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Book Review: The Destruction of Black Civilization

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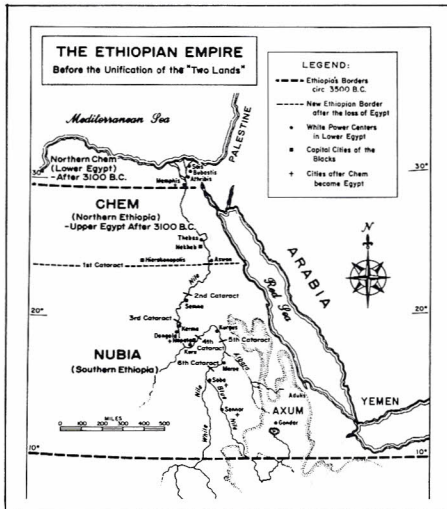
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The Destruction of Black Civilization

(Great Issues of A Race, from 4000 B.C. to 2000 A.D.)

By Chancellor Williams
Third World Press, Chicago
398 pp., \$5.95

Reviewed by John Oliver Killens



This book represents a great historic achievement. In this work, Dr. Chancellor Williams has made a major contribution to the understanding of where we Black folk are, in time and space, how we got here and what history and circumstance demand of us to be done to get us to another place, to a higher level of survival. That other place is Black liberation, unequivocal, complete and everlasting, so that we can go about the business of making the kind of contribution to humankind it is our destiny to make. In this book, Dr. Williams makes it clear that we are a great people of indomitable courage and invincible spirit, for we have withstood the bitterest of chastening rods, have trod the stoniest of roads of any people in the entire history of the human race.

One thing Dr. Williams makes blazingly clear very early in the game is: *There is no such thing as pre-history.* Wherever on this planet mankind gets up on his hind legs and stands and walks erect, it is at that moment that his history has begun. Wherever men and women are, they make history. People are the makers of history, not the special men who keep the records. And this is a book in depth, beginning, as is suggested in its subtitle, 4000 years B.C. and projecting the future to the 21st Century. As a student in a class at Howard University stated in a review of the book, "This is a teaching book."

Though Dr. Williams is a scholar who paid his dues in research in the European archives where he encountered all the myths, lies and distortions about the history of Black people, and though he researched many years in Africa at the ancient sources, at the diggings themselves, and although this is certainly a scholarly work, this is nevertheless a highly readable book, its meaning through the author's skill and clarity is made available to the masses of Black people. And we must work to

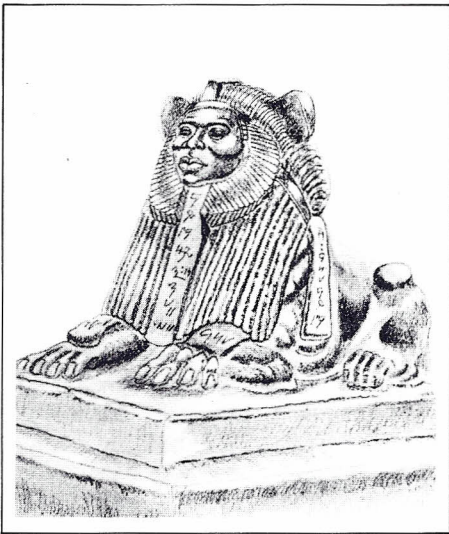
get this book into their hands. For the author states in the beginning that he has written this book to be read "by Black John Doe, cab driver or laborer, and Jane Doe, housemaid or waitress."

Another thing to be said about this book, it is a truthful and courageous work. But none should fear its painful truth but those who have prospered and still prosper from the millions of "little white lies" this book exposes. So truthful is this book that both the white and Black press have, with a few exceptions, formed a "gentleman's agreement" to give this book the silent treatment. For example: *The New York Times* had discussed with me on a couple of occasions my doing book reviews for the *Times*. The two times I offered to review a book, I was put off, politely and with courteous remarks. Those two books were Paul Robeson's *Here I Stand* and Chancellor Williams' *The Destruction of Black Civilization*. So much for white objectivity and the august *New York Times*.

The book begins with a "preview." In this preview the author tells us that it is a summary of 16 years of research. A summary, he states modestly, instead of an extensive work, because the need of the book was now and urgent and could no longer be delayed. He would lay a firm foundation and leave it to those who would come after him to extend the work he had begun. He tells us that he was also engaged in battle with time and the loss of vision on his part. But the vision and perspective of this great Black man is wide and broad and deep and monumental.

In the preview, he begins with himself as a boy in the fifth grade in North Carolina. Even then he perceived that white folk were the "haves," and Blacks were the "have-nots." And he wanted to know, "How come?" By the time he was in the sixth grade, he was fortunate enough to have a dedicated teacher who

introduced him to the *Crisis* magazine and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* newspaper, where somehow he learned of the "Land of the Blacks" that was *the Cradle of Civilization* and that Black people had once been the leading people of the earth. And he wanted to know the answer to these questions: How did this terrible fall in world status come about? How come we're at the bottom? How come we're holding up the earth? I believe it was at this time in the young days of his years that he made a commitment to himself and to his people to come up with some answers. Perhaps it was at these moments that the great historian was born.



Dr. Williams begins with the cradle of civilization itself, Ancient Ethiopia, the northeastern part of which was Egypt and all of which was Black, or what the white anthropologists have designated as "Negroid." There was no such thing as white Africa and Black Africa. All of Africa was Black. And thriving until the white man came, first from Asia. This then was a new concept for me, that the first white men who brought this thriving Black civilization under attack were from Asia.

