

# Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man



as told by  
**John P. & C. Buck West**

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## History Of The Negro

(PHYSICAL AND HUMAN GEOGRAPHY)

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(Submitted as entry in the VOICE-sponsored Negro History Essay Contest.)

EGYPT IS THE basis for many of the institutions of the Western World. Protection, food, and warmth were the factors that made this country so attractive to the hordes that sought security and founded its civilization.

People migrated to the West from every direction. Those commonly referred to as the Mediterranean race came from the North; Semitic Nomads from the East; and the black and brown tribes from Ethiopia came from the South. The intermingling was so extensive and the fusion of their cultures was so complete, that it was impossible to credit any one particular group for the civilization created. Before the culture and civilization of Egypt took shape, a new group of people emerged, neither basically Mediterranean, Semitic, nor Ethiopian, but Egyptian. Migrations from all directions continued, and soon the character and appearance of the Egyptians began to lean toward the infiltration which was heaviest.

The picture one can derive of the physical appearance of the Egyptian depends on the source of the description and the period for which the observation is made. Herodotus described them, in the fifth and sixth century Before Christ, as "black and curly-haired," while Homer and other Greek writers regarded the Egyptians as black. Archaeologists have recovered some art pieces that show a great variation in the appearance of the Egyptian. The range was from the Mediterranean type with features usually associated with Caucasians, to the distinctly Negroid type with fleshy lips, broad noses, and woolly hair. In all probability, Egyptians were decidedly a mixed race with all the variable characteristics that such a group usually possesses.

### A-CIVILIZATION EMERGES

THE GEOGRAPHICAL factors and the presence of the different races who shared with each other their own culture and social experiences stimulated the early development of a civilization there. By the time of the New Stone Age the inhabitants of Egypt settled down to a life of agriculture. They had also domesticated many animals, including goats, sheep, donkeys, and cattle. Shortly, they began to reclaim land and develop a system of irrigation. Their resourcefulness and self-sufficiency are demonstrated in the skills which they achieved in weaving linen and other textiles, in making tools and in building houses. As they entered the age of metal, they displayed exceptional skill in making objects of art and implements in copper and bronze.

Sculpture and painting were highly developed in areas where the social and cultural experience of a people has lasted for a long period of time. In architecture, Egypt made remarkable advances in precision-like constructions of houses, royal palaces, and pyramids. These works gave clear evidence of a thorough knowledge not only of architecture, but physics, en-

gineering, and geometry as well.

### PHYSICAL TRAITS

"NEGRO" REFERS basically to the people of Africa; the word itself meaning black, referring to skin pigmentation. The physical traits of the Negro or Negroid is sketched briefly under the following heads:

**Skin.** The skin color ranges from light brown in the Northeast Africa to brown-black in West Central Africa.

**Hair.** The color is uniformly dark brown to brown-black; the form is wavy, to curly, to frizzy or woolly, to tightly spiraled peppercorn. The facial and body hair are sparse. The tightly-curved hair is said to provide an air cushion cooling the scalp.

**Eyes.** The eye color is usually dark brown. **Nose.** The nasal root is low and broad, and the bridge is straight to concave. It is very broad across the wings. The nostrils are rounded or oval and the tip is blunted.

**Lips.** The lips are full and relatively pigmented. Often a ridge separates the upper mucous lip from the skin.

**Head.** The head is long or oval. It is moderately high with a rounded forehead.

**Body.** Form and proportions range from linear to stocky. The span is relatively great; the trunk short; the arms and legs long.

**Stature.** Stature is moderate, ranging from very short to very tall.

### THE SLAVE TRADE

WHEN THE Christians of Western Europe began to turn their attention to the trade in men in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they were not developing a new practice among human beings. They were engaging in a pursuit that had been the concern of men for countless centuries. Slavery was widespread during the earliest known history of Africa as well as of other continents. Doubtless there was cruelty and oppression in African slavery as there was anywhere that the institution developed. At least in some portions of Africa there was no racial basis for slavery. The Egyptians enslaved whatever peoples they captured. At times they were Semitic, at times Mediterranean, and at other times they were blacks from Ethiopia.

