Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity is a philosophical paradigm used to generate theories and methods of analysis and correctives to the social, economic, and cultural conditions of African people. Accepting the idea that the dominant interpretation of African history during the past five hundred years had to consider a response to the disorientation that Europe created among African people on the continent and in the African diaspora, Molefi Kete Asante proposed a theory of social change he called Afrocentricity. It was the first theoretical attempt to propose an alternative to the two struggle stream theories, integration and separation, that had often become debates about racism and not-racism or pathways to assimilation and separateness. Emphasizing the need for a new approach to the question of racism Asante defined an alternative to assimilation and separation as a way to normalize African situations.

Afrocentricity and Pan-Africanism

There were two important propositions that Asante advanced that would underscore the need for this new project. In the first place, it was essential that people of African descent reject all negativity about Africa, African origins, history and values grounded in the European’s biological deterministic view of superiority and inferiority. Rather Afrocentricity argued that Africans, regardless to opposition and despite the spatial distribution of Africans, had to embrace the idea that as African people there was nothing wrong with them as Africans. The second position was that without such acceptance it would be almost impossible for Africans to find normalcy and balance in relation to Western doctrines of social, economic, and political dominance. Clearly the implications for Africology, history, sociology, politics, sciences, economics, as well as social and cultural justice were quickly acknowledged in the literature as thousands of articles, books, and encyclopedias began to adopt the new thinking. Afrocentrists advanced the idea in international African conferences in Dakar, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Lagos, and Accra that the true substance of Pan Africanism was a commitment to African agency in all fields, discourses, and movements. Without Afrocentric agency there is neither purpose nor shape to Pan Africanism. Afrocentricity asserts that Pan Africanism ceases to be a slogan when there is a robust theoretical and philosophical
commitment to the subject place of Africans in discourses of unity; otherwise there is neither ideology nor practice of Pan Africanism.

The word “Afro-centric” as an adjective first appeared in W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1962 speech notes stating that the Encyclopedia Africana, which he was to edit, should be “unashamedly Afro-centric” and then later in the year Kwame Nkrumah, the founding prime minister of Ghana, called for an “Afro-centric education” for Ghanaian students.

On the other hand, Afrocentricity as employed by Asante in 1980 was an intellectual discourse on the issues of social and historical dislocation as well as the centering and locating of African people within their own narratives, especially for interpretation, analysis, and action. In fact, in 1973 there had occurred a single issue of a journal called Afrocentric World Review, but it had no definition of the term, and no theoretical or analytical extension of the adjective “Afrocentric.” Asante has been universally acknowledged as the founder of the theory of Afrocentricity. It was further enhanced as a central tendency in discourse around culture and agency by the Temple Circle of Afrocentrists that included C. Tsehloane Keto, Ama Mazama, Nah Dove, and Kariamu Welsh. Other scholars such as Linda James Myers, Maulana Karenga, Mark Tillotson, Clenora Hudson-Weems, Mark Christian, Kmt Shockley, Simphiwe Sesanti, and Daryl Harris became leading thinkers in this intellectual school.

These scholars, and others, made several observations. First, the term Afrocentricity was not to be confused with either Afrocentrism or Africa-centered although those two words were often used to refer to Afrocentricity. Afrocentrism is a term frequently employed by those who see Afrocentricity in religious terms, that is, a belief system, rather than an analytical paradigm. Of course, it has nothing to do with any form of religion. The term Africa-centered has geographical implications that are not necessarily definitive for Afrocentricity insomuch as someone could be Afrocentric living in Siberia and perform Afrocentric scholarship from any place in the world. Although the adjective Afro-centric pre-existed Asante, it had no methodological dynamism until Molefi Kete Asante developed the theory of Afrocentricity in a series of books and articles. The second observation was that Afrocentricity had become a term applied to numerous philosophers of Africa and the African diaspora who see African agency as the starting point of most social, political, ethical, and economic analysis related to Africa. Without centering of Africans as subjects, they opined that all explanations of African phenomena would go astray. Hence, discourses on gender, class, or race had to first acknowledge the subject place of Africans in their own history before attempting to interpret or explain behavior, identity, or actions. One could not simply impose criteria taken from a Eurocentric cultural or behavioral model on African people or ideas and expect a valid analysis. Afrocentrists understood that there were no universalist principles applicable to all people without historical and cultural groundings.

