

“Anténor Firmin, the ‘Egyptian Question,’ and Afrocentric Imagination”

by

Celucien L. Joseph, Ph.D.

celucien_joseph@yahoo.com

Assistant Professor of English, Indian River State College

This essay examines Joseph Anténor Firmin’s engagement with the racial situation in ancient Egypt. We are particularly interested in Firmin’s confrontational claim of the Black African origin of the ancient Egyptian civilization. This analysis also considers Firmin’s thought along the line of Afrocentric articulation of the historic contribution of the Kemetic culture to classical Greece and world civilizations, as well as his plea for the “formal recognition” of the achievement of the “Black race” in the intellectual development of the modern world.

In 1885, the nineteenth-century Haitian lawyer, statesman, anti-racist intellectual, anthropologist, and Egyptologist, Joseph Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), published his magisterial text, *De l’égalité des races humaines (Anthropologie positive) (The Equality of the Human Races)* in Paris¹ in the form of an impassioned “scientific rebuttal” to Arthur de Gobineau’s scientific racism and, particularly, against his central thesis of the ontological superiority of the Aryan-White race and the ontological inferiority of the Black race. Gobineau articulated his ideas on the subject of racial hierarchy and racial essentialism of the human races, and correspondingly the history and achievement of the white race in modernity in his controversial and unfortunate text, *Essai sur l’inégalité des races (An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races)* (1853–1855).² For Gobineau, the history of the world in the strictest sense of the term is a racial accomplishment, the accomplishment of whiteness.³ On the contrary, Firmin argued that the Aryan race does not name the conclusion of human history and the history of an achievement, which the French anthropologist and other proponents of white ideology and white supremacy celebrated. The Haitian intellectual also challenged Western racist attitudes towards Blacks and the logic of nineteenth century’s scientific racism for ranking the Black race discriminately and deliberately in the lowest racial ladder of the racial hierarchy of the human races and in the metanarratives of human history. Ostensibly, Firmin anticipated Du Bois’ 1903 perennial question: “What does it mean to be a problem?”⁴ In the same line of thought, Firmin was deeply troubled about what Western Egyptologists had reformatted ancient Egyptian-African history to fit their ideological agenda and intellectual vision of world history.

Firmin's cogent response in his celebrated text not only interrogates Gobineau's racist biases but also the logic of other racists who had denied the intellectual and moral achievements of the African and Black people in the foundations of modern civilization and Western modernity. Firmin's intellectual curiosity and rigor weights the veracity of Western historiography, Western Egyptology, modernity's racial imagination, and the scientific enterprise of his time.⁵ A major aspect of this present analysis is to explore precisely Firmin's Afrocentric imagination and sensibility championed by Molefi Kete Asante—the most vocal proponent and poignant intellectual voice of Afrocentric thought in modern times—in regard to the Nile Valley Civilizations. We will also study his argument about the African origin (or the Africaness) of the ancient Egyptian in comparison with other Black Atlantic writers who seem to exhibit an Afrocentric tendency and leaning. Consequently, this essay will apply some of the protocols of Afrocentric inquiry as delineated in Asante's theoretical and yet practical work, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, *The Afrocentric Idea*, and other cognate texts.

Firmin posits that the Kemetic-Egyptian civilization was a Black civilization and that the Black race had made notable contributions to universal civilization, which are often undermined in Western scholarship. His revisionist exposés were motivated by a genuine desire to correct European perspective on African history and culture as well as to valorize Black achievement in human history. In so doing, the Haitian anthropologist-intellectual was concurrently deconstructing Western Egyptology and reshaping ancient Egyptian-African historical narrative. The general outline of the essay offers a succinct narrative of scholarly reflections on Firmin's text (Part one) and analyses the Afrocentric discourse (and Afrocentricity and Egyptocentrism) in order to situate Firmin's Afrocentric sensibility (Part two). We close the essay with Firmin's thoughtful engagement with the "Egyptian question," that is with the ideological interpretation of the history, life, and culture of ancient Egypt by Western Egyptologists.

Firmin and His Text: A Brief Assessment

Firmin's main objective in *The Equality of the Human Races* primary was first intended to dismantle De Gobineau's racist ideas—such as his doctrine of the innate inferiority of the Black race and the innate superiority of the Aryan-White race—and to challenge the strident racist voices, dangerous ideologies and scientific racism of the nineteenth century.⁶ His second objective was to underscore Black pride, the historic achievement and intellectual contributions of ancient Egypt and the people of African ancestry across time and space—such as the symbolic example of Haitians and African Americans⁷—in the meganarratives of human history. His third objective was to demonstrate that "white reason" was delinquent and inadequate. His fourth goal was to stress that "whiteness" was the central problem of modernity and the greatest threat to human flourishing and solidarity. Firmin's final goal was to challenge and destabilize Western arrogance and its claim of ontological superiority.

Hence, in the book Firmin portrays himself simultaneously as an anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-imperial radical as well as an anti-white oppression and anti-white arrogance intellectual. Most importantly, Joseph Ant enor Firmin presents himself as the Apostle of the undivided equality of all people.

In several chapters of *The Equality of the Human Races*, Firmin endeavors, with intellectual rigor, commitment, and scrupulous research, to analyze and debunk European construction of race and interrogate the logic of white supremacy. In the process, he attempts to offer a different epistemology than what was provided by European men of letters by highlighting the distinctive role Africa had played in the advancement of human civilizations as well in the emergence of modernity, what we might phrase Black African particularity.⁸

The Equality of the Human Races is an apologetic text that showcases with clear arguments, intellectual meticulousness and lucidity the momentous contributions of ancient Egyptian civilization in the early developmental stages of classical Greek life and thought and ultimately in the birth of the Western world.⁹ Yet, the reception of Ant enor Firmin, his ideas, and his magnum opus as a pioneer work in modern anthropology and in modern Western intellectual history had been a disappointment. It was after sixty-three years after his death that prominent Twentieth-century Haitian scholar and anthropologist, Jean Price-Mars, an intellectual heir of Firmin, produced the first full biography on him in the French language. Price-Mars's posthumous *Ant enor Firmin* was released in the French language in 1978.¹⁰ In the same way, the first English translation of *The Equality of the Human Races* was produced by the Haitian literary scholar Asselin Charles in 2002, some eighty-three years after its original publication.¹¹

The gradually recent resurgence of scholarly interest in the Anglophone world indicates a renewed appreciation of the significance of Firmin's ideas in our postcolonial moment. It is possible to group recent scholarship on *The Equality of the Human Races* in five interrelated categories: the book's relation to the discipline of modern anthropology, race studies, Egyptology, history of ideas, and Africana studies.¹² According to Firmin's biographer, Price-Mars, Firmin "attacked without interruption the most diverse aspects of thorny problems of anthropology and the related disciplines in the science of man."¹³ Afro-Jewish philosopher Lewis R. Gordon names *The Equality of the Human Races* a "classic in Africana philosophy, philosophical anthropology, and historical anthropology."¹⁴ Anthropologist Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban claims that as a pioneering work on anthropology and a scientific project, *The Equality of the Human Races* was "a positive assertion of the potential of the anthropology objectivity to study human differences without the bias of biological and social ranking."¹⁵

Current studies on Firmin delineate a clear connection between the science of modern anthropology and the modern construction of race, as observed in *The Equality of the Human Races*. Lamentably, Kevin A. Yelvington remarks that “The Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), whose writings on ‘race’ preceded those of Franz Boas and were in direct opposition to contemporaneous racist theorists like Gobineau, placed himself and his work squarely within a framework of diasporal exchanges but can nowhere be seen as an anthropological ancestor.”¹⁶ Faye V. Harrison, who has commented on the multiple legacies of Firmin, remarks that Firmin’s robust *anthropologie positive* contested the scientific racism of Count Arthur de Gobineau (1853-55), whose ideas resonated with his contemporaries in metropolitan France and Anglo-North America.¹⁷ Fluehr-Lobban clarifies that Firmin “developed a critical view of racial classifications and of race that foreshadowed much later constructions of race... [and the text] lies historically at the foundations of the birth of the disciplines of anthropology, yet it is unknown to the field.”¹⁸ Similarly, Gordon states that the absence of attention to Firmin’s work in Western academic studies “is perhaps one of the great travesties of the impact of racism on the history of ideas.”¹⁹

In his recent book on the relevance of Anténor Firmin for the twenty-first century, Haitian scholar and public intellectual Leslie Péan declares that “Firmin’s powerful interventions struck the prevalent racist ideology of Black inferiority evoked by anthropologist ‘scholars’ to justify, on one hand, the enslavement of blacks, on the other hand, the division of Africa by whites at the Berlin Conference of 1885.”²⁰ Complementarily, Watson R. Denis, in his interpretation of the significance of Firmin’s work, reports that “Firmin arrived at the conclusion that the idea of the inequality of the human races was a European strategy to maintain the racial domination of Europe over the rest of the world, and by extension, to keep the political and economic exploitation among peoples and races to justify the social domination within their respective societies.”²¹ Furthermore, historian Laurent Dubois writes:

Firmin’s work was largely ignored by European anthropology, which continued for decades to focus on racial differences and hierarchy. It would take another generation before a new set of thinkers, led by Frantz Boas in the United States, began to dismantle the racist “science” that Firmin had lambasted. And it took much longer yet for Firmin to begin to assume his rightful place in the history of anthropological thought...In Haiti, however, Firmin’s powerful attack on European racism gained him many admirers and established him as one of the country’s most revered intellectuals.²²

In the same line of reasoning, Fluehr-Lobban contends that Western scholars and scientists had consciously marginalized and ignored Firmin’s work in its time because of its “antiracist themes and the use of anthropology in the assertion of human equality...no doubt because of its then revolutionary premise clearly stated in the title.”²³

Scholars have also commented on the contours of Firmin's ideas and the importance of *The Equality of the Human Races* for the field of Africana critical studies and theory, postcolonial studies, and cosmopolitanism. For example, Péan states that, in its publication in 1885, Firmin's work had quickly become a response to the problem of colonialism and its thinkers.²⁴ Fluehr-Lobban notes that Firmin's book articulates "early Pan-Africanist ideas as well as an analytical framework for what would become postcolonial studies."²⁵ Prominent African historian Theophile Obenga writes that Firmin "was a lawyer by profession, a Pan-Africanist by political choice."²⁶ Magloire-Danton substantiates that claim by affirming that

Firmin's perspective methods encompass the three main elements of Pan-Africanist thought identified by Immanuel Geiss, which makes Firmin an early theoretician of the movement: the rejection of the postulate of race inequality, reference to the history of ancient Africa as proof that Africans were capable of civilization, and examples of illustrious individuals of African descent in diverse fields.²⁷

J. Michael Dash in a recent article on the Black internationalism of Firmin presents him simultaneously as a universalist and cosmopolitan thinker. He also claims that not only Firmin had made the case for "crosscultural negotiations" and "post-territorial theorizing," he had also anticipated prominent Caribbean thinkers such as Edouard Glissant and Frantz Fanon.²⁸ Jean-Elie Gilles sees the competitive ideas of universalism, humanism, and nationalism intrinsic to Firmin's thought and intellectual development.²⁹ Gordon contends that the book "challenged what could be called colonial epistemology and intellectual dependency....the presupposition was that black people could offer at most unreflective experience—data—for the proper purveyors of reason to assess or offer resources for study."³⁰ In other words, Firmin diagnosed the problem of what we might call "the crisis of Western reason" as well as sought to "demonstrate that Paul Broca and Arthur de Gobineau (among many others) were wrong and *how* they were wrong."³¹

Moreover, current studies on Firmin do not publicly distinguish him as a "formal Egyptologist" until a recent article was published in French by the African Egyptologist Theophile Obenga. Obenga offers linguist and rhetorical evidence from a careful study of Firmin's text that substantiates his thesis. He concludes that Firmin was an "Egyptologist...one of the first among the Blacks of Africa and the Diaspora."³² In addition, Obenga observes that "Anténor Firmin was strongly critical of racist theories of physical anthropology. He also defended the Africanness of Pharaonic Egypt. The Egyptian question was an interesting historiography to know."³³

This present essay expands on Obenga's thought by considering the relationship between Firmin's ideas to Afrocentricity as an intellectual project of revisionist history and his engagement with the Egyptian question. I am particularly interested in Firmin's Afrocentric imagination and his daring thesis of the Black origin and Africaness of ancient Egyptian civilization. In various ways, *The Equality of the Human Races* Firmin has clearly exhibited early manifestations of Afrocentricity and pre-Negritudist ideas. As previously noted in the valuable body of scholarship reviewed above, Firmin was a complex intellectual, whose ideas on the human nature, race, Negritude, Black pride, Black nationalism, post-colonialism, and cosmopolitanism can be interpreted as paradoxical and sometimes ambivalent. These ideas can be very challenging to us; yet, we must learn to wrestle with them and read Firmin more closely. While this current analysis is built upon current scholarship on Firmin, it seeks to fill many intellectual voids on Firmin studies.

