in January of 1974. The two African researchers would leave the racist notions that denied the African origins of Egypt in ruin by exposing the lack of factual evidence supporting these notions held by most of these Egyptologists. The development of the man would be the development of the movement.

Diop's work would seek to explain and liberate the African being. He reclaimed the ancient aspects of Africa in order to put the present Africa into its proper context. Using African social and political constructs as points of reference, he would come with a format for liberation by using the African people's own particular history as a guide. His work, as stated before, would include activism, particularly in the form of founding political parties in his native Senegal. Diop founded the Block of the Masses of Senegal in 1960, the Senegalese National Front in 1964, and the National Democratic Rally. His pioneering role in Afrocentricity through use of science would continue as well. In 1966, Diop helped to make the creation of the radiocarbon laboratory at IFAN in Dakar. This "Pharaoh," as Ivan Van Sertima would call him, would also become President of the World Black Researchers Association in 1976. The major works that represented the materialization of Diop's thought were *The Cultural Unity of Africa*, *Pre-Colonial Black Africa*, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?*, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, and many others.[29] These works form the very foundation of which Afrocentricity rests. "His new conception of history" would unify Africa and Africans throughout the Diaspora by demonstrating the continuity that would "transcend" the ethnic and ideological differences while still imparting a sense of pride on Africans.

The next pioneer would have a pioneering role in Afrocentricity mostly through the use of political activism, and his major works would reflect this political slant on Afrocentricity. This is no other than Kwame Nkrumah, the Ghanaian born genius and freedom fighter. A man who was the major force in the liberation of Ghana from its former colonial masters through political education and organization of the masses, Nkrumah, born in 1909, would make major contributions to the liberation of African peoples even beyond his period of transition in 1972. Residing with his mother in the village, Nkrumah would go to live with his father in Half Assini when he turned three years old. He would demonstrate great promise in this early schooling.

Eventually, he entered a teacher training college in Accra. Continuing his college education in the United States at Lincoln University, Nkrumah gained invaluable knowledge of the inner-workings of capitalism by being in the heart of its power. Upon graduation, Nkrumah went to England were he joined the West African Students Union, putting himself at the forefront of the struggle for the liberation of African peoples. He would go on to be a part of the fifth Pan-African Conference in Manchester.

After returning to Ghana, Nkrumah helped to form the Conventional People's Party (CCP) in 1951. He would eventually be elected to a position in Accra Central after being imprisoned because of his call for "Positive Action," a halt to work by all non-essential workers in protest to the colonial regime. Nkrumah went on to become Prime Minister when after general elections the CCP gained power. Ghana gained its independence on March 6, 1957, and it then became a Republic in December of 1960 with Nkrumah as its President. Participating and organizing a number of conferences, ranging from the First All-African People's Conference to the First Conference of Independent African States, Nkrumah brought the highest level of organization to the struggle for liberation by any people. Forever seeking the greater unity of Africa, he would also be a founding member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Nkrumah's contributions to Afrocentricity and to the overall fight for African liberation were unsurpassed.

During his activism, Nkrumah produced some of his major works that serve as a guidepost for those continuing the fight. In 1945 after leaving Lincoln University, he wrote *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* in 1957, *Towards Colonial Freedom* in 1957 and republished in 1962, *I Speak of Freedom* in 1961, *Africa Must Unite* in 1964, *Consciencism* in 1964, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* in 1965, and *Challenge of the Congo* in 1967. Nkrumah demonstrated an understanding of imperialism and all its manifestations that allowed him to come up with the necessary tactics to eliminate it. He saw "scientific socialism" as the economic system a unified Africa must take in order to keep from making the same mistakes of the West. Nkrumah's dedication to the unification of Africa can best be summed up in his own words at a speech given on the day of Ghana's independence when he said that "the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent."[30]

The last pioneer highlighted is somewhat different in that he is not of African descent, and this gives him no special treatment. It is only the genius, unwavering search for the truth, and scope and content of the work of Gerald Massey that allows him mention among the great Africanists. A life spanning from 1828 to 1907 was to effect a change on how some viewed the whole of human existence. He was born in Hertfordshire, England to a poor family. In his early years, Massey for the most part was self-educated, reading whatever material on which he could lay his hands. As a "lecturer, poet, and literary critic," he eked out a living.[31] That which brought him to the feet of Mother Africa came later in his life when he was introduced to Egyptology because of an interest in spiritualism.