Centering Africans in historical experiences

Afrocentricity’s innovation in approaching knowledge related to African people is the assertion that Africans must be the center of their own narratives. This was a simple philosophical pivot, but its impact has colored all studies of African people since the publication of Asante’s four original studies on Afrocentricity. For nearly five hundred years Africans had been written out of their own stories and had suffered marginalization in the historiography of Europe. In fact, the contestation of ideas, concepts, original advances by African theorists is a part of the same process. Only with the Afrocentric movement was there a consistent response to the overwhelmingly Eurocentric interpretations of the African experiences.
By the late 1990s and early 2000s the idea of Afrocentricity had been richly textured by the works of two of its earliest proponents, Ama Mazama (The Afrocentric Paradigm) and C. Tsholoane Keto (An Africa Centered Perspective on History). Both added their own flavor to the idea of African agency and the reorientation of Africans within the context of knowledge acquisition and creation. Ama Mazama, with a doctorate from La Sorbonne in Linguistics and Philosophy, extended the idea proposed by Asante and added the perspective of a complete change in the way Africans approached reality. The implications of this change have been far-reaching, even to the fact that in Bolivia some pundits have suggested that the clock be turned to run in the opposite direction from what European thinkers have called “clockwise.” Who was to say that Europe had the right to define the way a clock should run? Keto, a South African with a strong political and historical orientation sought to clarify the place Africa holds in world history. Trained as a historian at the University of Kansas, Keto tried to place Africa in its proper geographical space as the first continent of human origin. His books African Centered Perspective of History and Introduction to the Africa Centered Perspective of History are the first books to advance the idea that Africa sits at the center of human history. Thus, Keto added to the idea of Afrocentricity from a continental angle in a way that had only been anticipated by Asante.

Afrocentric cadres

During the 1990s and into the early 2000s a cadre of intellectuals rallied to the argument that Africans had to be seen as agents within historical narratives and not as people on the side of history. Indeed, they saw Africans as centered in the account of African history and important in most aspects of world history. Among those scholars were Linda James Myers, Maulana Karenga, and Clenora Hudson-Weems. In the case of Myers her 1993 book Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to Optimal Psychology established her as one of the first serious scholars of Afrocentric understanding from the psychological field. Myers suggestion is that African Americans are forced to abide by cultural and cosmological assumptions that are contrary to their own beingness. Hudson-Weems applied Afrocentric thinking to the question of sex and gender and developed Africana Womanism. Jerome Schiele, Patricia Reid-Merrit, and Thad Mathis saw the advantages of an Afrocentric social work. Daryl Taiwo Harris advanced Afrocentric political theory at the same time as Kmt Shockley and Mwalimu Shujaa were seeking to reorient education along the lines of African agency. Afrocentrists came to accept the research agendas of several scholars who did not declare themselves Afrocentric but left no doubt that they were interpreting phenomena from the same perspective as Afrocentrists. They may have called themselves in some cases Africentrists but they were fully committed to the centering of Africans in the middle of narratives of Africans. Among these were Wade Nobles, Kobi Kambon, Na’im Akbar, and Asa Hilliard. In fact, these individuals became the front pages of the book of psychologists who expressed the significance of Afrocentric views. Their names became associated with a new form of psychology; indeed, they were only psychologists in name because they had become uniquely Afrocentric in their orientation to knowledge. Maulana Karenga, the author of the most comprehensive Introduction to Black Studies, wrote several substantive articles for the Journal of Black Studies extending the ideas of Afrocentricity which was ultimately based anyway on a cultural foundation. In a sense, the Afrocentrists had come to adopt Karenga’s conceptualization of the African crisis as one that was fundamentally cultural. Asante would be inspired by this formulation to suggest that all issues of African trauma could be related to this factor. Thus, economics, religion, language development, social protocols,
critical analysis, social justice, and consciousness had to be seen as tied to the domination of Europe in the minds of Africans and Europeans over the past four centuries, hence, a cultural crisis.