The Afrocentric Discourse

In a recent article, Molefi Kete Asante, the most representative figure of the Afrocentric school of thought in the Anglophone world, pays homage to Firmin when he writes, "When the Haitian intellectual Anténor Firmin in 1885 wrote his famous book, *The Equality of the Human Races*, he was defending all black people, those in the United States, Brazil, United Kingdom, and Nigeria, against racist assaults and bias commentary."³⁴ Asante's reflection on the meaning of Firmin and his work is pan-Africanist in leaning; it situates the Haitian intellectual in the tradition of Black Atlantic vindicationism and the anti-racist narrative in the history of ideas. The passage below succinctly summarizes Firmin's intellectual vision and bond between his ideas and the Afrocentric discourse:

In examining the region of Ancient Kemet (currently referred to as "Ancient Egypt"—another discussion for another time), Firmin presents incontrovertible historical evidence supporting his and early writers' accounts that the inhabitants of the region were black, a term that over time has acquired greater social significance than in the past. In providing copious research on the region, particularly the journal entries of early visitors, Herodotus among them, Firmin soundly situates the origins of the peoples of the region in Upper Kemet/Egypt, i.e. in the interior of black Africa. Interestingly, his argument regarding the African/Black phenotype of the ancient Kemites/Egyptians predates assertions made by Afrocentric scholars by nearly a century. Such a position by a scholar from the 19th century, from Haiti no less, allows for the removal of defaming designations applied to today's Afrocentric scholars who are often viewed as scholarly extremists and historical revisionists.³⁵

Firmin's affinity to and parallelism with Afrocentricity can be captured in five main ideas or concerns: (1) The problem with Western Egyptology and historiography in constructing African history and culture, (2) The conceptualization of an alternative epistemology grounded on African-Egyptian phenomena and achievement, (3) The importance of ancient Egyptian history for understanding modern African history and the history of the Black race across time and space, (4) The intellectual role and significance of ancient Egypt in the birth of classical Greece and Rome, and (5) The Black race had played a singular role in universal civilization by bringing its distinct contributions.³⁶ What is then Afrocentricity? Where does it come from?

A critic has recently observed that Afrocentricity is “many things to many people.”³⁷ For the sake of precision, we shall define Afrocentricity primarily as an ideology and a cultural, intellectual, and educational movement that stresses the African agency and perspective in the quest for values, knowledge, truth, and understanding. Like *The Equality of the Human Races*, Afrocentricity is an intellectual orientation that seeks to decenter the Eurocentric paradigm by shifting the geography of reason and the discourse of civilization to the significance of ancient Egypt in the birth of the modern world. Firmin and Afrocentrists would argue for the putative influence of ancient Egypt—which they contend was undeniably black—on the ancient Greek civilization. The Afrocentric paradigm articulates the cultural uniformity thesis of continental Africa and across the Black Diaspora; advocates of this school of thought valorize the African heritage and the continuity of African cultural traditions and values in the African Diaspora as well as the survivals of Egyptian civilization. The Afrocentric enterprise is chiefly concerned with the vexed question of the Black African origin of civilization and the blackness of Pharaonic Egypt. Yet, like Firmin their intellectual predecessor, Afrocentrists pursue the de-Europeanization of world history and the culture of modernity by promoting a wider openness to cultural relativism, alternative histories and worldviews.

Ama Mazama, a fervent advocate of this school of thought, suggests that Afrocentricity should be understood as a “paradigm.”³⁸ Mazama relies heavily on Kuhn's work in her conceptualizing of Afrocentricity as a “scientific paradigm.” While she subscribes to the cognitive aspect and the structural aspect of a paradigm as defined by Kuhn, she adds a third one: the functional aspect, which she describes as the notion that “knowledge can never be produced for the sake of it but always for the sake of our liberation, a paradigm must activate our consciousness to be of any use to us.”³⁹ By inference, Afrocentrists are intellectual-activists. Mazama rejects Russell Adam's fourfold classification of ‘Afrocentrism’ as defined below:

The “Nile Valley” Afrocentrists (the “hard-liners” identified as espousing “pure Afrocentrism,” and gathered around Molefi Kete Asante); the Continental Afrocentrists, who do not pay any special attention to Kemet (Egypt), and the Afrocentric Infusionists, primarily concerned with making the African cultural and social experience a part of the curriculum; and the Social Afrocentrists, for whom “African per se is more of a target of interest than inspiration.”⁴⁰

Accordingly, Firmin may be classified as a Nile Valley Afrocentrist. Firmin certainly used the ancient Egyptian civilization as a symbol of Black pride and to rebuke the prevalent doctrine of Black innate inferiority. For him, African achievement in history was a target for Black inspiration in the Diaspora. Mazama goes on to demarcate that Afrocentricity views “the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one,”⁴¹ acknowledging the existence of alternative epistemologies in the market of ideas and the realm of multiculturalism. The Africological methodological principles underscore that “the African experience must determine all inquiry, the spiritual is important and must be given its due place, immersion in the subject is necessary, holism is a must, intuition must be relied on, not everything is measurable because not everything that is significant is material, and the knowledge generated by the Afrocentric methodology must be liberating.”⁴² Mazama acknowledges that the methods employed by Africologists may vary, as they are connected with their particular subject of research; in the same line of thought, she avers the existence of a multiplicity or variety of Afrocentric theories in the world of ideas.

Afrocentric moral philosopher Maulana Karenga does not affirm the paradigmatic status to Afrocentricity but rather construes the school of thought as a category. He sustains that Afrocentricity is “essentially a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of African people.”⁴³ Karenga insists that “the focus is on the cultural and human quality of African thought and practice rather than on thought and practice as an ideological conception and conduct.” Nonetheless, critics of Afrocentricity state that the movement gives attention to the building pride in African American and Black diasporic communities, and stops short in analyzing interaction and transformation; it stresses more on race than on community, more on heritage than on exchange, and more unity than on variety.⁴⁴ As will be observed later in the essay, Firmin emphasizes direct links between Egypt and Ethiopia, and the shared cultural traditions and common religious practices between the two countries.

Critics of Afrocentricity also bring to the front the following challenges to the school of thought: (1) Afrocentricity is presented as a dogma of authenticity rather than an orientation and methodology, (2) It denies the reality and value of the diversity of perspectives and approaches within the disciplines of Black Studies, (3) It promotes a static, monolithic and unreal concept of African culture which denies or diminishes its dynamic and diverse character, (4) it overemphasizes the continental African past at the expense of recognizing the African American past and present as central to and constitutive of African culture and the Afrocentric enterprise, and (5) finally, “Afrocentrism” is unable to prove its utility in intellectual production beyond declaration of its presence and aspirations.⁴⁵

The origin of the term Afrocentric is unknown. African American historian William Jeremiah Moses credited W.E.B. Du Bois as probably the first writer to have used the concept as early as 1961 in a paper proposal entitled “Proposed plans for an Encyclopaedia Africana,” whose objective was to be “unashamedly Afro-Centric, but not indifferent to the impact of the outside world.”⁴⁶

Nonetheless, the cultural critic and most influential Afrocentric scholar today is Molefi Kete Asante of Temple University would popularize Afrocentricity as a distinctive worldview in numerous path-breaking studies.⁴⁷ Asante defines Afrocentricity as a philosophy and program for social change. In *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, he writes, “The Afrocentric method seeks to transform human reality by ushering in a human openness to cultural pluralism which cannot exist without the unlocking of the minds for acceptance of an expansion of consciousness.”⁴⁸ He continues by noting, “I seek to overthrow parochialism, provincialism, and narrow Wotanic visions of the world by demonstrating the usefulness of an Afrocentric approach to questions of knowledge.”⁴⁹ Asante’s objective is to inspire proponents of this school of thought “to put African ideals and values at the center of inquiry”⁵⁰ as well as to “allow the student of human culture investigating African phenomena to view the world from the standpoint of the African.”⁵¹ Both Asante and Firmin would construe the liberative project of Afrocentricity is its clear emphasis on emancipative epistemology and on the African as subject (that is African agency) rather than object in the overarching narrative of humanity.⁵² Advocates of African-centered though employ rigorously the African cultural image as a tool to increase the self-esteem and consciousness of the people of African ancestry in the United States and in the African Diaspora.

In *The Afrocentric Idea*, Asante asserts that Afrocentricity “proposes a cultural reconstruction that incorporates the African perspective as a part of an entire human transformation, critical theory suggests a pathway.”⁵³ As he makes clearer, “The crystallization of this critical perspective I have named Afrocentricity, which means, literally, placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior.”⁵⁴ While Mazama is correct to affirm that “it is to Asante that we owe the making of African epistemological relevance into an operational scientific,”⁵⁵ she only tells half of the truth when she also enunciates, “much like we owe Cheikh Anta Diop the making of the Black-ness of the ancient Egyptians into an operational scientific principle.”⁵⁶ The problem with Mazama’s assessment is her failure to acknowledge our considerable debt to Firmin as the first Black Egyptologist who revolutionized our understanding of the Black origin of the ancient Egypt and put the ancient Kemetic civilization at the center of African epistemological inquiry, as early as in the nineteenth century. Firmin was also among the first Black anthropologists and intellectuals to deconstruct Western Egyptology and decolonize Eurocentric perspective on African historiography. He reconstructed scientifically the African historical narrative from the source that is from classical Egyptian civilization. Consequently, both Asante and Diop are intellectual heirs of Ant  nor Firmin.

Afrocentricity and Egyptocentrism

Echoes of the Afrocentric ideology can be traced in the writings of both Anglophone and Francophone Black and non-Black writers in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries.⁵⁷ To various degrees, the works of these writers exhibit explicitly both Afrocentric and Egyptocentric themes and ideologies. While the discourse of Afrocentricity seeks to link the cultural traditions and civilization of ancient Black Egypt to those of continental Black Africa and the Black Diaspora, the discourse of Egyptocentrism puts forth the idea that ancient Egypt was geographically and culturally African and that the flourishing civilization of Egypt was unquestionably Negroid. The thesis of the black African creation of ancient Egyptian civilization had been defended with intellectual force and brilliance relatively almost by all the aforementioned writers.

Egyptian antiquities were first discovered by scholars and scientists who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte on a travelling campaign to Egypt in 1799.⁵⁸ These researchers described the Egyptians as having Negroid features including the high-status individuals in the Egyptian society and political order.⁵⁹ As Cheikh Anta Diop explains:

Egyptologists were dumfounded with admiration for the past grandeur and perfection then discovered. They gradually recognized it as the most ancient civilization that had engendered all others. But, imperialism being what it is, it became increasingly “inadmissible to continue to accept the theory—evident until then—of a Negro Egypt. The birth of Egyptology was thus marked by the need to destroy the memory of a Negro Egypt at any cost and in all minds.”⁶⁰

Proslavery interest in Western societies had discredited the Black African origin of the ancient Egyptian civilization. In addition, Firmin had also reported that White racist scientists had denied the historic contribution of Black Egypt to the intellectual development of humanity to support the doctrine of racial inequality, the innate inferiority of the Black race and the enslavement of Blacks.⁶¹ St. Clair Drake informs us that while White racists in the United States maintained that the extraordinary Egyptian civilization was debased by miscegenation with Negroes, black intellectuals and antiracist writers used the Sphinx as a symbol of the Negro presence in Egypt.⁶² For example, Edward Wilmot Blyden who himself immigrated to Liberia in 1851 wrote about the emblematic Egyptian Sphinx in this manner:

Her [sic] features are decidedly that of the African or Negro type, with “expanded nostrils.” If, then, the sphinx was placed here—looking out in majestic and mysterious silence over the empty plain where once stood the great city of Memphis in all its pride and glory, as an “emblematic representation of the King”—is not the inference clear as to the peculiar type of race to which that King belonged?⁶³

In *The Negro*, published in 1915, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, “Egyptian civilization seems to have been African in its beginnings and in its main line of development...Egyptian monuments show distinctly Negro.”⁶⁴ Two decades later after much research on the subject of the ancient Egypt, Du Bois published *Black Folk Then and Now* and stated that “In recent years, despite the work of exploration and interpretation in Egypt and Ethiopia, almost nothing is said of the Negro race. Yet that race was always prominent in the valley of the Nile.”⁶⁵ In 1946, Du Bois would revisit the topic again and even included a Chapter on “Egypt” in *The World and Africa*. Du Bois was more decisive to declare more strongly that “We conclude, therefore, that the Egyptians were Negroids, and not only that, but by tradition they believed themselves descended not from the whites or the yellows, but from the black peoples of the south.”⁶⁶ As Drake once again remarks, “Egyptology thus became a crucial arena in the persisting struggle between antiblack racists and those black intellectuals who considered themselves to be vindicationists.”⁶⁷

Furthermore, the debate over the Black genesis of civilization and over the character of ancient Egypt and the idea that the ancient Greece had borrowed both cultural and intellectual resources from the black people of Egypt had also appeared in the pages of several important controversial texts.⁶⁸ It is noteworthy to underscore here it was the three-volume magisterial work of the white British and Cornell University historian Martin Bernal, under the provocative title *Black Athena*, that has gained the academic attention of the Afrocentric movement in the United States. The multivolume work⁶⁹ was published by the Rutgers University Press, and, as the author states, “essentially concerned with the Egyptian and Semitic roles in the formation of Greece in the Middle and Late Bronze Age.”⁷⁰ In this historical revisionism project, Bernal also sought to affirm Black agency in world history and in the making of world civilizations.