Massey would study the words of Egypt to ascertain its secrets, thereby revealing the origins of humanity in linguistics, culture, and religion in Africa among its Black children. To say the least, this was contrary to the opinion held by the scholars of his day who sought the origins of humanity everywhere else but Africa. Massey was not plagued with the racism of his colleagues. His research in the origin and evolution of consciousness was centuries ahead of its time, and even today many scholars, both of African and European descent, have not read one of the greatest thinkers and authorities on the origins or religion, civilization, thought, and humanity in Africa. He put fourth his proclamation in his first major work on the subject titled *A Book of Beginnings*:

> The starting point of the human family has now to be sought for in Africa, the birthplace of the black race, the land of the oldest known human types, and of those that preceded and most nearly approached the human…Aethiopia and Egypt produced the earliest civilization in the world and it was indigenous. So far as the records of language and mythology can offer us guidance, there is nothing beyond Egypt and Aethiopia but Africa….[32]

The value of Gerald Massey's works on African consciousness, religion, and history is impossible to ascertain. Put simply, "You cannot study religion and speak as an authority if you have not read Massey's works." He covers everything from the evolution and origin of "typology" which, as Charles S. Finch describes in an essay entitled "The Works of Gerald Massey: Studies in Kamite Origins," which appeared in Ivan Van Sertima's *Egypt Revisited,* as "…the foundation of all-human symbolism, myth, language, and religion."[33] His three-set, double-volumes, would demonstrate the Egyptian origins of everything from the Christ story to Judaism and Christianity while still showing that there was no religious system from Asia or otherwise older than the one given birth to in Africa. This is only a brief summary of Massey's works and in no way does it do justice to his many writings. His works include *A Book of the Beginnings* (1881/1995), *The Natural Genesis* (1883/1998), and *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World* (1907/1992). The importance of Massey's contributions to Afrocentricity lies in the fact that the total liberation of the African person should include a religious system based on his/her own history, and neither Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, nor any other non-African religion, will suffice. Since all religions are cultural, and even though these religions, as Massey has demonstrated, have their birth in Africa, their forms have been altered to fit the worldviews of the prospective peoples who adhere to them. The last and most difficult stage of the liberation of the African soul is the religious stage. And until African peoples can do away with those alien religions, they will continue to be oppressed. Massey, therefore, holds the key to the ultimate liberation of the African consciousness.[34]

These are only a few of the people who had pioneering roles in Afrocentricity. Nonetheless, if one were to do more research, one thing they all would have in common, whether of African descent or not, is a devotion to the truth. This devotion gives Afrocentricity a firm foundation upon which to stand. W. E. B. Du Bois, Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah, Gerald Massey and many others have left a legacy of greatness that will illuminate the future, if future generations continue their work.

## Major Research Questions in Afrocentricity

The foundation upon which Afrocentricity rests is based on certain essential research questions. All forms of inquiry done in the name of Afrocentricity must use these questions and their answers as their basis. Here are those questions according to Diop:[35]

(a) What is the unique history of African peoples?
(b) What is the unique cognitive style of African peoples?
(c) What are the unique characteristics of African languages?

These questions facilitate an understanding of Afrocentricity as well as establish a point of departure for Afrocentric analysis.

## Major Theories and Concepts in Afrocentricity

In Afrocentricity, there are major theories and concepts that form the basis of the discipline. Here are some of them:

(a) *Matriarchal Origins Theory* is the theory that most of African civilizations prior to the incursion of Christianity and Islam were matriarchal in structure with women being shown high levels of respect.[36]

(b) *Two-Cradle Theory* is the theory that Blacks in Africa and Whites in Eurasia resided in two separate localities or cradles which characterized their physical features, cultures, histories, and cognitive styles.[37] It should be noted here that this theory has been dismissed by many scientists, both Black/African and White, in light of the new evidences that point to Africa as the sole cradle of civilization.

(c) *Analogical Symbols Theory* is the theory that African symbolism was based on finding the similarities between things and representing those things incomprehensible, abstraction, by that which is comprehensible.[38]

(d) *Kawaida* was conceived and crafted as a philosophy in the midst of the liberation struggle of the 1960s as an emancipatory philosophy dedicated to Cultural Revolution, radical social change, and bringing good in the world. *Kawaida* was shaped by its focus on culture and community as the basis and building blocks for any real movement for the liberation of African people everywhere. This means that culture is conceived as the crucible in which the liberation struggle of African people takes form and the context in which it will ultimately succeed. *Kawaida* is an ongoing synthesis of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world, asking questions and seeking answers to central and enduring concerns of the African and human community.[39]

(e) *The African Code* is a concept within Pan-Africanism that stresses unity through diversity based upon the seven key principles of *Kwanzaa* delineated by Maulana Karenga: (1) *Umoja*—Unity; (2) *Kujichagulia*—Self-determination; (3) *Ujima*—Collective Work and Responsibility; (4) *Ujamaa*—Cooperative Economics; (5) *Nia*—Purpose; (6) *Kuumba*—Creativity; and (7) *Imani*—Faith. The African Code acts as an intersection of a global Pan-African ethos for unity through diversity. It has been translated into over 30 languages and functions as a non-political, non-religious cultural commonality for African people seeking self-determination everywhere. The African Code employs the Ge'ez alphabet and treats Kiswahili as the official Pan-African language and, subsequently, Ge'ez as an African script to replace all forms of Latin to write all African languages.[40]

These theories and concepts help to guide research in Afrocentricity. They define that which is African; and by doing this, they establish a means of differentiating between that which is African and anything else.

**Academic Areas that Have Employed Afrocentricity**

Asante suggests that in the analysis of what he calls the "three fundamental Afrocentric themes of transcendent discourse: (1) human relations, (2) humans' relationship to the supernatural, and (3) humans' relationships to their own being"[41] that if done with an awareness of the interrelatedness of these themes, a greater understanding of the African being will be acquired. These themes are embedded in the following academic disciplines:

(a) *Psychology* is the study of the way in which the mind works and the manifestation of those thoughts into actions or behaviors while recognizing the distinct character of African thought processes and behavior. In particular, this suggests the predominance or greater use of the right hemisphere, the intuitive side, of the brain when compared with other peoples and its subsequent effects on thoughts and behaviors.

(b) *Anthropology* is the study of the physical, social, and cultural adaptation of African peoples to their ever-changing environment.

(c) *Theology* is the study of the way in which Africans define the Supreme Being that is responsible for the creation and sustaining of the universe and all in it and their relationship to the Supreme Being, God.

(d) *History* is the recording and studying of the relationships between events. From an Afrocentric perspective, the African conception of time, cyclic as opposed to the European linear, is used in application of this discipline in order for it to truly be considered Afrocentric.

(e) *Linguistics* is the study of the way in which language is structured and its nature, as well as the particular way in which Africans conceive and represent the universe in their languages.

There are other areas of study in which an Afrocentric perspective can and should be applied in order to grasp the impact that African cultures have had in those disciplines: Egyptology, literature, music, political science, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, mathematics, the natural sciences, etc. As in the African conception of the universe, all things are defined by relationships and, therefore, Afrocentricity in its application can only be successful when the interrelated natures of these disciplines are reconciled.

**Major Journals on Afrocentricity and Related Topics**

There are many journals on Afrocentricity and even a larger number that feature works on issues relating to Afrocentricity. The following is a sample of these journals:

(a) *The Journal of Black Psychology* deals with the psychological issues facing African peoples. This journal is published quarterly.

(b) *Journal of Black Studies* deals with a wide variety of issues related to Afrocentricity. This journal is published bi-monthly.

(c) *African Archaeological Review* is a journal that deals specifically with archaeological finds in Africa and their significance. This journal is published quarterly.

(d) *African Studies Review* deals with issues ranging from sociology to art. This journal is published three times a year.

(e) *African Studies* is a journal that deals with the issues facing countries in the southern part of Africa. It also contains debates by scholars. It is published twice a year.

(f) *The Journal of African History* deals with the issues of African history, anthropology, and sociology. This journal is published three times a year.

(g) *Current Anthropology* is a journal that deals with anthropological issues in general, but it also features articles dealing with issues related to Africa and people of African descent. This journal is published seven times a year.

## Examples of Works that Employed the Afrocentric Paradigm

In this section, I briefly discuss four studies in different academic disciplines whose authors used the Afrocentric paradigm. Faye Belgrave et al.[42] examined the influence of Afrocentric values, spirituality, and demographic variables on drug knowledge, attitudes, and use. Their sample comprised of 189 fourth and fifth graders attending public schools in Washington, DC and Baltimore, Maryland. The authors obtained measures of Afrocentric values (Collective Work/Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, and Self-Determination), spirituality, age, and whether or not the child resided in a two- or one-parent household. The results derived from the regression analyses revealed that Collective Work/Responsibility and Cooperative Economics were significant predictors of attitudes towards drugs. Collective Work/Responsibility and spirituality were significant predictors of perceived drug harmfulness. Age and spirituality were significant predictors of drug usage. Age was the only significant predictor of drug knowledge. The Collective Work/Responsibility sub-scale was the strongest predictor of drug outcomes. Based on these findings, the authors then suggested Afrocentric preventive approaches to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors against drug use among African American youth.

Leslie Doty[43] employed a multiple regression analysis to examine Afrocentricty as a predictor of adoption among 92 respondents who labeled their racial or ethnic identity as Black or as African American. Forty eight of the respondents had adopted at least one child and 44 had inquired but did not adopt. Doty found that respondents with high scores on the Self-Reinforcement Against Racism sub-scale of Baldwin and Bell's African Self-Consciousness Scale (1985), as factor analyzed by Stokes et al. (1994), were significantly more likely to adopt, compared to those with lower scores, controlling for one's reason for contacting an adoption agency initially (i.e. parent-centered versus child-centered reason). Doty discussed the results in terms of the multidimensionality of Afrocentricity and implications for social work research, practice and policy.