Afrocentricity and the academy

Afrocentricity became the dominant intellectual theory used by scholars in Black Studies during the 1990s due to the dissemination of the theory by doctoral research of students graduating from the first PhD program in African American Studies in the United States at Temple University. By 2020 more than 190 doctoral degrees had been granted by Temple University where Afrocentricity first took root in an academic environment. Within the first ten years of the doctoral program Temple had produced many scholars with dissertations centered on African agency: They were written by Ella M. Forbes, *But we have no country: an Afrocentric Study of 1851 Christiana Resistance*; Mark J. Hyman, *Afrocentric Learnings of Black Church Owned Newspapers from Mid-nineteenth Century to WWII*; Ida Delores Young, *Between the voices of our ancestors: Afrocentric strategies, symbols, forms of revolution, and the philosophical implications of the rhetorical discourse of Abolitionist Maria W. Stewart (1803–1879)*; Donnie Leon Luke; *Afrocentric methods and the retrieval of an obscured African history: a reexamination of old Norse sagas*; Barbara J Marshall, *Mirroring Isis: an Afrocentric analysis of the works of selected African-American female writers*; Carolyn Louise Holmes, *New visions of a liberated future: Afrocentric paradigms, literature, and a curriculum for survival and beyond*; Susan Alexis Thomas-Holder, *Henry Highland Garnet: his life, times and an Afrocentric analysis of his writings*; Timothy James Johnson, *The ideological, theological, and conceptual postulates of the Black Church becoming Afrocentric*; Victor Oguejiofor Okafor, *Leadership and political integration in Africa: an Afrocentric case study of Nigeria*; Cecil Conteen Gray, *From incipient Afrocentric thought and praxis to intellectual history*; Edward Lama Wonkeryor, *The effects of United States’ political communication and the Liberian experience (1960–1990): an Afrocentric analysis*; Miriam Maa’at-Ka-Re Monges, *Kush: an Afrocentric perspective*; Jose V. Pimienta-Bey, *Some “Myths” of the Moorish Science Temple: an Afrocentric historical analysis*; Jeffrey Lynn Woodyard, *Afrological rhetorical theory and criticism: Afrocentric approaches to the rhetoric of Malcolm X*; and Katherine Kemi Bankole, *An Afrocentric analysis of enslavement and medicine in the Southeastern parishes of antebellum Louisiana*. These were just the early dissertations that utilized Afrocentric in their titles. Other dissertations, while Afrocentric, did not display the theory or method in the titles. Of course, since that period there have been scores of doctoral graduates from the Temple University program.

Katherine Bankole-Medina wrote the first comprehensive work on Afrocentric terms and concepts in the late 1990s. Christel Temple has explored the relationship of Afrocentricity to literature producing a new body of literary works founded on the principle of African subject places. Other writers have examined Afrocentric architecture, Afrocentric social work, Afrocentric critiques of rhetoric, Afrocentric psychology, Afrocentric economics, Afrocentric literary analysis, Afrocentric philosophy, Afrocentric historiography, as well as issues of race and gender in the context of the paradigm. A. Wade Boykin, Freya Rivers, Susan Goodwin, and Kofi Lomotey have all written about culturally sensitive teaching and learning with a major dose of the Afrocentric idea.

Afrocentricity has gained intellectual ground in Africa with brilliant articles and books by Simphiwe Sesanti, Vimbai Chivaura, and Tavengwa Gwekwerere; in the Caribbean with the works of Michael Barnett and John Bewaji; in Europe and Africa there are numerous authors who have unleashed a plethora of books and articles reflecting the Afrocentric perspective. Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe was one of the first United Kingdom scholars to write about
operationalizing Afrocentricity. Scholars and authors such as Vusi Gumede of South Africa, Ayele Bekerie, Theophile Obenga, Doumba Fakoly, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Mubabinge Bilolo have advanced the work of African philosophy and political science by virtue of their willingness to reorient the Eurocentric thinking that had dominated African thought. Although the work in South America has been done principally by extraordinarily bright activists because of the lack of Africans in the university systems there have been some very positive developments in Brazil. Inspired by the writings of Abdias Nascimento and Leila Gonzales students in Brazil have begun to create Afrocentric clubs and social organizations. Chief among these Afrocentric students are Ama Mizani at the Federal University in Rio de Janeiro and Gabriel Swahili of the Federal University in Salvador, both are leaders of Afrocentricity International in their cities. As in the Portuguese-speaking region, the Spanish-speaking areas of South America, particularly in Colombia, where Omotunde Asare, and other young Afrocentrists have pioneered the distribution of Afrocentric content to local communities and creating Afrocentric organizations to advance consciousness. The result is that many people are beginning to see the benefits of an Afrocentric analysis of their situations. In every region of the African world Afrocentrists lead discussion groups, clubs, social gatherings, festival panels and community forums of ordinary people that debate issues of economics, racism, gender, aesthetics, ethics, consciousness, values, ontology and epistemology in search of African agency.