Whoever heard of white Asians? It is a <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol2/iss2/10>

concept one has to face and deal with. White Asians. The first despoilers of Mother Africa. What does that do to Frantz Fanon's theory of the "Third World?" All along some of us had thought the words white and European were exclusively synonymous. Teach us, Dr. Williams. These white Asians came with three and four-hundred-year plans to turn Black Egypt into white. And to destroy all the evidence of its once great Blackness. How was this done? One of the ploys was "integration." Does it have a familiar ring? It seems you've heard that song before? Integration through intermarriage with the Black women who were part of a matrilineal line of Egyptian royalty. This was the surest route to the aristocracy and seizure of Egyptian power. Integrated marriages did not restrict themselves to the African royalty, however. This way they ultimately created a generation of mulattos most of whom identified with their white fathers and despised their Black mothers. (My wife's parents are from Barbados. After we returned from a visit there in the summer of 1972, she observed, "The 'colored' Barbadians will be able to put it together, if ever, only when they begin to identify with their Black mothers instead of with their white fathers." Strange how cultural similarities persist in places so distant from one another.)

As time went on, the nation became whiter and whiter. The mulattos were given more privileges and were considered superior to the Blacks, but not as superior as the whites whose cause they were committed to serve. Not all mulattos took this course. There were some who chose to identify with their mother's people, but not enough to make a qualitative difference. More often than not they were the enemy within the ranks of the African people.

So here were a white people committed to a course of action the benefits of which would not be reaped in their time

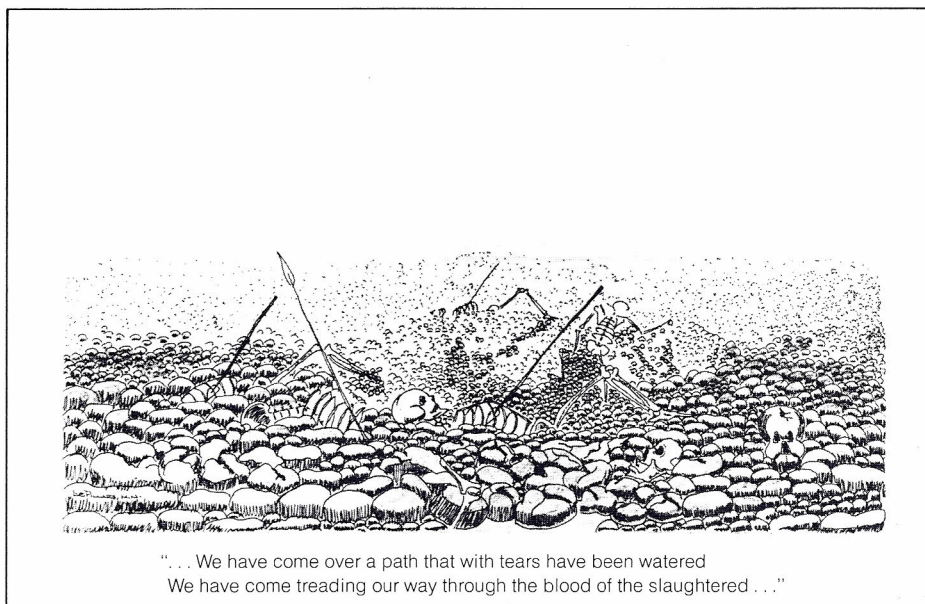
nor even in their children's time, nor even in their children's children's time. But ultimately white power would prevail in Egypt and in northeastern Ethiopia. So much so that modern historians through some sleight of hand of self deception try to make us believe that Egypt is a part of Europe. They go through such strange changes that sometimes it is described vaguely as a "Mediterranean" country. If only through some legerdemain the top of Africa could be lopped off and stuck on to Europe!

But the Black Egyptians fought back, conquered, lost and reconquered and lost again the great civilization along the Nile. The fight went on back and forth for centuries, as Egypt was bled white of all her Blackness. The Blacks that remained were usually forced into the role of slaves. Another strong point that Dr. Williams makes, if I read him correctly, is that, in contradistinction to the white man who came with three and four-hundred year plans, the Black man lived from day-to-day and spent much wealth and human resources in building pyramids and monuments to the dead, but very little for his posterity. This seems to be an African trait with which many of us are still afflicted. An hostility to planning.

I remember talking to some militant "revolutionary" brothers once on the West Coast. They were telling me about the guns they were collecting for open warfare and revolution. And I said, "Yeah, brothers, that's cool. But what's the plan? I mean, you've gotta have a plan." The brothers shook their heads at me in deep disgust. "Plan! Plan! Who in the hell needs a plan. Just get out there on the streets and do it! Damn, Brother John, the white man's messed up your head with some of that bourgeois . . .! From all those books you wrote, Brother John, we thought you were really with it." And of

34 course, as I have written elsewhere, we Blacks are in desperate need of some great long distance runners—long distance running, which requires planning, pacing, discipline, timing and a faith that we can win the race (the human race that is) in the long run (future).

Dr. Williams explodes another myth. Some of us Blacks, in a feeble attempt to explain away the technological discrepancy between Europe and Africa have romantically pictured the entire continent of Africa as the "original Garden of Eden" where Blacks had no need to work hard. Nature had provided everything so easily for the taking. One could just lie outside one's hut, snore with one's mouth open and the fruit would fall in from the tree. All one had to do was chew. Not so, says Dr. Williams. In fact just the opposite was true. African civilization was crushed by a conspiracy between the white invading forces and the forces of a vicious nature which turned riverbeds and lakes and fertile earth into ocean waves of devastating sand, ever on the march against the beleaguered Black people. In one of the most moving paragraphs in the book he talks about the months in each year that were called the "Starving Times." