

An Afrocentric Manifesto

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Molefi Kete Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*
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Proponents of the globalization process argue that the homogenization of world culture is reflective of the growing universality of norms and customs reflective of both democracy and liberal market economies. *The Afrocentric Manifesto* rightly questions these assertions of multiculturalism which fail to recognize the legitimate contribution of Africans to the world's historical, artistic, and intellectual development, while simultaneously challenging cultural hegemony. Afrocentricity, according to Asante is not simply an ideological and theoretical foundation which acknowledges the African experience for African people; it also serves as a personal narrative illustrating the sustainability of an intellectual praxis which has yet to reach its full potential. In connecting to the previous works of Cheikh Anta Diop, Maulana Karenga, and Harold Cruse, Asante seeks to rescue the continent from the clutches of anthropologists through establishing a genuine narrative of Africa through explaining how Diopian Historiography, Kawaida, and Black Nationalism movements all influence Afrocentricity but remain distinctively different in its ideological orientation.

In the first chapter Assante revisits Afrocentricity through the lens of Martinique scholar Ama Mazama in an attempt not to focus on the temporality of events as "African history and Africa need no defense," but to place the African subject at the center of historical analysis, in the interpretation and manifestation of cultural will and cultural consciousness. According to Mazama, the notion of Afrocentricity connects Africa to the essential processes of agency and voice, through which Africans throughout the Diaspora situate their learned experiences in a localized and global context outside the boundaries of ethnocentrism and racism. This recognition of African values unmask the rhetoric of power, privilege, and position as Africans discover social experiences conducive to the enhancement of individual and collective self-worth.

The thematic core of Afrocentricity in the following chapters emphasize the importance of theory in practice as a liberation model which extends beyond the notion of Africa itself through the application of strategies in education and history. Of particular importance *In Search of an Afrocentric Historiography* is emblematic in its critique of the continued suppression of intellectual history and impact of post colonial vestiges on the African psychological condition.

The dominance of power based ideologies within the Western world, have allowed Eurocentric values to maintain their privileged assumptions in which differences between Africa and Europe are erroneously accentuated. Stanley Crouch (Stanley Crouch. *Beyond the Afrocentric Con*, Alternatives to Afrocentrism, Center for the New American Community, Manhattan Institute, 1994, pp. 62-63) and other critics have argued that Afrocentricity offers little in the form of intellectual substance based on its particularistic nature, which is a direct result of racial isolationism.¹ Asante uses this chapter to invalidate the notion that Eurocentric historiography is not universal but particularistic as it relates to the human experience.

Through distinguishing between these two forms of historiography as a rebuttal to such assaults Asante's focus on solely on Africa does not alienate Afrocentric thought, but invigorates the political and cultural imagination of Africa's larger communities through its influence on attitude, language, and direction. The ability of Afrocentricity to foster collective agency and open discourse in favor of multiculturalism is imperative for the preservation of African culture and society, as each are complimentary to Western civilization rather than subordinate to its doctrine. This section serves as a call to Afrocentric intellectuals to utilize African historiography as a starting point of social inquiry and continental dynamism. These observations coincide with the principal argument made by Mazama in her work *The Afrocentric Paradigm* whose focus on epistemological centeredness develops Africentricity as an idea which encourages freedom from mental incarceration, striking at the core of those who challenge the relevance of Afrocentricity and its theoretical saliency in the development of African culture and experience.

In *Afrocentricity and History*, the practical applications of agency and voice within Afrocentric theory by Asante unfortunately lend a receptive ear to his critics, the remnants of which are also found in additional chapters. While the recognition of the educational process is critical to the Afrocentric paradigm and the evolution of Afrocentric thought Assante assails and discredits some of the same theoretical foundations used historically to forward Afrocentricity within the larger Diaspora. In alienating the Marxist paradigm, Asante fails to recognize voices of the Diaspora such as Cameroonian intellectual Achille Mbembe whose work *On the Postcolony*, challenges the post-colonial legacies of Ethnocentricity in the examination of underdevelopment and class based cultural identities. In constituting such a narrow perspective in rightly acknowledging that Marx's perspective was consumed with understanding the method of market production rather than cultural norms, he rejects the strong neo-Marxist tradition of Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci and the use of culture as a form of material domination, an argument that could be used to separate Afrocentricity from theories deemed to be universal.

While Asante notes that theoretical foundations such as Marxism can be explained with caveats in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, continued emphasis on the origins of these theories, rather than their relevance unfortunately reduces the ability of Afrocentricity to directly engage and attack the prepositions of Eurocentrism from the basis on which they stand. This underlies the importance to expand the ideological understanding beyond conceptualization of Africans as “other,” thus centering the Afrocentric discourse as a set of human relationships to each other, the supernatural, and their own being which define themselves.

Similar disagreements on postmodernism’s lack of hegemonic deconstruction and the dislocation of the instruments of African dislocation extend to the works of Manthia Diawara and Paul Gilroy into *Race, Brutality, and Hegemony* as Asante focuses more on the role of race in a globalizing world rather than supporting alternative approaches in combating the legacies of ethnocentrism through the lens of African agency. In particular, Senegalese intellectual Mamadou Diouf’s example of vernacular cosmopolitanism serves as a prime example of how culture uses post modernist frameworks to illustrate open and diffuse social phenomenon in the affirmation of African identity without the typology of race. The works of intellectuals such as Errol Henderson also reflect how emerging scholarship is being reshaped to discredit ideas of white supremacy, and ethnocentric claims using valid cultural explanations. The impetus on race in the American construction of social classes found in Afrocentricity and Gilroy’s cultural imperatives are both essential tools in heightening the consciousness of Africans and their place within their respective locales.

In sum, *The Afrocentric Manifesto* lends special importance to its namesake as it remains a comprehensive work on the shared histories and interconnected relationships which exist between African people and should be read in tandem with Mazama’s *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, as both books cover the philosophical, intellectual, educational, and practical meanings of Afrocentricity. As with any manifesto, the limitations of the book still offer glimpses of hope for adherents and protégée’s interested in the political, social, economic, and cultural development of Africa. For academics the book serves as a foundation to understanding the processes connected to African centered thought which then can be applied to understanding the continent’s contributions from a historiographical and theoretical perspective. In the case of social activists, *The Afrocentric Manifesto* should serve as a springboard for action in the communal traditions of responsibility towards individual and humanity. Molefi Asante’s work is not reflective of a scholar committed to the preservation of African history; it is also a definitive work on how to establish stronger networks in order to advance the cause of Pan-African intellectual thought and practice.