**Afrocentricity and the agency reduction formation**

A key premise of Afrocentricity is that African agency is the central instrument in a cultural reorientation in the African world (Tillotson, 2011). How to achieve agency and what it looks like is a matter of constant debate; however, what is not debatable is the condition of collective marginalization caused by the assertion of Arab and European hegemony over African people, primarily as a result of the Arab Slave Trade, the European Slave Trade, and colonization. The necessity for Africans to assert their own narrative against the intensive and persistent pushing of African people, ideas, and concepts to the margins is at the core of the cultural problem. Lack of assertion or the forceful removal of agency has often created a pervasive generalized economic and cultural disorientation that accompanied the physical and psychological dislocation of Africans from a home place.

**Afrocentricity and cultural terrorism**

The moral aesthetics of Afrocentricity is that it situates Africans within the center of the African narratives of place, time, and space hence demonstrating that the dislocation of Africans from the center of their own history is a form of intellectual and cultural terrorism that is a constant attack on the African’s concept of self (Asante, 2014). Afrocentricity accepts the idea of changing realities; however, it argues that all human actions take place from some perspective or location and if one is not speaking or writing from one’s own cultural perspective one has become dislocated. As Asante has said, “the French, German, Japanese, and English do not argue hybridity although those who know recognize that those national cultures are the products of ethnic and cultural mergers” (Asante, 2014). Afrocentricity is therefore a critique of hierarchy in both signs and language and argues that the projection of European hegemony during the recent encounter with Africa has in effect been an assertion of superiority at the cultural level, the level of the writing of history, then at the level of the interpretation of history. There is no alterity except in the language of the definer. For the
Afrocentrist there is only us humans, a concept first explored in Maulana Karenga’s designation of his human rights and cultural organization Us. The idea is that separation and hierarchical relationships found in the Western society are at the core of our human problem. Asante claims that location is the fundamental source of difference; therefore, it is not biological determinism that influences human communication but cultural place (Asante, 2007). While some postmodernists have tried to deny the nature of “intrinsic meaning” the Afrocentrists have argued that meaning, however differentiated by circumstance, life chances, racism or gender, inheres in the particular condition until that condition is altered. This is precisely why the Afrocentric scholar Ana Monteiro Ferreira called her meme the demise of the inhuman. To be human is to be impacted by circumstances. Ferreira sought to hasten the end to a world of chaos and suggested an African idea of harmony and balance (Ferreira, 2014). In the African tradition everything is everything else if we realize the condition of our existence. Consequently, Afrocentricity’s first order of business has to be the determination of cultural, political, or economic location. There is no place that is not place, and there are no circumstances that humans are involved with that do not influence them. The attempted negation of African people by Arab and European philosophers from Ibn Khaldun to Hegel, traders in humans, gold, and ivory, historians of race and hegemony, enslavers of non-Islamic and non-Christian believers, and missionaries who cursed at African gods and built their churches on the land of the revered ancestors resulted in a variety of political and cultural responses. Hence, the concentration of where a person is coming from as the beginning point of any analysis is central to a full-fledged Afrocentric understanding of situation. Nothing is without context and therefore the role of the Afrocentrist is to probe for perspective, location, attitude and direction in intricate crevices of historical, social, and economic contexts.

In An Afrocentric Manifesto, Asante argues that there are five characteristics that establish the Afrocentric framework. The characteristics are: (1) psychological orientations, (2) emotional commitment, (3) political implication, (4) collective textual revision, and (5) socio-economic redefinitions. Each characteristic is determined by context.