In these rigorous and learned studies, Bernal complemented and fortified the works of previous Afrocentrists and especially the Firminian thesis of Black genesis as will be observed in subsequent paragraphs, by establishing literary, archeological, and linguistic data of the substantial influence of ancient Egypt and Phoenician on Greek civilization. His well-developed thesis about the Egyptian question claimed for the African backgrounds of Attic civilization resulting in his rejection of the notion that Greek civilization was original and autonomous. Martin put forth the idea that Western historians “have not acknowledged the full extent of Greece’s debt to Egypt and the Near East.” He explained that this silence in Western historiography and modern intellectual history was chiefly due to eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ racism and anti-Semitism, and consequently, European scholars had dismissed the Phoenician and Egyptian influence on Greece.

Bernal declared that Greece had imported both Egyptian culture and language through the exchange with the Semitic people known as the Hyksos in the seventeenth and sixteen centuries B.C. He agreed with Firmin and other Afrocentrists in many points: (1) that the Egyptians introduced civilization to Greeks, (2) the Hyksos brought to Greece Egyptian language and culture during the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries B.C., (3) Classical Greek philosophers borrowed from Egyptian philosophy, (4) the Egyptian origins of many of the Greek heroes such as Socrates and Inachus, (5) the Roman poet and playwright Terrence was a Black African, and (6) Cleopatra had African ancestors.⁷¹

Firmin, the Egyptian Question or the “White Problem”

Exclusively in Chapter nine in *The Equality of the Human Races*, with intellectual force, clarity, and brilliance, Firmin defends the Blackness of Pharaonic Egypt and the influence of Kemetic civilization on ancient Greece as well as the contributions of ancient Egypt to world civilizations. Foremost, Firmin indicates that the “Egyptian question” was both an intellectual and psychological crisis of Western Egyptology and nineteenth century scholarship. This predicament clearly had to do with two basic factors: the origin, and the cultural identity (i.e. skin color) of the inhabitants of ancient Egypt. In turn, the Egyptian conundrum left an indelible mark on the mind and intellect of Western cynics in regard to the creators of the ancient Egyptian civilization. Subsequently, Firmin could write, “The Egyptian question...involves the most complex interests and absorbs the attention of the Ottoman world, the Slavic world, and the Germanic world, and the Latin world.”⁷² The Egyptian phenomenon was inevitably tied to the history and the achievement of a people in the history of ideas in the West in both eighteenth and nineteenth century, respectively.

Quoting the Spanish republican politician Emilio Castelar (1832-1899) in full, Firmin reiterates that the source of Egyptian civilization was the riddle of Western modernity, an epistemological watershed among the nations in the West:

For the Turks, Egypt is but a part of their empire. For the Austrians, it is a line they respect because of their own possessions in the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea. For the Italians, concerned with the security of their beautiful Sicily and aspiring to claim Malta and colonize Tripoli and Tunis, it is a border to be protected. For the great and powerful Germany, whose pride could not withstand the loss of its hegemony in the European world, Egypt is both a continental and extra-continental question. For Russia, which dreams of a Greek Bizantium in Europe and of land route to India through Asia, Egypt is a European question. For Spain, Portugal, and Holland, it is an important crossroads on the itinerary to the various islands and archipelagos still under their respective flags. For all of them, in this moment of horrible anxiety, Egypt is the preeminent question. All events pertaining to it can lead either to peace, which fosters work, trade, and freedom, or to implacable war, which spreads death, desolation, and sorrow in the world. But the Egyptian question is essentially an Anglo-French question.⁷³

Ultimately, for Firmin, the Egyptian question was inescapably a “White problem.” He sought to provide a plausible scientific rejoinder to the popular belief among European men of letters that “Blacks have no social history and so have never influenced the march of humanity.”⁷⁴ Firmin professed that the white problem was the misrecognition that the Black race had contributed “its stone to the construction of the edifice.”⁷⁵ Looking at the issue in a grand scale, Firmin informed us that white prejudice and Western anti-Africanism were deeply rooted in European racial solidarity and ethnic superiority, what he calls “Caucasian union”⁷⁶ and “the worst form of egocentrism.”⁷⁷ Firmin described the logic of European solidarity. First, he inferred that it was customary for Western scientists and scholars to scorn “everything that was not European.”⁷⁸ In fact, he noted astutely, “all White European nations naturally tend to unite in order to dominate the rest of the world and the other human races...It is more in order to paralyze the progress of a feared or resented rival than to support that people, whom in any case it only intends to exploit itself.”⁷⁹ There is a sense to infer here that Firmin connected the Egyptian question with European “civilizing mission” and imperial hegemony and colonialism.

Firmin moves on to address Western construction of the ancient Egypt and the central claims (or the major tenets) of anthropologists and Egyptologists of his time: (1) That the ancient populations of Egypt belonged to the White race,⁸⁰ (2) Westerners had severed the ancient Egyptians from the Ethiopian race and turned them into a branch of the Caucasian race,⁸¹ (3) They also claimed that Egyptians felt great contempt for the other Black peoples of Africa,⁸² (4) The Black African race did not create the ancient civilization that flourished on the shores of the Nile Valley,⁸³ (5) The Egyptians were not originated from Ethiopia,⁸⁴ (6) Egypt was all Asiatic,⁸⁵ (7) Gobineau claimed that a White people from Asia civilized the Egyptians,⁸⁶ (8) Egyptologists and anthropologists denied that the people living in the Nile banks were not Black,⁸⁷ and (9), finally, the Egyptians were gifted *dark-skinned Caucasians* descended from Ham, the son of Noah.⁸⁸ Firmin attempts to expose the various ways that European scholars had reformatted ancient Egyptian history for their own gain.

In the subsequent paragraphs, we allow Firmin to respond to those objections and directly engage the major tenets and assumptions of scholars and scientists of his time.

The Case for the Black Civilization in the Nile Valley

Firmin opens Chapter nine (“Egypt and Civilization”) of the book with an excellent illustration, an elaborate syllogism:

Truth is eternal. It must remain whole through time and space, otherwise it cannot be validated by logic...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.⁸⁹

To express the matter a different way, the historical record of the past and the experience of Black people across time and space do not validate nor justify the position of white racists that blacks are inferior to whites. In the passage above, Firmin intends to surface historical accomplishments of the Black race in order to bear witness and dismiss white arrogance. Yet, his ultimate goal is concurrently to critique white supremacist ideology, challenge pseudo-scientific claims that are presented and proliferated as exclusive truth claims, and reconstruct African history and culture from the standpoint of classical Egypt and Black agency.

He pursues forward to articulate his major arguments. That the civilization of the ancient people of Egypt, which he calls by the original name “Kemet,” “precedes all the others.”⁹⁰ He advances the idea that the Black Egyptians “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.”⁹¹ The Nile Valley civilization theory best explains the rise of the ancient Egyptian civilization, an idea that is relatively supported by all modern Egyptologists.⁹² For example, Diop posits that “the Nile Valley was peopled by a progressive descent of the Black peoples from the region of the Great Lakes, the cradle of *Homo sapiens sapiens*.”⁹³ J.D. Walker proclaims that, “the northern Nile Valley owes much to development in the Sahara and probably the Sudan...Nilotic flora and fauna were well integrated into the belief and cultural systems, including writing.”⁹⁴ Firmin identifies precisely the Hamites, “the inventors of geometry,” as the people who lived on the shores of the Nile. He exclaims that they existed “more than three thousand years before the Christian era, when the European nations were still in a barbarous state, the Hamites who lived on the shores of the Nile had already been doing geometric computations, calculating the area of different types of surfaces.”⁹⁵ Other powerful African kingdoms and civilizations such as the Kushitic or Ethiopian emerged around the Nile Valley.⁹⁶

The majority of Egyptologists in Firmin’s era maintained that the people inhabited within the precincts of the Nile bank were not black and a people of different ethnic group and culture. Firmin strikes back by countering the prerogative of the ethnography of Egyptologists of the ancient peoples of the Region is not historically reliable. He thus points out that “the further back in antiquity we go the more we become convinced that all the peoples living on the shores of the Nile were of the same ethnological type.”⁹⁷ To justify his position, the Haitian intellectual references an authoritative text in classical Greek literature, Aeschylus’s drama, *Prometheus Bound*. He hence cites these famous lines:

On the coast of Egypt, near the mouth and flood region of the Nile, there stands the city of Canope. There, by the sole touch of his caressing hand, Jupiter will restore your sanity.

You will give birth to a son whose name will remind you of the god’s touch, black Epaphus who will harvest his crops on all the plains irrigated by the Nile during its long journey.⁹⁸

Admittedly, Firmin avers that scholars of his time often misread and debated the real meaning of the passage above. In his careful exegesis of the text, he interprets that the poet Aeschylus seeks to convey the message of the exodus of the Egyptian people who, according to Greek tradition, had journeyed from the farthest regions of equatorial African to the mouth of the Nile where they lay the first foundations of ancient civilization.⁹⁹ Accordingly, the “Black Epaphus,” as mentioned in the text is the personification of the Egyptian people, was the bearer of civilization who would bring the light to all humanity. Pondering further upon these words, he makes the following pronouncement: “Should my interpretation of Prometheus Bound to be considered adequate proof that the Egyptians were a black race represented by Black Ephaphus who was to harvest all the plains irrigated by the Nile.”¹⁰⁰ Asante remarks trenchantly that the Afrocentric discourse recognizes the cultural complex of the Nile Valley as “points of reference for an African perspective much the same way as Greece and Rome serve as reference points for the European world.”¹⁰¹

Firmin continues with the conversation by asking a rhetorical question, how can “a race Europeans consider radically inferior, could produce a nation to which today’s Europe owes everything, for Egypt is responsible for the original intellectual and moral achievements which constitute the foundations of modern civilization.”¹⁰² Firmin maintains that the vestiges of antiquity do testify that there was a period of history that Black people “were holding up the flame of early civilization.”¹⁰³ Accordingly, if this first premise is attested as a truth claim, then, the theory of the inequality of the races is dismissed or rejected.

The Egyptians Called their Land Kemet

We already referenced in the previous section that Firmin used the original name “Kemet,” to identify the ancient Pharaonic Egypt. He continues by reporting that the Egyptians themselves called their land Kemet, meaning “the Black land of Egypt,” or simply the “Black land.”¹⁰⁴ He also adds, “As for their national name, the Egyptians called themselves *Khemi*, a word that means “burnt face,” just like *AEthiopes*.”¹⁰⁵ Firmin deploys the word *Retou* to denote the indigenous people of Egypt; as he notes, “We know, in fact, that the word *Retou* means nothing more than indigenous, a “native of Egypt.”¹⁰⁶ As a result, he could assert, “That the ancient Egyptians, the true *Retous*, were Black Africans, just like the other Negroes,” and that “they called themselves *Retou*... which seemed to distinguish them from the *Nahasi* or *Na’hasiou* (Negroes).”¹⁰⁷ At this point, Firmin does not give the impression that the Egyptians undermine their own Blackness and Africaness. In fact, before this particular observation, he clarifies the seemingly confusion this might bring to the readers:

The ancient Egyptians grouped together the Asiastics (*Aamou*) and the white-skinned peoples of the North (*Tamahou* or *Tahennou*). Isn’t this division significant? Does it not suggest that they claimed for themselves the same origin as the other Black peoples of Africa and that, rightly or wrongly, they attributed a common origin of the White peoples of both Asia and Europe?¹⁰⁸

Firmin expounds on his argument for the Black beginning of ancient Egypt by engaging another dimension in the Egyptian life and experience. He turns to the visual culture and the aesthetic character of Egyptian art, monuments, and paintings. He posits that “Egyptians artists seem to have taken particular care to distinguish themselves from Whites,”¹⁰⁹ and significantly, the Egyptians used the “black color to represent the principal deities as well as the Pharaohs.”¹¹⁰ By citing a quote from Champollion that “Egypt is all African and not in the least Asiatic,”¹¹¹ Firmin was dismissing the idea that external influences from Asia are the sole basis for the successes of Egyptian civilization and its intellectual development.

