

Three Elements Of African Culture

(The Journal of Negro History)

The passion for self expression is one of the most potent factors in social development. No problem of social philosophy yields to a satisfactory solution where the passion for self expression is not regarded as a requisite factor. This principle is operative in the life of the individual, the race and the nation. All human achievements are directly traceable to some inward urge, and evolution as a theory is but the universalization of this principle. Civilization, whether in its more perfected stages or whether in its manifestations that are crude and rudimentary, is essentially a measure of human expression. The inward urge that drives mankind onward has a variety of manifestations and the difference in the number of these manifestations is the measure of difference between various civilizations and between civilization and barbarism or savagery. The impulse that moves the saintly worshipper in St. Peter's to kiss the rosary as he kneels low-bowed and earnest before the high altar is the same that moves the aborigine in Zululand to dance in frenzied ecstasies around his devil-bush. That there are various degrees of self-expression, with a maximum in this nation and age, and a minimum in that, is a fact that is as undeniable as it is obvious; but that there are impulses of cultural possibilities which are lavished upon some races while totally withheld from others is a thesis which finds no sanction in history or archaeology.

Archaeology is the guiding light in which we grope in our attempt to explore the life of the ancient man. In Europe and in Asia we have unearthed numerous evidences of prehistoric cultures. There may have been surprise at the antiquity and variety but certainly not at the location, for it was highly probable that the present high civilization of Europe and Asia had risen from the ruins of the older ones; yet it cannot be longer doubted that when archaeology as a searchlight was turned upon Africa there was occasion of surprise when that Dark Land yielded evidences of a civilization that antedated the arrival of the European. It would be just as hard to designate the African cultures as purely Negro as to designate the European cultures as purely Teuton. However, a study of African culture promises richer results when it can be identified with certain Negro tribes or such Negro tribes as have a large extraction of Negro blood. The findings of archaeology have not only a backward look but also a meaning for the future and especially is this true of African cultures, which not only throw light upon the past of the black man but may also become prophetic of his future. It shall be the purpose of this treatise to analyze the African cultures so as to disclose their essential elements and to compare these elements with their counterparts in European cultures.

Once attention had been directed towards Africa, there arose numerous archaeological expeditions and especially noteworthy were the findings of those from Germany and England, the two European countries which had the most ambitious schemes of colonization. In details there is not always agreement among the various archaeological explorers; but, in the main, there is unanimity that is marvelous and especially is this true when there is evidenced such keen rivalry that is at bottom doubtless economic.

What are the essential elements of civilization? What are the cultural manifestations which constitute the sine qua non of human progress? What is the "irreducible minimum" of civilization? A studied answer must include ethics, art and government, for without any one of these no social order can claim for itself an approach to civilization. The cultures of nations and races must be expressive of these cardinal elements of social expression. In investigating African cultures and their essential elements

it is deemed best to dwell at greatest length on the positive aspects of these cultural manifestations. To attempt a negative exposition of the primitive cultures of any people will not reveal any worthwhile criterion of its worth especially when the scope of investigation is limited to three essential elements of culture. If ethics, art and government constitute the irreducible minimum of civilization which is manifested in certain cultural aspects, it is clear at the outset that specialization in ethics, art and government is the measure of a people's advancement.

(To be Continued)

The What-Not Column

(By Robert P. Edwards)

Who was the "Son of Laughter?"

"Son of Laughter" Bert Williams was born in the British West Indies in 1876. As a boy, working at odd jobs about theatres, his jovial disposition soon won him recognition and he finally found himself in vaudeville as a singing comedian. He rapidly arose to fame as a peerless comedian, and appeared by Royal Command before many of the crowned heads of Europe. His performances in "The Sons of Ham," "Dahomey," "Abyssinia," and "Bandanna Land," are well remembered by this generation. He made people laugh, and it has been said that he laughed his way into the hearts of men, yea into the hearts of great men. As he carried the interests of his race into those hearts with him, he is to be numbered among the illustrious Negroes, for the bread that he cast upon the waters has been, is being, and will be seen and gathered after many days. Bert collapsed during his act on a Detroit stage, rallied for a week, and passed out March 5th 1922 in New York.

Did a Negro ever preside over The House of Assembly of any State?

During the session of The House of Assembly of the State of New Jersey, on March 30, 1920, Dr. Walter G. Alexander of Orange, Assemblyman of Essex Co., was called to the chair by Speaker Hobart. After half an hour of deliberation on bills, Assemblyman Coon presented a resolution which recited the fact of a Negro's presiding over a House of Assembly for the first time in any State, and the first time in Jersey. The resolution, which was unanimously passed, expressed profound respect for the ability of Dr. Alexander. In 1923 a similar honor was conferred upon Assemblyman Frederick Roberts of Los Angeles, Cal.

Was Carthage betrayed?

After breaking the power of Carthage, at Zama, the kingdom of Numidia, an erstwhile ally of Carthage, was given to Massinissa, who became a tool of Rome and tricked the Carthaginians into surrendering their arms. When the dreadful truth was realized the heroic Carthaginians, without engines, weapons, or ships, shut their gate and kept the Romans out for more than two years. Finally Scipio fought his way to the citadel street by street and by command of the Roman Senate leveled its last building to the earth and sent the surviving inhabitants to Rome to be sold as slaves.

What is the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the U.S.A.?

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the U.S.A. was submitted in February 1865 and proclaimed November 1865 reads as follows:

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Professor Arrested

(By The Associated Negro Press)

Washington, D.C., Aug.—Thomas Williams, said by police to be no other than Prof. Akpan Ession, world wonder and Mohammedan Magician, lately arrived from Central Africa, was arrested on charges of false pretense.

According to the police and nearly a dozen alleged victims, "the professor" cures all external and internal diseases, no matter how long you have suffered. He also is an authority on "bullar." The police were unable to determine just what that meant, but John Murphy declared that he understood it thoroughly; the professor, he said, separated him from \$5.

The wonder worker was arrested when he failed to change a five dollar bill into a twenty-dollar bill. Murphy told them, police say, that the professor was a "luck man" from Central Africa. By placing a five dollar bill in his hand and saying a few magic words he would change the bill into a twenty dollar gold note, said Murphy, and he added that when the trick failed to work with his five, the professor said he would have to call on the "skeetink" of Africa to help him out. Murphy's reply was that he himself would have to call on somebody, and it might as well be the police.

George Smith told police that he had requested the professor to find his girl, whom he lost 7 years ago. "Easy," the professor replied, according to Smith, and charged him \$7 for his talent.

According to the police, the professor's visiting card reads, "If you are in trouble, consult me and I will free you." At headquarters a victim scornfully exclaimed, "Professor, you had better consult the skeetink, for you're sure in trouble."

Next Week's Whatnots

Did Samuel Coleridge-Taylor ever visit America?

What became of the Pyramid of Cheops?

What reward was Robert Smalls given for his exploit?

What is the 15th amendment to the Constitution of the U.S.A.?

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