
Write Your History

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I had been president of the Phylaxis Society for less than a month when I suffered the indignity of my first rebuke. I had quoted, or rather paraphrased, our esteemed leader, Brother Joseph A. Walkes, Jr., when I began a letter with the words: “*Prince Hall Freemasons must write their own history and not allow anyone else to write it. Then and only then will the truth be manifest.*”

One of our Canadian members took exception to this statement and he was kind enough to share his concerns in a telephone conversation. “Are you saying that only a Texan can write the history of Texas, or only Canadians can write the history of Canada?”

My response was brief, but I began by addressing the distortions in the history of the black race that have been deliberately perpetuated by European and American historians and that influence our history to this day. I had to agree that some white historians, particularly since the 1950’s, have done our history justice and have presented our story using the most accurate information available without special coloration.

Having taken a few months to consider this exchange, I stand as firmly behind the quote from Brother Walkes as ever. Prince Hall Masons, and black people in general, must get into the habit of writing our history, and not wait for somebody else to do it. And I want to take the time to tell you why.

I studied American history and world history using books written by Americans and Europeans for consumption by Americans and Europeans. Some of these books excluded the black experience. They were the kind ones, because when Anglo-Saxon writers did address the black experience, they too often painted an awful picture of black people and their accomplishments. In my youth, it was my considered opinion that “history sucks.” There was nothing there to uplift the spirits of a young, proud African-American.

My Masonic brothers changed my attitude by bringing me into the light. They made me realize that black

people have an amazing and meaningful history that extends back to the earliest epochs of human existence. I never saw that as a young man in books written from the Eurocentric perspective, and Eurocentric books published in 2006 still leave much to be desired.

To be fair, I need to point out that I had read numerous world history books before I discovered anything about the explosion of learning that took place in Baghdad in the Eighth Century AD as the Arabic world entered a full-blown scientific and cultural renaissance. And this proves my point. Anglo-Saxon writers have written history from an American and European perspective for their fellow Americans and Europeans. If the Arabic world wants anyone to know their history, they have to write it themselves. If we, as African Americans want anybody to know the good our ancestors have done, we have to dig it out ourselves and let the world know. Waiting for somebody else to celebrate our heritage is a bad plan.

Unfortunately, we are a long way behind. Take a look at a world map and you will see what I mean. You will find Europe directly in the center of most maps—giving the impression that Europe is the center of the world. When somebody calls China the “Far East,” it makes sense only if your point of reference is in Europe. On the West Coast of the United States it would be ridiculous to travel east to reach China in the “Far East;” the direct route from there is to the West. As far as the United States is concerned, Europe is the Far East and China is the West. But the world map puts Europe in the center, and that is what Eurocentrism is all about—giving the appearance that the world, and everything of importance, revolves around Europe. Eurocentric history at its most brazen gives the impression that advances in human culture, in science, in industry, all originated on the Continent of Europe. The goal is to put Europe at the center of world culture. A book titled “World History” can be plain deceptive. “The History of Western Civilization,” is more honest because the title tells

you that anything outside Europe will be summarily ignored. History from the Eurocentric perspective, the history of Western civilization, begins in Mesopotamia, proceeds through Ancient Greece, then through the Roman Empire, and concludes with the English speaking countries in Europe and the Americas.

Such an outline is deceptive, and one can root out the deception even from Biblical history (but any objective account will do). The Romans show up in the Bible around the time of Christ—in the New Testament—a relatively recent period in human history. By the time of Christ and the Romans, there were civilizations and cultures in the Nile Valley of East Africa that were thousands of years old. This can be seen from Old Testament passages: Egypt is a well established, dominant civilization in the days of Abraham in the Book of Genesis. Keep in mind that Egypt is a Nile Valley, African civilization. One would be hard pressed to associate Egypt with African culture if one depended on typical Eurocentric history for enlightenment. One is not likely to find Egypt and African mentioned in the same breath in these books. I have met people who believe Egypt is a European country. I have heard modern Islamic inhabitants of Egypt credit their Arabic ancestors with building the pyramids and temples of ancient Egypt. But Egypt is not European and its earliest inhabitants were not Arabic.