The Haitian Egyptologist strengthens his linguistic argument by appealing to an ancient authority in the Medieval era, Eustathius of Constantinople. He observes:

Until the last years of the Middle Ages, then, scholars generally believed in the Negro origin of the *Retou* (In his *Commentaries on The Odyssey*, Eustathius of Constantinople comments on a well-known phrase asserting that the expression was used to mean “to be burnt by the sun,” that it, “to turn black, to turn brown.”¹¹²

Firmin’s extrapolation based on linguistic data is confirmed by Obenga in the article we referenced earlier in the essay. Obenga shows systematically, through his close reading of Firmin’s text and Firmin’s usage of the Egyptian language, that the Haitian anthropologist was one of the earliest Black Egyptologists in the nineteenth century. Felicitously, he specifies that Firmin transcribes innately Egyptian proper names—very close to the Egyptian language—a clear indication of his knowledge of ancient Egypt and familiarity with the Egyptian language.¹¹³ For example, Firmin writes authentically the selected following Egyptian names:

- 1) *Ramses II or Ramesses II (Ri□māsisu)*¹¹⁴
- 2) *Nahasi/Na’hasiou (Negroes)*¹¹⁵
- 3) *Tamahou or Tahennou (White-skinned peoples of the North)*¹¹⁶
- 4) *Aamou (Asiatics)*¹¹⁷
- 5) *Khemi*¹¹⁸
- 6) *Retous*¹¹⁹
- 7) *Kha-f-Ra (Cheops)*¹²⁰
- 8) *Sheikh-el-Balad (Ka-aper)*¹²¹
- 9) *Rahotpou*¹²²
- 10) *Nofrit*¹²³
- 11) *Nofritari*¹²⁴
- 12) *Medinat-Habu*¹²⁵
- 13) *Ahmes*¹²⁶
- 14) *Psamethik*¹²⁷
- 15) *Piankhy Meri Amoun*¹²⁸

In *Civilization or Barbarianism*, originally published in French in 1981, Cheikh Anta Diop would substantiate Firmin's position that Kemet was in fact an "African land" and connected with the rest of "Black Africa;" and that "Kemet gave birth to subsequent Black African societies such as Nubia, Kush, Meroe, and ancient Ghana."¹²⁹ In addition, Asante complements both Firmin and Diop when he writes, "The Africans called their land Kemet and it was designated 'the land of the Blacks.' This was quite appropriate inasmuch as the country had found its life from the emergence of civilization in Upper, that is, southern Egypt, where the people were often as black as the fertile soil that extended, on either side, the length of the Nile."¹³⁰ Troy D. Allen also observes, "Kemet provides us with a record of how Africans constructed their society before foreign influences had taken hold in Africa."¹³¹ This same specialist on ancient Egyptian history sustains that the relationship between Kemet and Nubia (Ethiopia) is significant in studying the social organization of ancient Kemet. Nubia was egyptianized in all aspects of culture and that there had been uninterrupted contacts between the two nations and that both ancient Kemites and ancient Nubians-Ethiopians were of the same race.¹³²

We have already seen that temples were built all over Nubia by the Kings of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. Then towns important as religious, commercial and administrative centers grew around those temples. Nubia was entirely reorganized on purely Egyptian lines and a completely Egyptian system of administration was set up, entailing the presence of a considerable number of Egyptian scribes, priests, soldiers and artisans.¹³³

As observed, Firmin cogently defended the blackness of ancient Egypt and delineated that there was a close relationship between ancient Kemet-Egypt and Ethiopia. Firmin establishes that close links between Egyptians and Ethiopians are important signals in finding the origin of the Egyptians. Firmin was particularly concerned to inquire about the skin color of the Ethiopians. Were the Egyptians black like the Ethiopians? What was the nature of the relationship between the Egyptians and the Ethiopians? To what extent did the Egyptians and Ethiopians share similar cultural traditions and practices? How significant are those common customs in retracing the origin of the Egyptians?

The Egyptians are the Descendants of the Ethiopians

Firmin debunks the predominant thesis of nineteenth-century European social scientists and anthropologists that the Egyptian people were a White race and that Egypt was not a part of Africa. Firmin also counters a major tenet of Western Egyptology the notion that the Ethiopians did not originate from Ethiopia. He does that by documenting scientific evidence ranging from the material culture in anthropology, archeology, linguistic (to a certain degree) and to religious practices as well as by offering the proof from the science of botany and fauna that links the Egyptian and Ethiopian peoples.

He contends that Egypt was one of the colonies of Ethiopia and that the Ethiopians who migrated to Egypt created the great Pharaonic civilization. To express this idea another way, the Egyptians were the direct descendants of Ethiopians, a historical fact that attests to the origin of ancient Egyptian civilization. Consequently, in Chapter nine (“Egypt and Civilization”), Firmin’s inquiry leads him to determine exactly the origin, cultural identity, and more importantly the “race” of the Ethiopian people and the nature of their relationships to the Egyptians.

Firmin underscores that there is no substantial historical nor scientific evidence that justifies classifying the ancient Egyptian race as Caucasian.¹³⁴ “Once we acknowledge the Ethiopian origin of the ancient civilizers of Egypt, he declares, we will necessarily acknowledge the innate capacity of all the races to develop their genius and their intelligence.”¹³⁵

Firmin remarks that the Egyptians had migrated from Ethiopia by following the flow of the Nile is an established belief among scholars and is well attested by the French philologist and man of letters Jean-Jacques Ampère in *Voyage en Égypte et en Nubie*. Ampère visited Egypt for scientific research and was influenced by the works of the “Father of Egyptology” Jean Francois Champollion.¹³⁶ In the referenced text, Ampère makes this striking observation about the peoples of the Nile Valley: “The farther one goes up the Nile, the more one finds physical similarities between the populations living today on the river’s shores and the ancient race as it is portrayed on the old monuments and as its appearance has been preserved in the mummies.”¹³⁷ As early as 1830, Ampère in *Heures de poésies* or *De l’Histoire de la poésie* had sustained the common racial identity and origin of the Egyptians and Ethiopians when he composed this poetic stand, which Firmin reproduced in his book:

With their black tresses, the Nubian women
Draped in their flowing dresses
Resemble the Egyptian maidens
Whose portraits decorate the monuments.¹³⁸

Ampère’s understanding of the Egyptian-Ethiopian phenomenon and the close relationship between the two countries is communicated in his remarkable insight that the Ethiopians of the Nile Valley were black just like the Egyptians. In this poetic note, he stresses the material culture exhibited in the common dress and visual painting, which the Egyptians and Ethiopians shared. Firmin also cites the French linguist Jean-François Champollion, who also visited Egypt and penned several influential works on the Egyptian civilization and language.¹³⁹ Champollion is prominently known as the founding “Father of Egyptology” who deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs on the Rosetta Stone and published the first Egyptian grammar in the French language in 1822. From 1828 to 1830, he and a group of able scientists under the leadership of Emperor Napoleon conducted a scientific expedition in Egypt. Champollion, who had declared that the Egyptian and Ethiopian peoples were one and the same race and with common cultural and linguistic characteristics, also penned the following words about them:

The ancient Egyptians belonged to a race of humans who resembled in every way the Kenuz or 'Barabras,' the current inhabitants of Nubia. The Copts found in Egypt today have none of the characteristic traits of the ancient Egyptian population. The Copts are the result of the anarchic métissage of all the different peoples that had successively dominated Egypt. It is wrong headed to try to find in these people the physical traits of the ancient race.¹⁴⁰

In Chapter four ("Monogenism and Pologyenism") in *The Equality of the Human Races*, Firmin like Diop rejects the theory of polygenism¹⁴¹ but instead embraces the principle of monogenism as a theory explaining the origin of humanity; he offers additional historical and textual evidence from Roman literature supporting the long-standing tradition of the classical records which identify the people of Ethiopia as Black, and that the Egyptians were the direct descendants of the Ethiopians. He quotes a memorable line from the Roman poet Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, a mythico-historical poetic narrative describing the history of the world from the time of creation to the elevated divine status (that is his deification) of Julius Caesar of Rome:

Ovid, however, simply repeats an opinion shared by all the Ancients. The word Ethiopian itself (in Greek, *Aethiop* from *Aethein*, to burn, and *op*, face), which was already used by Homer, says it all. Long before Ovid, we find the same idea in the work of Thodectis of Phaselis, an ancient Greek tragedian who lived in the fourth century before Christ. Strabo attributes the following lines to him:¹⁴²

Those to whom the burning sun comes too close in its course take on a soot-like complexion and their hair curls up, swells, and dries up in the heat.¹⁴³

To continue, Firmin offers two basic reasons that explain the Ethiopian influence upon the Egyptian civilization and his reason to contradict and reject the unscientific claims of Egyptologists and anthropologists that the Ethiopians were uncivilized and barbarians. In other words, the Ethiopianization of Egypt is a historical attestation of the momentous of the peoples of Egypt and Ethiopia in world civilization. This position clearly affirms the dignity of the Ethiopian people. These two historical facts, he contends, would also support his suggestion that the *Retous* were a people of the same origin as the Ethiopians and the indigenous peoples of Sudanese Africa.¹⁴⁴ First, he mentions the historical Hyksos—a white race or a group of mixed Semitic-Asiatics—invasion of Egypt around 1720-1710 BCE. Second, he reports the mass migration from Egypt to Ethiopia.¹⁴⁵ When the Hyksos of West Asia annexed the land of Egypt, the Egyptians of the Delta region spontaneously withdrew themselves in the direction of Upper Egypt. It is there at the borders of the Thebes province they received military assistance and other substantial resources from the Ethiopians, their natural allies.

Consequently, the Egyptians eventually overcame their invaders and removed them from their land. In fact, the Ethiopian civilization was at its peak in this time period to the point that an arranged marriage was performed between Princess *Nofritari* and *Ahmes* and in order to enact the alliance between Egypt and the King of Ethiopia.¹⁴⁶ To express this another way, the Hyksos were intruders whose cultural influence at the birth of the Egyptian civilization only came later in the game. They were not the original architects or makers of the Black Pharaonic Egypt.

Firmin's second historical reason to ascertain the common racial origin and identity of the people of Egypt and Ethiopia and to establish the priority of Ethiopia attests to the great migration already mentioned above. As he puts it, during the mass migration, "240,000 soldiers of the Egyptian army walked away in compact groups from Egypt into Ethiopia when the policies of the Sais Dynasty King *Psamethik* the First seemed to give too much access to the Greeks."¹⁴⁷ Firmin reinforces his position by referencing to an important historical period in Egyptian-Ethiopian history, in which more than a century before the restoration of the Sais Dynasty, King *Piankhy Meri Amoun*, the founder of the XXV Ethiopian dynasty, subjugated the entire territory which extends from Thebes to the Nile Valley. Moreover, he invites his readers to consider his judgment: "How else can we explain the destination of these Egyptian migrants if not by the fact that they shared a common racial identity with the people under whose flags they willingly gathered? Consciousness of race here superseded consciousness of nationality."¹⁴⁸

Complementarily, Firmin showcases the shared cultural traditions and religious and spiritual practices between the Ethiopians and the Egyptians. He indicates that when scholars study African flora—including the papyrus and the *lebka* tree—and fauna—such as the ancient greyhound (*canis leporarius oegypticus*)—of classical Egypt, they soon realize that "most of the plants and animals the Egyptians used in their religious rituals or for their basic daily needs, originated in Ethiopia."¹⁴⁹ What did account for this common cultural tradition and shared practices between Egypt and Ethiopia? Firmin explains that these plants and animals were first used in Ethiopia and later transported to Egypt and raised there. He was convinced that the Egyptians came from Ethiopia with their plants, livestock, and material and religious resources.