Barbara Wallace and Madonna Constantine[44] probed the relationships among Afrocentric cultural values (i.e. the extent to which an individual adheres to a worldview emphasizing communalism, unity, harmony, spirituality, and authenticity), favorable psychological help-seeking attitudes, perceived counseling stigma, and self-concealment (i.e. the tendency to withhold personal, sensitive information that is perceived as negative or upsetting) in a sample of African American college students. Wallace and Constantine found that for both African American women and men, higher degrees of Afrocentric cultural values were associated with greater perceived sigma about counseling and greater self-concealment. Also, they found that neither favorable psychological help-seeking attitudes nor perceived counseling stigma significantly mediated the relationship between Afrocentric cultural values and self-concealment behavior.

Kevin Cokley and Wendi Williams[45] explored the psychometric properties of the Afrocentric Scale (i.e. the seven principles of Maulana Karenga's *Nguzu Saba* for *Kwanza*) with a sample of 167 African American students. The results generated from the authors' factor analysis showed that the Afrocentric Scale is best conceptualized as measuring a general dimension of Afrocentricity rather than several separate principles. Thus, Cokley and Williams suggested that the Afrocentric Scale will be an increasingly viable option among the handful of measures designed to assess some aspect of Afrocentric values, behavioral norms, and an African worldview.

## Conclusion

Afrocentricity will continue to evolve as more information on African people's past comes to light and as greater and differing demands are placed on African people. It can be defined by its history, the organizations and people who contributed to its development, and the body of ideas that make it up. Applied within the scientific framework, Afrocentricity has greater value and respect.

The value of Afrocentricity in regards to the wellbeing and overall development of African people is invaluable. It can ultimately give them a greater degree of understanding of themselves. Probably the most beneficial aspect of Afrocentricity is its potential in uniting people of African descent for their collective wellbeing.

## Endnotes

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5. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmia, pp.26-27.

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8. Roger C. Schank. "Identification of Conceptualizations Underlying Natural Language." In R. C. Schank and K. M. Colby (eds.). *Computer Models of Thought and Language*. (San Francisco, CA: Freeman, 1973); Roger C. Schank. "Conceptual Dependency: A Theory of Natural Language Understanding." *Cognitive Psychology* (1973, vol. 3). pp.552-631.

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10. Chris K. Riesberg and Roger Schank. "Comprehension by Computer: Expectation-based Analysis of Sentences in Context." In W. J. M. Levelt and G. B. Flores d'Arcais (eds.). *Studies in the Perception of Language*. (New York, NY: Wiley, 1978). p.252.

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16. John Heritage. *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1984), p.242.

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20. Cheikh Anta Diop. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill, Co., 1974), p.1.

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23. Wade W. Nobles. "African Philosophy: Foundations of Black Psychology." In R. E. Jones (ed.). *Black Psychology*. (Berkeley, CA: Cobb and Henry, 1990), p.47.

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25. Lathardus Goggins, II. *African Centered Rites of Passage and Education*. Chicago, IL: African American Images, 1996), p.18.

26. Asante, 1987: p.125.

27. J. R. Firth. *Papers in Linguistics*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1957), p.182.

28. David L. Lewis. *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*. (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), p.3.

29. Cheikh Anta Diop. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill, Co., 1974); *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State*. (New Haven, CT: Lawrence Hill Co., 1978); *Precolonial Black Africa*. (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987); *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. (London, UK: Karnak House, 1989); *Civilizations or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991). See also Ivan Van Sertima (ed.). *Great African Thinkers: Cheikh Anta Diop*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Journal of African Civilization Ltd., Inc., 1992).

30. Kwame Nkrumah. *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. (London, UK: Panaf Books Ltd., 1965), p.1. See also Editors of Panaf Books. *Forward Ever: The Life of Kwame Nkrumah*. (London, UK: Panaf Books Ltd., 1977).

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40. Maulana Karenga, 1993.

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Like Diop, Asante adopted diffusionism and used its instruments in the process. Following Diop, he believes that 'Kemet' (Ancient Egypt) was founded by black Africans and became the cradle of the whole human civilization (Asante 1990). In the 1980s, Asante was the one to coin the terms Afrocentricity, Afrocentrism, and Africology (Afrocology). He argues that Afrocentricity is 'a paradigm based on the idea that African people should re-assert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity' (Asante 2008: 104), 'the total use of method to affect psychological, political, social, cultural, and economic change' (Asante 1987: 125). Asante subdivided his paradigm into several branches and defined the Afrocentric paradigm both as a whole and its elements.