The most amazing story is being told by archaeologists who have unearthed ancient artifacts throughout Eastern Africa in the last century that have created quite an upheaval in the Eurocentric view of the world. And if anyone really wants to believe that the original inhabitants of the Lower Nile Valley were something other than African in origin, how can they deny the African origin of the advanced cultures of the Upper Nile Valley in the region of Khartoum and the Shendi and Dongola regions of the Nile Valley.

The findings of archaeologists give us a new and impartial perspective on world history. Modern archaeologists acknowledge that the earliest signs of the human race are found in an area in Central Africa near the source of the Nile River. No reputable archaeologists would venture to dispute this. In piecing the story together, they have found strong evidence that advances in human culture moved down river along the flow of the Nile passing from the deep interior of Africa toward the Mediterranean Sea, passing through Khar-

toum, then Nubia, and then Egypt. If anyone wants to reconcile archaeology with the Bible, then here's what this means: the Garden of Eden was in Central Africa near the source of the Nile River and human migration took the most natural course—along the flow of the Nile River—which is northward toward the Mediterranean Sea.

But this story is not being told. You won't find it in the textbooks used in public schools. Why not? Because black people are not writing history, the history of our people, as it ought to be written. We are not passing the verbal story to our children as it ought to be told. We are content to let the other version of history stand; we are content with the version we were ourselves taught so many years ago from distorted history books, and we are content with the version being taught to our children in schools today.

A pertinent question, a question you may be asking is, why? Why would people try to falsify history? I have an idea, but I will leave that for another forum because questions that ask "why?" have answers that are inherently speculative. What is certain is this: Black people have a history that is rich in achievements that goes back ten thousand years, but these achievements are glossed over in history books.

This is why we must write our own history. I don't care if Canadians write about the black experience. I don't care if Texans tackle the subject. But we can't wait for other people to do it. We need to write the history of our people, and we need to write the history of our involvement in the Masonic Order. Prince Hall Masons, write your history. Eastern Stars, write your history. Royal Arch Masons, write your history. We can start by writing the history of our lodges and chapters. We can continue by writing the history of our families. Then we need to write the history of our people so that recorded history captures everything that makes us a great people, so that we can eliminate the coloration that brings us down, and we can eliminate the misconceptions that are perpetuated by those who would deny the position of esteem black people have had from the beginning of human existence.

These is so much that can be said about the misconceptions in our history, but that is a part of what each of us needs to do—we need to know our history and we need to teach our children the history of our race. We do not have to stretch the truth to show positive events

in our history because history is filled with accomplishments of the black race. We do not have to distort history to put ourselves in a good light, because we have much in our history of which to be proud.

So what do I really expect you to do? I know that many of you will not consider taking on a massive history project. There is one thing that all of us can do, and that is to learn our history. You learn it first, then encourage our newest members and our children to learn it next. From this beginning, future generations will take on the task of expanding our knowledge of Prince Hall Freemasonry and black history in general.

I want to leave you with a comment that some people

find strange, but it is being said by people more learned and more reputable than I am: Every human being alive, every human being who has ever lived, has ancestors who are African. There are those of our own race who will not accept this. If this idea is difficult to accept the reason may be the reduced opinion the modern world has formed of the people of the so-called Dark Continent as a result of Eurocentric mis-representations of history. But if you accept the findings of archaeologists, you have to admit that human roots—the roots of all mankind—are in Africa. Our ancestors are indeed a great people. And if we are to let the world know it, we are going to have to write our own history.

ANNUAL SESSION 2006



*Table Lodge hosted by MWGM Jessie James
and the MWGL of New Mexico.*



*Phylaxis Society and Phyllis Chapter members
from Louisiana in attendance in 2006*