The Firminian logic is the sustaining argument that Egypt not only had close cultural links and relationships with Ethiopia but with the rest of the African populations with which Egypt shared thousands of similarities in terms of customs, popular religion, and language.¹⁵⁰ This judgment is further affirmed by Cesar Cantu and Ampere. Firmin quotes the latter below:

Some objects used in Egyptian religious rituals are originally from Nubia. Two such items are the sweet marjoram (*organum majorama*), a plant sacred to Isis, and the ibis, a bird which comes down to these lands only at the time of the Nile's flooding...It was only in Nubia that Caillaud had seen the black ibis and the sacred scarab (*scarabeus ateuchus*), which was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians.¹⁵¹

Firmin was also persuaded that “the further back in antiquity we go the more we become convinced that all the peoples living on the shores of the Nile were of the same ethnological type.”¹⁵² He projected the idea of the cultural unity and shared identity and traditions¹⁵³ between the Egyptians and Ethiopians by citing another authority, the distinguished Greek historian and classical writer *Diodorus of Sicily*. By appealing to this canonical writer, Firmin was reiterating the commonly-held belief in antiquity among Greek and Roman writers about the true origin of the Egyptians:

The Ethiopians claim that Egypt is one of their colonies. There are striking similarities between the customs and the laws of the two countries: kings are called gods; funerals are very elaborate rituals; the same writing systems are in use in Ethiopia and Egypt, and the knowledge of the sacred characters, which is the exclusive preserve of the Egyptian priests to be familiar to all Ethiopians.¹⁵⁴

Classics scholar Frank M. Snowden, Jr. concurs that the Greeks and Romans used the generic term Ethiopian (*Aithiops*, *Aethiops*) to refer to “dark-and black-skinned people” who lived south of Egypt and on the southern fringes of northwest Africa.¹⁵⁵ He makes the following observation as depicted in the classical records as early as the second millennium:

The Greeks and Romans...in detailed descriptions and striking realistic portraits have provided a very accurate and precise picture of the African peoples whom they described as Ethiopians. Ethiopians were black and flat-nosed in Xenophanes; black with the woolliest hair of all mankind in Herodotus; black, flat-nosed, and woolly-haired in Diodorus; and in the *Moretum* described with the detail and accuracy of later anthropological classifications of the so-called Negroid type.¹⁵⁶

Substantially, Firmin cites G. M. Ollivier-Beauregard in *Des divinités égyptiennes*, a text that was published in 1866 before the rise of Egyptology and anthropology as academic disciplines in the West, to accentuate ancient Egyptian attitude towards white people: “From the most remote antiquity, the Egyptians customarily referred to the White nations by such expressions as ‘cursed of Schet’ or ‘the plague of Schet.’”¹⁵⁷ This particular assertion is exploited here as a supportive evidence that the Egyptian had rejected the white identity as a people. As outlined in the preceding paragraphs, Firmin brilliantly offered strong opinions and convincing arguments to dismiss the common belief of the day that the ancient Egyptians were a White race. He also dismantled the traditional belief of his time that the ancient Kemet- Egyptian civilization was the achievement of the White race, and the Egyptologist prerogative that “the classical civilizations of the Nile Valley were not possible without European input.”¹⁵⁸

Prominent Haitian intellectual-anthropologist Price-Mars reiterates in his 1928 masterpiece, *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle*, what Firmin had already established in 1885 that "Abyssinia [Ethiopia] was a center of civilization in direct contact with Egypt? Its influence like that of Egypt extended far to the West over the peoples of eastern Sudan."¹⁵⁹ He accentuates that we must connect the Ethiopians with the ancient Egyptians.¹⁶⁰ In the text, Price-Mars elaborates on the wide-range spread and influence of ancient Ethiopian-Egyptian civilization upon the rest of continental Africa, which included the cultural and imperial centers of Songhai in the sixteenth century, the Askia dynasty, and that of Sudan in the domain of arts and sciences. For example, he concludes that the land of Songhai "bore the seeds of ancient Egypt."¹⁶¹

In our previous analysis, we have noted that the Black origin thesis of the ancient Egyptian civilization and the connection between Egypt and Ethiopia and their complementary roles in the civilizing process is substantially supported by Black Atlantic writers and intellectuals of the Vindicationist tradition, both in the Anglophone and Francophone worlds. The Black presence in Egypt and the Ethiopian-Egyptian connection is also supported by Count Constantin Volney (or Constantin François de Chassebœuf). Volney was an influential French scholar, philosopher and historian who travelled to Egypt in 1782 and 1785 in the blossoming era of slavery and the slave trade in Western societies. He wrote the excellent work entitled *Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie* in 1787. It is to him that Firmin turns to confirm his provocative claim. The Haitian Egyptologist reproduces Volney's historic observation: "When I saw that characteristically Negro head, I remembered this remarkable passage in Herodotus where he sates, 'I believe that the Colchis are a colony of Egyptians because, like the latter, they have a black skin and wooly hair.'"¹⁶² Firmin interprets the words of the French scholar to mean that "the Egyptians were true Negroes, of the same race as the natives of Africa."¹⁶³ Volney, who denounces European hypocrisy and racism towards blacks, also makes this striking declaration about white racism and Black slavery:

Just think that this race of black men, today our slave and the object of our scorn, is the very race to which we owe our arts, sciences, and even the use of speech! Just imagine, finally, that it is in the midst of peoples who call themselves the greatest friends and humanity that one has approved the most barbarous slavery and questioned whether black men have the same kind of intelligence as Whites!¹⁶⁴

Firmin closes the pages of the chapter on “Egypt and Civilization” by restating his underlying thesis:

It is time now to put an end to the dogma according to which the ancient Ethiopians were a bunch of barbarians unable to attain civilization simply because they were Black...The population of Egypt was Black like the Ethiopians, and the inhabitants of Ethiopia were as civilized as the Egyptians...The population of Egypt was Black like the Ethiopians, and the inhabitants of Ethiopia were as civilized as the Egyptians...Egypt was a country of Negroes, of Black Africans. The Black race has preceded all other races in the construction of civilization. It is in the Black race that thought first emerged and human intelligence first awakened...The Greeks paid homage to the ancient Egyptians; the Romans paid homage to the Greeks; and the whole of Europe salute them all!¹⁶⁵

The Indebtedness of Classical Greek to Ancient Egypt

In this division of the essay, we shall comment on Firmin’s unapologetic position for the considerable impact of ancient Egypt on classical Greek. In Chapter six (“Artificial Ranking of the Human Races”) in *The Equality of the Human Races*, the anti-racist intellectual cross-examines and hence rejects the logic of the “systematic hierarchy among the human races,” and the scientifically-derived racial categories and criteria used both by anthropologists and Egyptologists. In the opening words, he voices strong criticisms against the un-reasonability of Gobineau’s judgment, “the idea of an innate, original, profound, and permanent inequality among the races is one of the oldest and most widespread opinions in the world.”¹⁶⁶ For Firmin, Gobineau’s exaggerated and unsustainable claim—his ethnographic division of humanity into distinct races—cannot be justified or sustained on the basis of serious works of history and plausible scientific reason. He explains that the basis in classifying humanity as such and as an intellectual idea has its roots at the birth of ethnographic science and modernity’s racial imagination.

Firmin contends that the concept of race assumed its definitive meaning only with the works of eighteenth century naturalists, and race as a social construct is an invention of modern science.¹⁶⁷ The Haitian anthropologist reasons, as a reply to Gobineau’s ideology of racial superiority, that it is not absolutely accurate to suggest that the idea of original inequality of the human races is one of the oldest and most widespread opinions.¹⁶⁸ The problem was not race but patriotic zeal. He thus writes, “Through history, civilized peoples, self-centered and proud, have always thought themselves superior to their neighbors. But there was been the least connection between this sense of superiority, which results from a narrow but highly respectable patriotism.”¹⁶⁹

He explains further that scientists who have developed the doctrine of the inequality of the races and the superiority of one race over another race base their judgment upon four possible factors or criteria: intelligence, physical factors (physical anthropology)—which include height, muscular strength, proportion of the limbs, etc.—beauty, and morality.¹⁷⁰ After a thorough analysis of each individual proposal, Firmin bluntly dismisses all of those criteria of authenticity for maintaining white supremacy and hegemony, and the racist culture of Western societies. He judges that they do not have strong scientific foundation and that the arguments that sustain them are curious, ambivalent, unstable, and even contradictory.

The claim that bothered Firmin the most was the idea that the Black race had no history, as philosopher Georg Hegel had also reminded us that continental Africa was a place with no history. Firmin was uncomfortable with white claim of history—that is, history is the achievement of a race and a people, the Aryan myth and the triumph of white people in modern history. Also, he could not tolerate the thought of white denial that a Black population in Egypt could have produced the high intellectual culture and social development, which for him, “constitutes crucial arguments against the doctrine of the inequality of the races”¹⁷¹ and counters the doctrine of “the innate inferiority of the Black race.”¹⁷² To illustrate the pervasiveness of the problem of whiteness and the preposterousness of white claim of black innate inferiority in Western thought, Firmin reproduces a passage from the French naturalist Armand de Quatrefages’s book, *L’espèce humaine*,¹⁷³ published in 1877:

The set of conditions that produced the different races has also brought about an actual inequality which is impossible to deny. But such is the penchant of the professional Negrophiles for hyperbole that they insist that the Negro was in the past, and much as he is, equal to the White man.

Barth’s discoveries have a verified something which could be doubted until then: the existence of a political history among Negroes. But this very fact serves to underscore more the absence of an intellectual history, which consists of a general progressive movement marked by literary, artistic, and architectural achievements. Left to his own devices, the Negro race has produced nothing of the sort. The Black people, which have been classified among the Negro race in order to disguise the race’s too obvious inferiority, are connected to it at best through crossbreeding cases in which the superior blood predominates.¹⁷⁴

It is evident that both Gobineau and Quatrefage maintained a similar view on race and white supremacy in particular. Both of them had overlooked and undermined the long-established tradition of the Black origin of the Egyptians as maintained in the classical records and the indebtedness of classical Greek to ancient Egypt.

Firmin was convinced by bringing careful attention to the triumph of the ancient Egyptian civilization in world history and by highlighting the manifold debt the Greco-Roman civilization, and ultimately Western civilization owes to ancient Egypt, he would be able to prove that the Black race was capable of grand and noble actions, capable especially of standing up to the White race.¹⁷⁵ Hence, it suffices for the Haitian anthropologist to once again revisit the classical records of ancient Greece and Rome in which prominent figures and writers of antiquity acknowledge deliberately and pay homage to Egypt.

Firmin cogently reasons that classical Greek civilization and culture owes its intellectual development to Africa and ancient Egypt. He presents forceful, sustainable, and systematic arguments to validate all of his points. First of all, he declares that, "Besides the honor of having invented the science of numbers and surface measurement does not belong to the White race. The origin of mathematics goes back to Black Egypt, the land of the Pharaohs."¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, the intelligence of Black Egyptians in creating the science of geometry required high level aptitude and critical thinking:

All the scientists who researched the history of the exact sciences unanimously recognize the Egyptians as the inventors of geometry. More than three thousand years before the Christian era, when the European nations were still in a barbarous state, the Hamites who lived on the shores of the Nile had already been doing geometric computations, calculating the area of different types of surfaces.¹⁷⁷

Secondly, he insists on Greece's borrowing from Egypt when he writes:

Plato and Diogenes Laertes both recognize that arithmetic too originated in Egypt, which is quite logical, given that arithmetic calculations are indispensable in the solution of geometric problems. As with many other things, Greece, the first White Western nation to have attained a considerable of civilization indisputably owes to Egypt the first notions of mathematics.¹⁷⁸

Thirdly, Firmin denies Greek originality by attacking its intellectual foundations:

The first Greek scientist to have concerned himself with mathematics with some brilliance was Thales of Miletus; he had acquired most of his knowledge in Egypt. In the sixth century, before the decline of her culture, Greece produced, for her greater glory, Pythagoras, who showed the most brilliant aptitudes for the sciences. We owe him the discovery of several properties of numbers, the proof of the value of the square of the hypotenuse, and several theorems. But are we not justified to ask whether he had achieved all this on his own, or simply transmitted to us the notions he had learned from the Egyptian priests, especially as he studied in their college in Thebes and lived in their country for twenty years?¹⁷⁹

Next, he advances the idea that Plato, one of the intellectual giants of the Greek culture and thought, and Western civilization, studied in Egypt:

“Plato, who practiced mathematics with great success and who is mainly responsible for giving them the prestige they continue to enjoy, was not satisfied with studying with the Pythagoreans; he went to Egypt, to the very source of the light.”¹⁸⁰

Asante encapsulate the Firminian logic when pronounces these striking words: “Since Egypt preceded the civilizations of Greece and Rome in antiquity it is only natural that it would be the source of Greek knowledge, even names of towns and deities.”¹⁸¹ In this sense, it is Africa, to some extent, rather than Greece, that has made a lasting impact on Western societies.¹⁸² By emphasizing the achievement of Egypt in Greece and Rome respectively in the intellectual, cultural, social, and historical sense, both Firmin and Asante came to a similar conclusion.

Some seventy-one years before Firmin would publish his groundbreaking and anti-racist text, the first postcolonial writer of post-revolutionary Haiti Pompée Valentin baron de Vastey, the secretary and publicist to King Henry Christophe, published *Le système colonial dévoilé* (*The Colonial System Unveiled*) in 1814. Vastey, in many ways, echoes Afrocentric sensibility and condemns the colonial system and slavery as an inhuman institution. In this manifesto, anticipating Firmin’s work, the royal apologist articulates anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-Western oppression sentiments. Vastey brings to surface that “Danaus and Cecrops brought agriculture, enlightenment (*les lumières*), and the arts of the Egyptians to Greece.”¹⁸³ Like Firmin, he accentuates the tremendous impact of Egypt in the emergence of Greece and Rome as nations, and insists that both countries “had received these goods/benefits from Egypt,”¹⁸⁴ that is the Egyptians brought with them to Greece and Rome “the arts, the commerce, and the navigation system.”¹⁸⁵

Finally, with his critical and brilliant mind, Firmin proposes two basic reasons why Western scholars had failed to give credit to the Egyptians for all their accomplishments in world history. The first reason is that the Egyptians “had a language with a rather sophisticated grammar but also with a writing system that was so complicated and so difficult that scientific and literary documents in the language remained incomprehensible for centuries.”¹⁸⁶ The second reason he reports is that “Egyptian achievements in mathematics have not been recognized, one which worsens the effects of the first, the exclusionary mindset of the priest, the principal depositories of science.”¹⁸⁷ To express this concern another way, the second problem had to do explicitly with what we might call the “epistemic apartheid” which explains the “epistemic crisis” in Egyptian cultural and intellectual history.