Afrocentric scholars have established Afrocentricity as the first fully developed Africological approach to the issues confronting African people. Afrocentricity is not an extension of some idealistic notion of Europe or some pragmatic American response to a problem, but rather a paradigm that shifts the African people to their subject place within their own narrative and furthermore demonstrates the best human qualities based on the virtues of relationships. It is a materialist conception of reality because it discovers its sources in the actual historical and experiential realities of African people. But Afrocentricity does not diminish the search for humanity in other ways although it has been a principal critique of hegemonic Eurocentric domination on social, literary, and historical concepts and terminology. Afrocentricity contends that it is not enough to locate text, persons, or phenomena and return to a default positionality of Eurocentric ideology in relationship to Africa. To really create an innovation in knowledge one must completely overturn the arena where Eurocentrists play their game of one-upmanship in cultural terms. It is quite simple, for example, for one to accept the Afrocentrist’s position on African agency and then work to negate that agency. This is why Michael Tillotson’s compelling argument in Invisible Jim Crow is that African people have had to combat a specialized agency reduction formation that appears in every instance where African people seek to advance. Although this is the state or place of our current situation Afrocentrists do not take a nihilistic stand by insisting on a thorough-going cynicism about the condition or possibilities of victory over all forces that hinder human advancement.
Afrocentricity and culture

Negritude, a philosophy created by French speaking Africans, appears as an influence in Afrocentricity but the perspectives are different. Negritude emerges mostly as an aesthetic idea in the works of Léopold Senghor, Leon Damas, and Aimé Césaire. They clearly sought to demonstrate that Africans had their own conceptions of beauty in art, poetry, drama, and other forms of literature. On the other hand, Afrocentricity sees the importance of African agency in every sector and all aspects of the African historical narrative; thus, it is not limited to the aesthetic realm (Asante, 2014).

Maulana Karenga is the first African person, before Stuart Hall or Paul Gilroy, to posit the dramatic importance of culture on the freedom of African people. Karenga’s Afrocentric analysis led him to conclude as early as the 1960s that the “major crisis in the African community is the cultural crisis” (2008). What he meant by this pronouncement in 1966 was that every issue considered a problem or a negative in the African world can be traced to the dislocation of cultural grounding. This idea formed the foundation of much of what Asante came to write in the 1970s and 1980s. Coupled with Karenga’s emphasis on the cultural crisis was his recognition that in the area of human relations there was a profound problem of ethics in the Western world that impacted the psychological location of Africans (Karenga, 1988).

On the other hand, Ama Mazama seeks to address this same issue of ethical and psychological dislocation by proposing a spiritual revival to “re-center” Africans in their own historical experiences (Mazama, 2003). The depth of the spiritual mis-orientation is manifest, in her thinking, in bleaching creams, the idea of reverence for gods that do not dwell in Africa, and in anti-African expressions of religion. These are the traits of a “lost” people who often wander in dis-spirited ways seeking the sounds of their ancestors’ names only to hear the voices of their oppression. Mazama’s response is that these “lost” people must either find themselves or be found by those with more historical and cultural consciousness in order to save themselves from the ordeal of anonymity in the Western world. Why is it that the names of African ancestors cannot be heard in the schools, streets, and houses of worship if it is not because Africans have remained marginalized in an alien world? Africans themselves have imitated and often reproduced these same icons of Europe with the same marginalizing effects on themselves.

Maghan Keita examines the nature of the opposition to an Afrocentric projection of history and takes up where Cheikh Anta Diop left off by proposing a theoretical response to the critics of Afrocentric history. Keita’s main contention is that one has to allow Africans the right to assert their own history without complexes. He argues for reason and facts as cornerstones on the road to understanding the intricacies of historical records (Keita, 2000). And so Keita is one of the first Afrocentric historians to understand and appreciate the work of Diop in a profound way. This has made Keita’s own work a reference point for a break with the past. African historians who were unable to see the truth of Diop’s light remain caught in the fog of non-agency. They may be well-trained European or American historians who study Africa, but they have never broken the chains of their disciplinary status. Keita has advanced the critique of historiography farther than others because of his devotion to historical detail.

Ana Maria Monteiro Ferreira, the Portuguese Afrocentrist, launched an interesting javelin into the theoretical mix. She argued that because lots of contemporary thought was anchored in the hegemonic and totalizing views of the Western individual as superior and of Western thought as universal, new theories have surfaced, one after the other, as Western intellectuals and thinkers have tried to answer the anxieties of the Western individual mind and to close
the breach on the Western paradigm caused by the atomization and itemization of people in society. However, she pointed out that there was, “The possibility that African cultures and values bring renewed ethical and social significance to a sustained project of human agency, liberation, and equality…” (Ferreira, 2014). Ferreira is the most important European writing on the role of Afrocentricity in relation to postmodern theories of humanity. She has taken her cue from the immense body of data that exists in the ancient and contemporary African world and has explored the possibilities that Europe, on the way to its colonizing mission, was too quick to dismiss the human inheritance from the more ancient civilizations and cultures of Africa. Afrocentrists tend to agree with her assessment since the marginalization of this way of seeing has meant that it has rarely been given serious attention by Western thinkers. In fact, in the minds of some European writers the easiest action in relationship to any African ideas is to dismiss them. Such arrogance has resulted in cheapening the philosophical insights of some of the most prolific writers in European letters.