When the Mohammedans invaded Africa, they contributed greatly to the development of the institution of Negro slavery by seizing Negro women for their harems and Negro men for their military and menial service. The Moslems recruited Negro slaves and shipped them off to Arabia, Persia, or some other land of Islam. Negro kings and princes cooperated with the Arabians in the exploitation of human cargo. Mohammedans did not use the slaves primarily for the production of goods from which wealth could be derived. There were not extensive cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane fields in Arabia, Persia, and Egypt. Slaves in these lands were essentially servants, and the extent of the demand for them depended largely on the wealth of the potential masters. Slavery was, therefore, a manifestation of wealth. Slaves who were converted to Islam were regarded as brothers.

SOME OF the Negroes of Africa who were sold to the East and North during the period of Mohammedan domination found their way into the markets of Western Europe. It was not until the end of the fourteenth century, however, that Europeans themselves began to bring slaves into Europe. Both Spanish and Portuguese sailors were exploring the coast of Africa during the Great wave of expansionism that had swept over Europe. They went to the Canary Islands and to innumerable ports on the mainland as far as the Gulf of Guinea. Everywhere they made contacts with the natives and looked into the possibility of establishing trade relations with the natives. They carried Africans to Europe and made servants of them. By the middle of the fifteenth century, Europeans were selling many African commodities, among which were nuts, fruit, olive oil, gold, and Negro slaves. Within a very few years, the slave trade became an accepted and profitable part of European commerce. Under the encouragement of Prince Henry, the sailors and merchants of Portugal saw the economic advantage which the African slave trade afforded. Intrepid sailors attached themselves to the Portuguese courts primarily because of the opportunities for wealth which the Guinea slave trade promised. By the time of the death of Prince Henry in 1460, 700 or 800 slaves were being carried to Portugal an-

nually.

The last half of the 5th century may be considered as the years of preparation in the history of the slave trade. Europeans, mainly Spaniards and Portuguese, were establishing orderly trade relations with the natives and were erecting forts and trading posts at which points they could carry on their business. It was the period in which Europeans were becoming accustomed to having Negroes do their work and exploring the possibilities of finding new tasks for them.

THERE WAS never any profitable future for Negro slavery in Europe. Although Europe was undergoing drastic economic change in the 15th and 16th centuries, its new economic institutions did not utilize Negro slavery on a sufficiently large scale to make shipyards; mercantile establishments, and the homes of the newly rich could use only a limited number of slaves. To be sure, there were many new jobs to be performed, but the large white population which was dispossessed of land by the enclosure movement in England was in search of employment. If there were jobs to be filled, these Europeans claimed them for themselves. But the new era of economic development established some activities in which the Negro could perhaps be used. It was too much to expect that these activities would be confined to Europe as the international competition developed. The search for new trade routes, more lands and new commodities provided the opportunities for the use of Negro slaves for which the Europeans had been looking. It was the new world with its vast natural resources and its undeveloped regions that could make slavery and the slave trade profitable.

### THE SLAVE'S REACTION TO HIS STATUS

OWNERS OF slaves almost always sought to convey the impression that their human ownership was docile, and happy. This effort be- (See HISTORY, page 11)

## THIS WEEK IN NEGRO HISTORY

AN "NPI" FEATURE

- June 8, 1950 Bishop A. P. Shaw established precedent by being the first Negro prelate to preside over California-Arizona conference of the Methodist church.
- June 9, 1911 The Carnegie Corporation, which became the basis for the philanthropic fund that built many Negro libraries, received its charter to do business in the state of New York.
- June 10, 1945 Dr. Horace Mann Bonn was elected by the trustees as the first Negro president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.
- June 11, 1920 Hazel Scott, well-known jazz pianist and ex-wife of New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell (D.-N.Y.), was born in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.
- June 12, 1948 The American Nurses Association breaks custom by electing a Negro nurse to its national board of directors.
- June 13, 1942 Maceo, noted black Cuban revolutionist, was born in Santiago, Cuba.
- June 14, 1811 Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, a book that spurred the abolitionist movement, was born in Litchfield, Conn.

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