Egyptian priests who were supposed to teach the common people about the art of wisdom and science limited their scientific knowledge and findings or discoveries to a limited few in the population. As Firmin reports, “Egyptian priests made a mystery out of all their scientific acquisitions and taught them only in a restricted milieu, to a small number of pupils, training a close elite who would have the total monopoly of the esoteric doctrine.”¹⁸⁸ In spite of these shortcomings in Egyptian history, Firmin find comfort as he ponders upon the enduring impact of ancient Egyptian civilization upon the life and culture of classical Greece and Rome, and by extension the entire Western civilization:

Nevertheless, Egypt was considered the fount of science, so much so that it was in Alexandria that the Greeks went to develop their aptitudes for mathematics, producing such famous figures as Euclid, Archimedes, Appollonius of Perga, and so many other bright stars in the Alexandria Pleiades. Now that the human mind has entered a mature stage, as indicated by the conscientiously critical approach to phenomena that has become the norm, we wonder whether it is not possible that unknown scientists of the ancient Egyptian race helped to light the first sparks of science in the immortal city founded by Alexander the Great. Whether the answer is affirmative or not, it remains a fact of history that the Black race of Egypt was the first to cultivate the abstract notions of arithmetic and to formulate the first calculations.¹⁸⁹

Diop and Firmin: The Legacy Continues

In the final division of the essay, we shall briefly comment on the legacy of Diop in relation to Firmin’s work. In his seminal text, Firmin has not succeeded o explore profoundly the linguistic link between ancient Egypt and the rest of continental Black Africa. In 1954, the brilliant and highly respected Senegalese historian, anthropologist, physicist, and philosopher Cheik Anta Diop would fill the gap by establishing in his epoch-making book *Nations nègres et culture* the decisive and impressive linguistic connection between Egypt and several countries in Black Africa. Diop articulates a coherent theory of common linguistic roots of African languages he studies as well as the theory of Black genesis of ancient Egypt, as his intellectual predecessor had achieved.

Diop repudiates the racially-based scientific theories and dangerous ideologies propagated by European Egyptologists, anthropologists, archeologists, linguistics, and historians. In September 1956 at the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Diop pronounces these words to his predominantly Black audience:

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

We have come to discover that the ancient Pharaonic Egyptian civilization was undoubtedly a Negro civilization. To defend this thesis, anthropological, ethnological, linguistic, historical, and cultural arguments have been provided. To judge their validity, it suffices to refer to *Nations nègres et culture*.¹⁹⁰

Likewise, in the footsteps of Firmin, in the English translation of *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, Diop would rehearse and sustain the Firminian thesis that “ancient Egypt was a distinct African nation and was not historically or culturally a part of Asia or Europe”¹⁹¹ as some scholars had traditionally maintained. The Black origin of ancient Egypt, according to Diop, was critical for the reconstitution of African history and the future of the whole continent. Consequently, he would write in *The African Origin of Civilization*: “Ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt.”¹⁹² Diop describes with more precision and clarity the significant contributions of the Black race in the making of modernity:

The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, the Black world is the very initiator of the “western” civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science. One needs only to mediate on Osiris, the redeemer-god, who sacrifices himself, dies, and is resurrected to save mankind, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ.¹⁹³

Conclusion

The Significance of Firmin in the Twenty-first Century

The problem of scientific racism and the exclusion of Black people of ancient Egypt and the people of African ancestry from the meganarratives of human history and world civilizations are central points to the vindicationist discourse of Anténor Firmin’s *The Equality of the Human Races*. As a result, Firmin attempted to shift the geography of reason—that was then Eurocentric—and decenter the Westernization of epistemology and human history. He found Western historiography and its treatment of African history and culture deficient, and assessed the scientific enterprise and vision of Western scholarship as racist and unscientific. For Firmin, the problem of whiteness (or the Aryan myth) was a major crisis of modernity, which was deeply rooted in the racist culture in Western societies and white supremacist ideology.

The second problem of modernity was Black recognition, and the fear and averseness of Western scholars and scientists to acknowledge and valorize the substantial contributions of the Black race in the intellectual development of world civilizations and cultures. As Asante has rightly observed, European scholars and Egyptologists had tripped “Africa of its productive and generative subjectivity.”¹⁹⁴ For Firmin, ancient Egypt, for a better word, the Kemetic civilization was a master symbol of black achievement in world history. As he has also argued, by the virtue of the Haitian Revolution, the Haitian people are a symbol of Black equality and intelligence in human history.

Firmin’s book is significant in the twenty-first century for its direct and indirect engagement with important and critical issues of our time, both academic and practical; these include ethnic and postcolonial studies, critical race theory, the discipline of modern anthropology and history of ideas, and the practical effects of racism and discrimination in society . As long as whiteness remains a dominant problem in the modern world and our postcolonial moment, the necessity to read Firmin will become inevitable. Firmin refused to judge people based on their social rank, wealth, much less of the color of their skin; rather, he championed the dignity of every individual.¹⁹⁵ As he himself writes at the end of his book, “All men are brothers...once they acknowledge they are equal, the races will be able to support and love one another....That human beings everywhere are endowed with the same qualities and defects, without distinctions based on color or anatomical shape. The races are equal.”¹⁹⁶ It was Jean Metellus who reminds us that “Firmin deserves to be included not only among the pantheon of great Haitians, not only among the great Blacks of the world, but also among the first representatives of universalism.”¹⁹⁷

The Equality of the Human Races will remain an important text to consult from time to time as long as the onerous burden of race and white supremacy and arrogance, Western hegemony, neocolonial imperialism, and racism continue to exist and threaten human existence, and hinder the furtherance of peoples and nations in the twenty-first century culture.

In sum, for Firmin, the heritage of ancient Egypt belongs to all humanity regardless of one’s geography, race, gender, culture, and ethnicity. The significance of Firmin in the twenty-first century is what he exactly represents and what he does not represent in the history of ideas. Joseph Anténor Firmin is the Haitian intellectual par excellence and the fervent defender of the equality of the human races. Such a legacy will never die!

Notes

¹ Joseph Anténor Firmin, *De l'égalité des races humaines (Anthropologie positive)* (Paris : Librairie Cotillon, Paris, 1885).

² An excellent and more recent translation of Gobineau's work in the English language is by George L. Mosse, *The Inequality of Human Races* (New York: H. Fertig, 1999).

³ African American theologian and public intellectual J. Kameron Carter writes brilliantly about the problem of European construction of history and the *anthropos*, and Western racially-motivated theological discourse, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Carter cogently argues that race is a theological problem in modern Western intellectual history.

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classic, 2003 [1903]).

⁵ Firmin anticipates Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations Negres et Culture* (Paris: Editions Africaine, 1954).

⁶ Firmin critically engaged a wide range of European anthropologists, philosophers, scientists, and Egyptologists. Some of his most conversational partners were Paul Broca, *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie* (Paris, 1860), and *Histoire des progrès des études anthropologiques depuis la fondation de la société en 1859. Mémoires de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris, III* (Paris, 869); Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des Races Humaines. 4 vols.* (Paris : Belford, 1853-55) ; Julian J. Virey, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* (Paris, 1800) ; Paul Topinard, *Eléments d'anthropologie générale* (Paris, 1885) ; Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive* (Paris : Bachelier, 1835) ; Charles Darwin, *On Origin of Species* (London : John Murray, 1859); Herbert Spencer, *Classification des sciences* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillièrre et Cie, 1872) ; Georg Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Jean-François Champollion, Jacques Ampère, Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau, etc.

⁷ Firmin argues for the significant impact of the Haitian Revolution in world history as well as appeals to Haiti's national history, and the intellectual evolution of Haitians and African Americans to refute the doctrine of the inequality of the races, 180-201, 203-224, 295-323. In a recent review of Firmin's work, Watson R. Denis states that "Firmin's work extends the nineteenth century Haitian political and historical thoughts, which defended the Haitian, independence, the equality of races, and the pride of Black achievements in world history," "Review of The Equality of the Human Races (*Positivist Anthropology*)," *Caribbean Studies* 34:1 (2006):327.

⁸ The idea of Black contributions to modernity and world civilizations is well documented voluminously in the writings of other Black Atlantic writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro* (Mineola: Dove Publications, Inc., 2001 [1915]), *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (New York: Washington Square Press, 970 [1924]), and *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history* (New York: International Publishers, 1992 [1946]), Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'Oncle : Essais d'ethnographie haïtienne* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de Compiègne, 1928), Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, trans. Mercer Cook (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974). [1967]), and *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, trans. Mercer Cook (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991 [1981]).

⁹ In the final part of the essay, we will discuss Firmin's argument for Greek borrowings from Egyptian arts, mathematics, sciences, literature, rhetoric, philosophy, religion, and architecture.

¹⁰ Previous short studies on Firmin and the present text in evaluation in French include the following: Leonce Vivaud, *La personnalité d'Anténor Firmin* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Valcin, 1948); Pradel Pompilus, *Anténor Firmin par lui-même: le champion de la négritude et de la démocratie haïtienne* (Port-au-Prince: Éditions Pegasus, 1990); Firmin's biographer, Price-Mars highlights two important studies on Firmin: the first is by historian H. P. Sannon which appeared in the Haitian review *Le Temps* respectively on August 24 and 31, 1938; the second is by Seymour Pradel which was also published in the pages of *Le Temps*.

¹¹ Asselin Charles, the incredible translator, reproduced, as he himself remarks, "in modern English Firmin's modulate French style," "Note on The Translation," in Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races* (Champaign: The University of Illinois Press, 2002), ix; Charles also mentions that Firmin's style is "at once lyrically poetic, scientifically technical, and passionately polemical," *ibid.* In this present essay, I will often refer to Charles' *tour de force* translation.

¹² It is good to point out here the religious element of the book had not been studied by scholars. Hence, religion is the sixth interrelated category.

¹³ Jean Price-Mars, *Anténor Firmin* (Port-au-Prince, 1978), 147-8.

¹⁴ Lewis R. Gordon, "Not Exactly Positivism: Firmin's Critique of Transcendental Idealism in His Philosophy of Race and Culture," 1. Anténor Firmin was a complex intellectual, whose ideas on race, (Black) nationalism, and cosmopolitanism are debatable among scholars. Anthropologist Faye V. Harrison states that "Anténor's legacy in the 20th century was a vibrant school of *ethnologie* that documented and theorized the African-derived cultural heritage shaping Haiti's social-cultural landscape. This ethnological project aimed to vindicate Haiti and assert the first Black Republic's right to state and cultural sovereignty in the face of widespread international hostility and, most immediately, U.S. hegemony," "Dismantling Anthropology's Domestic and International Peripheries," *WAN E-JOURNAL* 6 (2012):91; J. Michael Dash declares that Haitian nationalists had mistaken Firmin "as a precursor to the negritude movement" and that "The irony is that some elements of racial theorizing by the negritude writers are closer to the conception of racial difference promoted Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau whose ideas were famously contested by Firmin in his *De l'égalité des races humaines* (1885)," "Nineteenth-Century Haiti and the Archipelago of the Americas: Anténor's Firmin Letters from St. Thomas," *Research in African Literatures* 35:2 (2004):47; contrary to Dash, David Nicholls in his well-received book, underscores Firmin's nationalism and asserts that "Firmin was a formidable defender of Haitian independence and gathered around himself many young disciples....," *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1996 [1979]), 125. In a recent article that compares the ideas of Jean Price-Mars and Anténor Firmin, Gerarde Magloire-Danton advances the idea that "Firmin's and Price-Mars's scholarship of commitment served to promote national self-definition, self-understanding....," "Anténor and Jean Price-Mars," "Anténor and Jean Price-Mars: Revolution, Memory, Humanism," *Small Axe* 18:9 (2005): 152.

¹⁵ Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, "Introduction," in Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, trans. Asselin Charles (Champaign: The University of Illinois Press, 2002), xv. Fluehr-Lobban wrote the most comprehensive and lucid introduction to the book in the English language, xi-xlvi.

¹⁶ Kevn A. Yelvington, "The Anthropology of Afro-Latin America and the Caribbean: Diasporic Dimensions," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001):228; for excellent studies on the relationship between the discipline of anthropology and the problem of race and racism in American culture and in Western societies at large, see Lee Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), and *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982 [1968]), Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Mentor Books, 1959 [1934]); on the relationship between anthropology, colonialism, and the Enlightenment, see Faye v. Harrison, ed., *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for liberation* (Arlington: American Anthropological Association, 1997 [1997]), Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), Michel Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, S.A., 1995).