The Afrocentric scholar Michael Tillotson seeks to examine the relationship between ideological domination and its influence on the contemporary lives of African Americans. He sees that domination is “aggressively rooted in methods of intellectual inquiry, scholarly debates, national conversation, policy speak and culture” (Tillotson, 2011). Understanding the marginal location of African people within the ideological framework of Europeans gives us a clue to how blacks have been dominated. Thus, Tillotson seeks the “illumination, exploration and critique of post racial discursive interventions … because if accepted uncritically these concepts have the potential to reduce the collective agency of African Americans” (Tillotson, 2011). He sees Agency Reduction Formation as a prominent postmodern phenomenon, but certain elements of the formation have occurred since the first negative encounter between Africans and Europeans in the fifteenth century at least. The idea that Europe was superior, and that Africa was inferior lay at the very core of the belief that every attempt on the part of Africans to assert their agency had to be challenged by Europe. Thus, the notions of the best, the greatest, the first, the most important, and so forth, coming out of Europe became stratagems to complicate and confuse the relationship with African people. In the Americas and especially in the United States these stratagems took the provocative posture of announcing a post racial society as a mechanism to defuse the African thrust for equality. Elements of this mechanism were first seen in ideas such as “race does not exist,” “we live in a post racial society,” and “to speak of race is to speak of the past,” and so forth. What Tillotson has done is to expose both the truths and the falsehoods of such constructions in the American society. As an Afrocentrist he is eager to discover a way around or through ideological threats to the safety and security of African people but he recognizes that there are Four Pillars of the Post Racial Moment that present challenges to African agency. These are Essentialism, Social Construction of Race, Post Modernism, and Color-Blindedness. Each of these constructions has the potential of dislocating African people. Tillotson’s work in dismantling these pillars is one of the major achievements of Afrocentric critique.

Another scholar, Reiland Rabaka argues that “In order to theorize blackness – and some might even argue in order to practice blackness, which is to say, to actually and fully live our Africanity – some type of thought or, rather more to the point, some form of philosophy will be required” (Rabaka, 2009). Indeed, Rabaka claims that “Africana critical theory involves not only the critique of domination and discrimination, but also a deep commitment to human liberation and constant social transformation” (Rabaka, 2009). Thus, the Afrocentric theorist has privileged both the critique and the commitment functions of an Afrocentric enterprise. Rabaka’s project is to construct a theoretical response to those who
would prefer to limit Afrocentricity’s fundamental groundbreaking rupture with Eurocentric domination. To do this he has used African agency to reveal new frontiers of knowledge and deliver powerful interpretative avenues for understanding various forms of aesthetics. Rabaka’s work resonates with the newer writings of the philosophers Lewis Gordon and Lucius Outlaw who also show influences from the Afrocentric School.

The late Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop is credited with re-orienting African historiography and setting the quest for truth in the last half of the twentieth century. It was Diop’s turn to ancient Africa, especially Egypt and Nubia, for the source of Africa’s civilization that pierced the thin skin of a European origin to Nile Valley civilizations and set the research of Africans, most still colonized when Diop’s first work, Nations negre et culture, was presented to La Sorbonne for his doctoral dissertation. Nevertheless, by 1973 he had risen to the top of African historical research with his relentless studies of African languages, symbols, myths, and kinship categories and was invited to the United Nations conference on the Peopling of Egypt in Cairo where he, and his protégé, Theophile Obenga, dominated the intellectual discourse and proved through several avenues, linguistics, paintings, correspondence of cultures, melanin studies of mummies, and proximity, that ancient Egypt was, as Diop says, “a Black African Civilization” (Diop, 1974). The conclusion made by Diop and Obenga reverberated around the globe. Only two African scholars invited to the conference had reset the discussion of classical Africa. From 1973 forward the debate about the origin of the ancient Egyptians was nothing more than vestiges of the racist diatribes that had been presented in the nineteenth century by Europeans who could not believe that “blacks” had produced the pyramids of Egypt and Sudan. Nevertheless, Diop’s work sparked an outpouring of other books and articles and caused an Afrocentric revolution in the historiography of Africa because Diop’s assertion that the history of Africa could not be written without a connection to the Nile Valley inspired numerous indigenous scholars to re-think the nature of their own local histories.

