

## AFRICA: ITS HISTORY AND PEOPLE

What do you think of when you hear the word Africa? Do you think of natives who live in jungles and run around grunting and groaning? Do you think of savages who have fun killing and eating people? Do you think of Africans as naked wild men who sit under trees, filing their teeth and waiting for fruit to drop on their heads, while the white man comes in to help civilize them? If you do, you have fallen for an old old myth - a myth invented by white men to justify using slaves for their own use. Let us see the real story of what Africa was like a long time ago.

Some people feel that civilization may have actually started in Africa. Back in the beginning of civilization, blackness was not considered bad, and black people were known and honored throughout the ancient world. Negroes were described as the most powerful, the most just, and the most beautiful of the human race and white men were sometimes ridiculed for the "unnatural whiteness of their skin."

Africa has been ruled by many great kings. Taharku, the greatest of the Ethiopian Pharaohs, took the throne in 690 B.C. He has been described as a capable and energetic king and under his rule Ethiopia was the greatest empire of the time. Tenkamenin, who ruled Ghana in the middle of the 11th century had an army of 200,000 men and lived in a castle decorated with sculpture and painted windows.

Perhaps the greatest king of all was Askia Mohammed who came into power in 1493, a year after the discovery of America. He held the throne for 19 years and built the largest and most powerful of the Sudan states. A brilliant administrator and legislator, Askia reorganized the army, improved the banking system and made great cities out of Gao, Walata, Timbuktoo, and Jenné. One writer said, "in personal character, in ability, in devotion to the welfare of his subjects, in openmindedness toward foreign influence, King Askia was certainly the equal of the average European king, and superior to most of them."

Under Askia, Timbuktoo was a great city of over 100,000 people, filled to the top with gold and beautiful women. Great buildings were built out of stone and lime. There were hundreds of shops where people could buy anything their hearts desired and their pocketbooks could afford, and Timbuktoo was the center of trade in that part of the world. Youth from all over the Moslem world came to Timbuktoo to study law and surgery at the University of Sankore, and learned from the writers and historians of the black empire. There were many judges, doctors, lawyers, and clerics. More money was made from the book trade than any other business.

As we can see, Africa is not what we thought at all. The family and the village were very important in African life. The old and sick were always taken care of, the fields were plowed by members of the community, and food was shared. Africans had their own system of law and spoke many different tongues.

Africa is responsible for the game of chess, and the Negro people are given credit for the discovery of the process of reducing iron ores by smelting the iron out. While Europeans were still satisfied with crude stone tools, the Africans were using iron. Africans have written beautiful poetry,

have created some of the most beautiful sculpture the world has known, and have contributed the great rhythmic dances and music of Africa. Africans were the first to have a money system, and long before the Europeans knew about it, Africans had discovered that mosquitos caused malaria.

No one is saying that all of Africa was always like that, though. There was slavery, human sacrifice, sin, and many wars. But in what nation has this not taken place? The lesson to be learned is that Africa is not a place of savagery and ignorance as the white slave owner has made us believe, but is a place where the Negro people can look to with pride. Today Africa has thrown off the chains of the white man and is a growing continent, led by Negro leaders. Let us remember, that nowhere in the country of Nigeria today, unlike certain places we may know, is there a dirt road to be found.

Words to discuss:

- 1) myth 2) ancient 3) pharaohs 4) ridiculed 5) myth 6) civilized 7) clerics
- 8) chains.

Questions to discuss:

1. Why do we sometimes think Africa is uncivilized?
2. What did people think of the black man many years ago?
3. Why was Askia Mohammed considered such a great king?
4. Why was Timbuktoo such a great city?
5. What have Africans contributed to the world?