¹⁷ Harrison, "Dismantling Anthropology's Domestic and International Peripheries," 91.

¹⁸ Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, "Anténor Firmin: Haitian Pioneer of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 102:3 (2000):449.

¹⁹ Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 58.

²⁰ Leslie Péan, *Comprendre Anténor Firmin: Une inspiration pour le XXI^e siècle* (Port-au-Prince: Editions de l'Université d'Etat d'Haiti, 2012); the French original reads as follows: "Les interventions de Firmin battent en brèche l'idéologie raciste de l'infériorité des Noirs évoquée par des 'savants' anthropologues pour justifier, d'une part, l'esclavage des Noirs et, d'autre part, le partage de l'Afrique par les Blancs lors de la Conférence de Berlin de 1885," 15-18.

²¹ Deny, "Review of The Equality of the Human Races," 331.

²² Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 184.

²³ Fluehr-Lobban, "Introduction," xv.

²⁴ Péan, *Anténor Firmin*, 15. In this sense, *The Equality of the Human Races* anticipates Aimé Césaire's anticolonial and revolutionary text, *Discours sur le colonialisme (Discourse on Colonialism)* (Paris: Présence, 1955).

²⁵ Fluehr-Lobban, "Anténor Firmin," 449; it is my goal in this essay to demonstrate that *The Equality of the Human Races* also demonstrates early Afrocentric imaginations, and the text can be conceived as an expression of what we might call performative Afrocentricity.

²⁶ Théophile Obenga, "Hommage à Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), égyptologue haïtien," *ANKH_17* (2008), 133.

²⁷ Magloire-Danton, "Anténor and Jean Price-Mars: Revolution, Memory, Humanism," 156; Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, trans. Anne Keep (New York: African Publishing, 1974), 96.

²⁸ J. Michael Dash, "Nineteenth-Century Haiti and the Archipelago of the Americas: Anténor's Firmin Letters from St. Thomas," *Research in African Literatures* 35:2 (2004):44-53.

²⁹ Jean-Gille Elie, "Patriotism, humanism and modernity: Three European concepts as a basis for the investigation and affirmation of the Negro soul in francophone literature of Haiti from the nineteenth through the late twentieth century," Ph.D. diss. (University of Washington, 2002).

³⁰ Gordon, "Not Exactly Positivism," 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³² Théophile Obenga, "Hommage à Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), égyptologue haïtien," *ANKH_17* (2008), 133

³³ *Ibid.* The French original translation is as follows, "*Anténor Firmin a vivement critiqué les théories racistes de l'Anthropologie physique. Il a aussi défend l'africanité de l'Égypte pharaonique. Cette question de l'Égypte pharaonique a toute une historiographie, intéressante à connaître.*"

³⁴ Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentricity: Toward a New Understanding of African Thought in the World," <http://www.asante.net/articles/5/afrocentricity-toward-a-new-understanding-of-african-thought-in-the-world/> (accessed 19 January 2013).

³⁵ Baruti KMT-Sisouvong, "Equality of the Human Races: A Review," *Radical Scholar*, http://www.radicalsolar.com/articles/publish/bkreviews/Equality_of_the_Human_Races_A_Review_printer.shtml (accessed 13 December 2012).

³⁶ The last point is very important to understand Leopold Sedar Senghor's theoretical conceptualization of the Negritude (hence, "Senghorian Negritude"), Shireen K. Lewis has written intelligently on Senghorian Negritude, *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Negritude to Creolite* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 200), 50-54.

³⁷ Ibrahim Sundiata, "Afrocentrism: The Argument We're Really Having," *DISSONANCE* (September 30, 1996), <http://way.net/dissonance/sundiata.html> (accessed 10 December 2012).

³⁸ Ama Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions," *Journal of Black Studies* 31:4 (2001):387-406; the concept of "scientific paradigm" is developed Thomas S. Kuhn's original work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962). The notion of Afrocentricity as a paradigm is also affirmed by Asante, more recently in his autobiography, *As I Run toward Africa: A Memoir* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 274.

³⁹ Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm," 392.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm," 389-90; also in Russell Adams, "African-American Studies and the State of the Art," in M. Azeveto, ed, *Africana Studies: A Survey of African and the African Diaspora* (Durham: North Carolina Academic Press, 1993), 25-45. Mazama characterizes Adams's definition of Afrocentricity as "intellectual bric-a-brac, dumped under the label *Afrocentricity*, is bound to dilute the meaning and the power of the Afrocentric idea as well as to create a great of confusion," 390.

⁴¹ Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm," 388.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 399-400.

⁴³ Maulana Karenga, “Black Studies and the Problematic of a paradigm: The Philosophical dimension,” *Journal of Black Studies* 18:4 (1988): 404; Karenga sharply differentiates the two terms: Afrocentrism and Afrocentricity. He notes that “Afrocentrism appears more often in ideological discourse between Afrocentric advocates and critics...Afrocentricity is used in my work to stress its intellectual value as distinct from its ideological use,” *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press, 1993), 35.

⁴⁴ Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 7; in contrast to the Afrocentricity, “The Black Atlantic” model, popularized by Afro-British sociologist Paul Gilroy, puts greater emphasis on the non-essentialist, hybrid, and creolized nature or character of the African Diapora as well as underscores the interaction and exchange between the people of the African ancestry and white people in North America, *The Black Atlantic: The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁴⁵ These remarks are documented in Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 38-9.

⁴⁶ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

⁴⁷ Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity, the Theory of Social Change* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003 [1980]), *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), and Kemet, *Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990).

⁴⁸ Asante, *Kemet*, v.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, v-vi.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵¹ Asante, *Kemet*, vi.

⁵² While the word “Afrocentrism” does not appear anywhere in Firmin’s work, nonetheless, several tenets of the school of thought can be observed in Firmin’s ideas and literary corpus. Elsewhere in *As I Run Toward Africa*, Asante would write, “African agency is important in interpretation and analysis of African and African American life situations,” 144.

⁵³ Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵ Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm," 394.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Anglophone writers include the following: Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, Edward Wilmot Blyden, David Walker, W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Boas, Melville Herskovits, George G.M. James, John Henrik Clarke, Yosef A. A. ben-Jochannan, Maulana Karenga, Kwame Nkrumah, Martin Bernal, etc. Francophone writers include the architects of the Negritude movement: Aime Cesaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Leon-Damas; and Cheikh Anta Diop, Theophile Obenga, Hannibal Price, Louis Joseph Janvier.

⁵⁸ Daniel Meyerson, *The Linguist and the Emperor: Napoleon and Champollion's Quest to Decipher the Rosetta Stone* (New York: Random House, 2005).

⁵⁹ Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, 132, 357.

⁶⁰ Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, 45.

⁶¹ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 379-391, 399-402,

⁶² Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, 131-2.

⁶³ Quoted in Elliott P. Skinner, "The Restoration of African Identity for a New Millennium," in Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazurui, eds, *African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 33. Skinner writes, "But Blyden was not content to assert that human civilization began in Africa, that Africa civilized Greece, and that Greece civilized Europe," 34.

⁶⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001 [1915]), 17.

⁶⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1939 [2007]), Xxxi; Drake, 135-6.

⁶⁶ W .E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history* (New York: International Publishers, 1965 [1946]), 106.

⁶⁷ Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, 132.

⁶⁸ For example, George G.M. James, *Stolen Legacy: The Egyptian Origins of Western Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954); Yosef Ben-Jochanan, *African Origins of the Major "Western Religions"* (New York: Black Classic Press, 1970), *Man of the Nile and His Family* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1972), and *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1971).

⁶⁹ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), *Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume II: The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), and *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume III: The Linguistic Evidence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); for counter responses to the Black Athena thesis, see Mary Lefkowitz & Guy M. Rogers, M., eds., *Black Athena Revisited* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Jacques Berlinerblau, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Bernal's response to his critics is documented in this text, David Chioni Moore, ed., *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena, Vol. 1*, 22.

⁷¹ In response to Afrocentrist claims and reconstruction of modern history, see Arthur Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville: Whittle Direct Books, 1991); Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (New York: Verso, 1998); Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became An Excuse to Teach Myth As History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). Throughout the book, Lefkowitz sustains the long standing tradition of the priority of Greece in the intellectual development of world civilizations. For her, 'Afrocentrism' should be regarded as a mass of invented histories and traditions of Black achievements in world history. As she comments, "The Afrocentric myth of ancient history is a myth, and not history...The ancient Egypt described by Afrocentrists is a fiction," xvi. She also adds that Afrocentric theories of history and culture are "based on false assumptions and faulty reasoning, and cannot be supported by time-tested methods of intellectual inquiry," xv.

Arguably, Lefkowitz is among the most powerful voices in the academia who longs to see the end of liberal relativism and multicultural and pluralistic perspectives in American education. As

she observes, “Teaching the myth of the Stolen Legacy as if it were history robs the ancient Greeks and their modern descendants of a heritage that rightly belongs to them,” 126. It is interesting to note here in the last debate between Lefkowitz and Asante at the Smithsonian, the Wellesley classics scholar professes admittedly, “Molefi, everyone knows now that the ancient Egyptians were black;” in response, Asante said, “Mary, I wish you had read the accounts *before* you wrote your book.” For more a detailed personal narrative of Afrocentricity and its reception in the United States and beyond, see Asante, *As I Run toward Africa*, 159-60, 199-200, 241-242, 274-279, 302-310.

⁷² Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 386.

⁷³ Firmin, *The Equality of The Human Races*, 386; also in Emilio Castelar, *Las guerras de América y Egipto* (Madrid, 1883), 120-21.

⁷⁴ Firmin, 390.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 235.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 286.

⁸⁸ St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology, Volume 1* (Los Angeles: University of California center For Afro-American Studies, 1987), 132.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 225.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 225-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 226.

⁹² For a collection of fine essays on the topic, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, ed., *Africa & Africans in Antiquity* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001).

⁹³ Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, 103.

⁹⁴ J.D. Walker, "The Misrepresentation of Diop's Views," *Journal of Black Studies* 26:1 (1995): 81.

⁹⁵ Firmin, 168; he also adds, "Besides the honor of having invented the science of numbers and surface measurement does not belong to the White race. The origin of mathematics goes back to Black Egypt, the land of the Pharaohs," *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Drake, *Black Folks Here and Then*, 129.

⁹⁷ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 240.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 247.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 247-8.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 248.

¹⁰¹ Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, 9.

¹⁰² Ibid., 227.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 226.

¹⁰⁴ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 226.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 235.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. it is good to note here the prominent Egyptologist Jean-Francois Champollion defines the Egyptian hieroglyphic word *Retous* as “real humans.”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 237, 234.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 234.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 243; the famous monument of Sheikh-el-Balad is reproduced in Firmin, 242, and the painting of the well-known Egyptian couple as well, 245.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 243.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 244.

¹¹² Firmin, 250; also, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban and Kharyssa Rhodes, eds, *Race and Identity in the Nile Valley: Ancient and Modern Perspectives* (New York: Red Sea Press, 2004), 108.

¹¹³ Obenga, “Hommage a Firmin,” 137.

¹¹⁴ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 230-1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 234.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 235.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 234, 237, 240-1, 250.

¹²⁰ This is one of the diorite statues of Cheops, a fourth Dynasty King, Firmin, 241.

¹²¹ Firmin, 242; Firmin includes the legendary wooden statue of a high dignitary, *Sheikh-el-Balad*, which Egyptologists call *dark red or brick red*. *Sheikh-el-Balad* is an Arabic title, which means "headman of the village." Nonetheless, his real and Egyptian name was *Ka-aper*. It is observed that Ka-aper was a high priest and lector at a Memphite temple, serving Menkaure (2490-2472); for more information on Ka-aper, see Margaret Bunson, ed., "Ka-aper statue," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2002 [1991]), 189-190.

¹²² Firmin, 244; Firmin includes the famous two painted statues of *Rahotpou and Nofrit* from the Fifth or Sixth Dynasty era. They were discovered at Meidium. Firmin informs us that, in his time, these paintings were on exhibit at the Boulaq Museum. *Rahotpou*, the husband, is Black; his wife, *Nofrit*, is light-skinned.

¹²³ Ibid. *Nofrit* was the wife of *Rahotpou*.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Queen Nofritari was Ethiopian who is always portrayed as a black-skinned woman. She was one of the great royal wives of Ramesses II the Great.

¹²⁵ Ibid. The title was given to the Mortuary Temple of Ramesses III.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 249; *Ahmes* married Princess *Nofritari*.

¹²⁷ Ibid. Psamethik was a King of the Sais Dynasty, the Twenty-sixth dynasty of Egypt (664–525 BC) during the Late Period.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 250; Piankhy Meri Amoun was an Ethiopian King of Napata who had conquered the entire territory which extends from Thebes to the mouth of the Nile. He was also the founder of the XXVe Ethiopian dynasty (747-657 B.C.E.); Obenga, 138.

