**INTRODUCTION TO AFRICANA STUDIES: *AFRICAN ORIGINS OF HUMANITY***

**Cheikh Anta Diop**: Senegalese genius—scientist, linguist, and historian. He was the first African scholar to suggest the African origins of humanity and also the cradle of civilization in the 1930s and 1960s. His acclaimed works, *The African Origins of Civilization* (1974), and *Civilization or Barbarism* (1991) challenged the doctrines of racism prevalent at the time. In his doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne, France, he argued that Africa was not only the home of humanity and civilization but that Europe has “stolen” or “distorted” much of the African historical and anthropological records. Racist science at that time created a wave of intellectual resistance. This would seek to silent Diop for a long time—**Note** the role of France and the work of naturalists and anatomists who performed experiments with African female genitalia in the 19th century [Sarah Bartman, the Hottentos Venus Story]

A host of other scholars including Martin Bernal, Theophile Obenga, and Basil Davidson revived Diop’s thesis and even opined further that Africa is not only the home of all living humanity; it is also the source of many of the technological innovations that laid the foundation for modern industrial and informational societies.

**Documentary Evidence:** *Prehistory* is a term used to refer to the time before the availability of writing records. Fossilized bones and stone tools have enabled scientists to recover information to support plausible arguments for African origin. Modern science can now date these fossils with highly developed techniques such as Carbon 14 to approximate their age. Molefi Kete Asante has described Carbon 14 as “an atomic clock that be used for dating purposes because it is based on the radioactive decay of the isotope carbob-14, which has a half-life of 5730 years” (2007:10). This method become handy in the examination of samples collected from strata in Olduvai Gorge, East Africa, which enveloped the fossil remains of *Zinjanthropus* and *Homo habilis*, thought to be precursors to humans, to discover their age (See Gate’s documentary, *Lost Cities of the South*, PBS Series, “Wonders of the African World”, 2004).

Modern humans belong to what scientists have referred to as the primate family of *hominids*. This is a biological term meaning “human” or human-like creatures who walk upright on two legs and have enlarged brains. Scientific evidence points to modern humans as the only remaining hominid. Earliest primates such as the chimpanzee, the ape, and the gorilla called *pongids*—separated from the group that became hominids. Scientists now conclude through DNA that modern humans share 99% of the same DNA as chimpanzees.

Archaeological as well as biological research since the 1920s have honed in the African connection with surgical precision. 1n 1925 South African archaeologist Raymond Dart offered a breakthrough when he discovered the buried skull of a six-year-old creature in a limestone cave in South Africa (See Jackson 1998:42-44; Walker, E. A., *History of Sothern Africa* 1957. Dart named this cave creature *Australopithecus* or Southern Ape). Other finds followed, including one in East Africa particularly Olduvai Gorge, the Great Rift Valley in central Kenya and the Lake Turkana area in Kenya, as well as the Omo River valley in Ethiopia. Richard Leakey followed these leads with his finding of “Skull 1470” near East Turkana in Kenya which looked quite human. This was followed by a 1975 discovery of the remains of an Australopithecine group of thirteen adults and children near Hadar in Ethiopia. Furthermore in 1976 human footprints were discovered close to an extinct volcano near Olduvai. Species of primates were also unearthed in the Egyptian Nile valley—the earliest ancestors of hominids and pongids now called Aegyptopithecus dated 30 million years ago. In 2002 scientists discovered *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* in Chad*.* But the most celebrated of all these discoveries in Africa was that of *Dinqnesh* called *Lucy* by American researchers. This was the work of Maurice Taieb and Donald Johanson in Ethiopia’s Hadar region in 1974. *Dinqnesh* was an upright being belonging to the species *Australopithecus afarensis* and dates to 3 million years ago. The most widely accepted classification of early hominids categories so far are *Australopithecus* and *Homo*, with *Homo Habilis*, Homo erectus*, and Homo Sapiens*.

*Homo* means “human”. *Homo habilis* or “handy human”, is associated with tools making. Evidence of these so-called Oldowan tools has been found in Gona and Hadar in Ethiopia as well as Senga in the Congo. Next stage after *Homo habilis* was *Homo erectus* or “upright man” who appeared 2 to 3 million years ago. The main debate in the scientific community today about the origins of modern humans centers on two key concepts: **Polygenetic or Monogenetic**. The **Polygenetic** theory suggests that humans emerged in different parts of the world or developed directly from *Homo erectus* in different regions of the world. **Monogenetic** model suggests a single event of human origin that occurred in Africa and that *Homo Sapiens* or modern humans expanded outward, driven by the Sahara desert during the Weichasel/Wisconsin/Wurm Ice Age—which ended about 10,000 years ago, when populations were displaced. The general believe now suggests the monogenetic model with Africa as the primary source (See Molefi Kete Asante, *The History of Africa*, Second Edition, Chs. 2 & 3;Mario Azevedo, Ed, *Africana Studies*, Ch. 3) .

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