Molefi Kete Asante has called himself a Diopian because he uses Diop’s vision of a historiography founded on the principle of African assertion, neither foreign nor alien, as the beginning of his analysis of culture in the African world. By the time Asante articulated his view of African agency the field had been amply supplied with the seeds of Diop’s thoughts and consequently Asante’s Afrocentricity benefitted from the fact that he no longer had to argue whether Greeks or Arabs or other-worldly creatures built the pyramids. The facts had been established as Diop and his colleagues such as John Henrik Clarke, John Jackson, Yosef ben Jochannon, Ivan van Sertima, and Moussa Lam, had already covered the ground of what African people did and could do. What remained to be done to firmly set the Afrocentric pedestals in place was to open the door to tropes of a new grammar to speak of Africa. Asante took on terminology such as Black Africa, Africa South of the Sahara, Negro, Pygmy, Primitive, Huts, Natives, Tribes, Slavery, Rational and Emotional Man, Subhuman, Emotion, Double Consciousness, Middle Ages, Universal Man, and scores of other words and terms that had been used to assert European superiority.

There were four books published by Asante on Afrocentricity between the years 1980 and 1998. They were Afrocentricity (1980), Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge (1990); The Afrocentric Idea (1992, 1998); and Malcolm X as Cultural Hero and other Afrocentric Essays (2001). Asante wrote articles in more than twenty different journals in North America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and South America that generated wide interest in the field. Although the theoretical work was necessary it was also essential that Asante be able to demonstrate a practical example of Afrocentric intellectual work. This was done with the creation of the first doctoral program in African American Studies in the world.
The proposal to create a Ph.D. program in African American Studies had come after intense discussion with Peter Liacouras, then President of Temple University. He had wanted to know what it would take to have the best African American Studies program in the nation. Asante presented the idea of a doctoral program to the University and after more than a year winding its way through the various committees and deans the proposal was viewed by the Board of Trustees and then approved. The first Ph.D. in African American Studies was granted to Adeniyi Coker from Nigeria in 1990. Creating the degree program was the easy part, building a strong curriculum based on the new disciplinary philosophy would be a much more difficult task.

Between 1984 and 1996 there emerged at Temple University a group of scholars committed to African agency that changed the nature of the study of African people. This cadre of individuals led by Molefi Kete Asante, C. Tseholoane Keto, and Ama Mazama included variously Nah Dove, Thelma Ravell-Pinto, Kariamu Welsh, and Theophile Obenga, among others. Describing themselves as Afrologists or Africologists these scholars explored works in history, literature, dance, and sociology, producing books and articles on all subjects. They had arrived at Temple from numerous other universities and soon found common purpose in discovering the agency and centered place of Africans in narratives and phenomena related to black people. Asante had been educated at the University of California, Los Angeles; Keto studied at the University of Kansas; Mazama had received highest distinction at La Sorbonne; Obenga came from the University at Bordeaux; and Welsh had received her doctorate from New York University. In many ways, especially in publications, but also in the assertiveness of theory and philosophical perspectives, this was perhaps one of the densest collections of Afrocentric intellectuals. Asante, as the creator of the first Ph.D. in African American Studies could claim that the Temple School was the vanguard movement in Black Studies and with numerous publications and doctoral graduates the proof was in the pudding itself.