¹²⁹ Troy D. Allen, "Cheikh Anta Diop's Two Cradle Theory: Revisited," *Journal of Black Studies* 38:6 (2008): 827.

¹³⁰ Asante, *Kemet*, 50; he also declares, "The Kemetic heritage penetrates the literature, the orature, the pottery, the burial rituals, the procreative myths, and the modes of thought of Africa. It is the classical African civilizations themselves that given us so much organic contact

with the history of ideas. The vivid example of the massive memorials to African genius, Karnak, the temples of the Valley of the Kings, the Pyramids, the major shrines,” 47-8.

¹³¹ Allen, “Cheikh Anta Diop,” 814.

¹³² Ibid., 821-2; for further studies on the topic, see Troy D. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Family: Kinship and Social Structure* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹³³ Quoted in Allen; also, see G. Mokhtar, ed., *General History of Africa, Volume II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 58.

¹³⁴ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 240.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 237.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 236 ; Jean Jacques Ampère, *Voyage en Égypte et en Nubie* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1868).

¹³⁷ Cited in Firmin, 235; Ampère, 55.

¹³⁸ Firmin, 226.

¹³⁹ Jean-François Champollion *Précis du système hiéroglyphique des anciens Égyptiens* (Paris, 1824), and *Lettres écrites d'Égypte et de Nubie*, (Paris, 1828 and 1829).

¹⁴⁰ Firmin, 228; Champollion, *Grammaire Egyptienne*, Introduction.

¹⁴¹ Gordon K. Lewis in his acclaim intellectual history on the Caribbean contends that the notion of “the monogenist principle....that is to say the unitary oneness of the human species” recapitulates Firmin’s ideas, *Main Currents In Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004 [1983]), 318.

¹⁴² Firmin, 52; for the Greco-Roman regard towards Africa and Blacks, I suggest these excellent texts, V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), and *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and The Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and the exceptional works by Frank M.

Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970) and *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient Views of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁴³ This is the English translation of the Greek quote; cited in Firmin, 52.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 249-50.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 248-9; for detailed historical study and information about the Hyksos people, see Bernal, *Black Athena, Vol. 2*; Howe, *Afrocentrism*, 202-203; Leftkowitz, 22-24.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Firmin writes the Greeks were “a white people with an incompatible culture, who could not be integrated into the *Retou* national community.”

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 239-240.

¹⁵³ The thesis of cultural unity and shared cultural customs across continental Black Africa is supported both by Diop and Afrocentrists like Asante.

¹⁵⁴ Firmin, 236; *Diodorus of Sicily, Book III, Chapter 8*.

¹⁵⁵ Frank M. Snowden, Jr., “Attitudes towards Blacks in the Greek and Roman World: Misinterpretations of the Evidence,” in Edwin M. Yamauchi, ed., *Africa & Africans in Antiquity* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 246; for an excellent study on the relationship between Africans, Greeks, and Romans and their view of Blacks in the classical period and records, see Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*; Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, 20-52.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 246-7.

¹⁵⁷ Firmin, 139 ; M. Ollivier-Beauregard, *Les divinités égyptiennes: leur origine, leur culte et son expansion dans le monde : à propos de la collection archéologique de feu le docteur Ernest Godard* (Paris : Librairie internationale, 1866).

¹⁵⁸ Asante, *Kemet*, 46.

¹⁵⁹ Jean Price-Mars, *Thus Spoke the Uncle*, trans. Magdaline W. Shannon (New York: Three Continents Press, 1983), 79.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 63.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁶² Firmin, 228.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Diop, *African Origin*, 27-8.

¹⁶⁵ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 252.

¹⁶⁶ Here, Firmin reproduces a quote by Gobineau, 139 ; Gobineau, *De l'inégalité des races humaines*, 35.

¹⁶⁷ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 140.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 139.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 147.

169

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

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 237.

¹⁷² Ibid., 402.

¹⁷³ Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau, *L'espèce humaine* (Paris, G. Baillière et cie, 1877).

¹⁷⁴ Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 154.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 168-9.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁸¹ Asante, *Kemet*, 100.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁸³ Baron de Vastey, *Le système colonial dévoilé* (Cap-Henry : Chez P. Roux, 1814), 19 ; the French text reads as such “*Danaus et Cécrops apportèrent l’agriculture, les lumières et les arts des égyptiens dans la Grèce.*”

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Greece and Rome “avaient reçus ces bienfaits de l’Egypte.”

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* The Egyptians “*apportent avec eux les lumières, les arts, le commerce et la navigation.*”

¹⁸⁶ Firmin, 169; he also remarks, “We may assume that during all the long period when the meaning of the hieroglyphs remained obscure, as mysterious as the Sphinx in this mysterious Egypt, most of these documents disappeared forever with the secrets the contained.”

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 170.

¹⁹⁰ Diop, *Nations nègres et culture*, ix.

¹⁹¹ Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, xvi.

¹⁹² Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, xiv.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Asante, *Kemet*, 116.

¹⁹⁵ Pean, *Comprendre Anténor Firmin*, 303.

¹⁹⁶ Firmin, 448-450.

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Pean, *Anténor Firmin*, 19. The French original reads : “*Firmin mérite de figurer non seulement parmi la panoplie des grands haïtiens, non seulement parmi les grands negres du monde, mais parmi les premiers représentants de l’universalisme.*”

Bibliography

Allen, Troy D. “Cheikh Anta Diop’s Two Cradle Theory: Revisited,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38:6 (2008):813-829.

Asante, Kete Molefi. *Afrocentricity, the Theory of Social Change*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003 [1980].

_____. *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

_____. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990.

_____. "Afrocentricity: Toward a New Understanding of African Thought in the World," <http://www.asante.net/articles/5/afrocentricity-toward-a-new-understanding-of-african-thought-in-the-world/> (accessed 28 January 2013).

_____. *As I Run toward Africa: A Memoir*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012.

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

_____. *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Benedict, Ruth. *Patterns of Culture*. New York: Mentor Books, 1959 [1934].

Ben-Jochannan, Yosef A. A. *African Origins of the Major "Western Religions."* Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1970.

_____. *Black Man of the Nile and His Family*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1972.

_____. *Africa Mother of Western Civilization*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1971.

Berlinerblau, Jacques. *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999.

Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

_____. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume II: The Archeological and Documentary Evidence*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

-
- _____. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume III: The Linguistic Evidence*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.
- Bunson, Margaret, ed., "Ka-aper statue," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2002 [1991].
- Carter, J. Kameron *Race: A Theological Account*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Castelar, Emilio. *Las guerras de América y Egipto*. Madrid, 1883.
- Dash, J. Michael. J. "Nineteenth-Century Haiti and the Archipelago of the Americas: Anténor's Firmin Letters from St. Thomas," *Research in African Literatures* 35:2 (2004):44-53.
- De Gobineau, Joseph-Arthur, *De l'inégalité des races humaines* ()
_____. *The Inequality of Human Races*. Translated by George L. Mosse. New York: H. Fertig, 1999.
- Denis, Watson R. "Review of The Equality of the Human Races. (Positivist Anthropology)," *Caribbean Studies* 34:1 (2006):325-334.
- De Vastey, Baron. *Le système colonial dévoilé*. Cap-Henry : Chez P. Roux, 1814.
- Diop, Cheikh Anta. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. Edited and Translated by Mercer Cook. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974.
_____. *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991 [1981].
- Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Negro*. Mineola: Dove Publications, Inc., 2001 [1915].
_____. *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America*. New York: Washington Square Press, 970 [1924].
_____. *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in World history*. New York: International Publishers, 1992 [1946].

- Duchet, Michel. *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières*. Paris: Editions Albin Michel, S.A., 1995.
- Drake, St. Claire. *Black Folk Here and There. An Essay in History and Anthropology, Volume 1*. Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies of University of California, 1987.

Firmin, Joseph Anténor. *The Equality of the Human Races*. Translated by Asselin Charles. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

_____. *De l'Égalité des Races Humaines anthropologie positive*. Montréal : Mémoire D'encrier, 2005.

_____. *De l'Égalité des Races Humaines (Anthropologie Positive)*. Paris: Libraire Cotillon, 1885.

Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn. "Anténor Firmin: Haitian Pioneer of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 102:3 (2000):449-466.

_____. "Introduction," in Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*. Translated by Charles Asselin. Champaign: The University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn and Kharyssa Rhodes, eds, *Race and Identity in the Nile Valley: Ancient and Modern Perspectives*. New York: Red Sea Press, 2004.

Geiss, Immanuel. *The Pan-Africa Movement*, trans. Anne Keep. New York: African Publishing, 1974.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Gilles, Jean-Elie. "Patriotism, humanism and modernity: Three European concepts as a basis for the investigation and affirmation of the Negro soul in francophone literature of Haiti from the nineteenth through the late twentieth century," Ph.D. diss. University of Washington, 2002.

Gordon, Lewis R. *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

_____. "Not Exactly Positivism: Firmin's Critique of Transcendental Idealism in His Philosophy of Race and Culture." Unpublished Paper. Communication with the author.

Harris, Marvin. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

Harrison, Faye V., ed. *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for liberation*. Arlington: American Anthropological Association, 1997 [1997].

_____. "Dismantling Anthropology's Domestic and International Peripheries," *WAN E-*

Howe, Stephen. *Afrocentrism: Mystical Pasts and Imagined Homes*. New York: Verso, 1998.

James, George G.M. *Stolen Legacy: The Egyptian Origins of Western Philosophy*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.

Karenga, Maulana. *Introduction to Black Studies*. Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press, 1993.

_____. "Black Studies and the Problematic of a paradigm: The Philosophical dimension," *Journal of Black Studies* 18:4 (1988):359-414.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962.

KMT-Sisouvong, Baruti. "Equality of the Human Races: A Review," *Radical Scholar*, http://www.radicalsolar.com/articles/publish/bkreviews/Equality_of_the_Human_Races_A_Review_printer.shtml (accessed 2 December 2012)

Lefkowitz, Mary & Guy M. Rogers, eds., *Black Athena Revisited*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Lefkowitz, Mary. *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became An Excuse to Teach Myth As History*. New York: Basic Books, 1996.

Lewis, Gordon K. *Main Currents In Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004 [1983].

Lewis, Shireen K. *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Negritude to Creolite*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006

Magloire-Danton, Gerarde. "Anténor and Jean Price-Mars: Revolution, Memory, Humanism," *Small Axe* 18:9 (2005):150-170.

Manning, Patrick. *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

-
- Mazama, Ama. "The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions," *Journal of Black Studies* 31:4 (2001):387-405.
- Mokhtar, G., ed. *General History of Africa, Volume II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Moore, David Chioni, ed. *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
_____. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and The Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Nicholls, David. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*. New York: Rutgers University Press, 1996 [1979].
- Obenga, Theophile. "Hommage a Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), égyptologue haïtien," *ANKH* 17 (2008):132-147.
- Okafor, Victor Oguejiofor. "Diop and the African Origin of Civilization: An Afrocentric Analysis," *Journal of Black Studies* 22:2 (1991): 256-268.
- Ollivier-Beauregard, M. *Les divinités égyptiennes: leur origine, leur culte et son expansion dans le monde : à propos de la collection archéologique de feu le docteur Ernest Godard*. P Paris : Librairie internationale, 1866.
- Péan, Leslie. *Comprendre Anténor Firmin: Une inspiration pour le XXIe siècle*. Port-au-Prince: Editions de l'Université d'Etat d'Haïti, 2012.

- Price-Mars, Jean. *Ainsi parla l'Oncle : essais d'ethnographie haïtienne*. Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de Compiègne, 1928.
- _____. *Thus Spoke the Uncle*. Translated by Magdaline W. Shannon. New York: Three Continents Press, 1983.

-
- Sertima, Ivan Van. *Nile Valley Civilizations*. New York: Transaction Publishers, 1989.
- Schlesinger, Arthur. *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. Knoxville: Whittle Direct Books, 1991.
- Skinner, Elliott P. "The Restoration of African Identity for a New Millennium," in Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazurui, eds, *African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Stocking, George W. *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982 [1968].
- Snowden, Frank M. *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970.
- _____. *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks*. Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1983.
- _____. "Attitudes towards Blacks in the Greek and Roman World: Misinterpretations of the Evidence," in Edwin M. Yamauchi, ed., *Africa & Africans in Antiquity*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001.
- Uzong, E. *Africology. The Union Academic Council Series, African Studies Volume 1*. London: The Union Academic Council for African Studies, 1969.
- Yelvington, Kevin A. "The Anthropology of Afro-Latin America and the Caribbean: Diasporic Dimensions," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001):227-260.
- Walker, J.D., "The Misrepresentation of Diop's Views," *Journal of Black Studies* 26:1 (1995):77-85.