Afrocentricity has attracted enough detractors for any theoretical idea. Mary Lefkowitz (Not out of Africa) and Stephen Howe (Afrocentrism) have been the two most significant white critics. Lefkowitz is an American and Howe a British professor. Asante has dealt with their works in his book, The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism. Also among the critics have been the British-Ghanaian, Kwame Anthony Appiah, a philosopher, who has found the idea of Afrocentricity difficult to accept because he sees it as promoting essentialism. Afrocentrists usually point out that Europe created essentialism and the idea is foreign to Afrocentricity. Alongside Appiah, the African American historian Clarence E. Walker is remarkable for his misunderstanding of Afrocentricity. Walker believes that Afrocentricity is not just bad history, but that it is based on a myth that Africans achieved heights in culture and civilization that are just not true. In Walker’s view the Afrocentrist is seeking to build something that does not exist or to pursue something that is an illusion. Much like Appiah who has often attacked other forms of African culture, Walker is familiar with all of the canards that have been thrown around by anti-Afrocentrist and he uses them to argue that Afrocentrists are promoting a false idea. Afrocentrists have criticized these ideas by insisting that Afrocentricity cannot be condensed to history. Furthermore, Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora do exist as a fact. One cannot argue that the centrality of Africans in their own narratives of history or philosophy are unreal. What Appiah and Walker and perhaps others who object have shown is like Mary Lefkowitz and Stephen Howe they are essentially tied to Eurocentric responses about African agency. Their views have had little impact on the growth and development of Afrocentricity. Few critics of Afrocentricity even quote from Afrocentrists; they are second-hand commentators for the most part.
The critics have been joined by a number of outstanding scholars who recognize the contributions of Afrocentrists. Lewis Gordon, a prominent African philosopher, published a book on African Philosophy that showed the influences of Afrocentric philosophers and historians such as Cheikh Anta Diop, John Henrik Clarke, and Theophile Obenga. Gordon’s work has established a new baseline for examining Afrocentric works in philosophy. In some ways, Asante’s *Ancient Egyptian Philosophers* is now seen as one of the important introductions to the study of African philosophy because it anticipates Gordon’s book and introduces the reader to the earliest philosophers such as Imhotep, Ptahhotep, Duauf, Merikare, Akhenaten, and Amenhotep, son of Hapu. David Hughes, Afrocentric Architecture, established an entirely new inroad into the discourse on African and African American architecture. Monte O. Harris, Afrocentric plastic surgeon, has explored the relationship between beauty, health, and identity as a form of alignment to wellness.

On the international scene Afrocentricity has had an impact on Asian scholars as well. Yoshitaka Miike, the leading Japanese communication cultural theorist, has maintained an interactive dialogue and correspondence with Afrocentrists Molefi Kete Asante, Ama Mazama and Maulana Karenga for many years. They have participated in several joint intellectual projects as a result of Miike’s own development of the Asiacentric paradigm used in the analysis and criticism of Asian communication. Furthermore, Miike has concretely linked the total understanding of communication theory to a necessary influence of Asian philosophy. Miike is considered the father of Asiacentricity because he explained that Asian communication must be evaluated on the basis of Asian philosophies. Thus, his Asiacentricity, and that of Jing Yin, has revolutionized thinking in the field of intercultural and international communication by reducing the dependency on theories that are grounded only in a Western tradition. Humans live in a shared environment and the built-environment of Asia has depended upon different ideas than those of Europe or Africa. Finding inspiration in what the Afrocentrists have done Miike has pushed the idea that the voice of Asia must join any discussion of world communication (Miike, 2014). Afrocentrists have found the dialogue with Asiacentrists to be fruitful and valuable in creating innovation in human relationships.

Although Afrocentricity reverberates in psychology, sociology, history, social work, and cultural studies there are numerous communication scholars who have utilized concepts that may be called Afrocentric. Cecil Blake, Renaldo Anderson, Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, and Ron Jackson, among others, have written on Afrocentric themes. In addition, a new cadre of Afrotuturists have announced that Afrocentricity in the foundation for a new approach to an African futurism. These writers, artists, and performers have emerged out of several traditional disciplines to assert an Afrocentric component to iconic symbolism, studies of the human body, and creations suggesting the advancement of intellectual insights from ancient Africa.

Finally, Afrocentricity is not a hegemonic idea and does not promote a particular vision as universal. Texts of all kind are made from cultural materials and Afrocentrists claim that all cultural productions are ultimately the results of collective agency. One cannot read the *Kebra Nagast* and not connect the authors to the culture of the Ethiopians or the *Odu Ifa* and connect the literature to the Yoruba. One cannot understand a speech by a Shogun of Japan and disconnect it from Japanese culture. Therefore, African views as expressed by African agency must find room at the table of humanity; otherwise we will continue to fight for the space that we know exists.
References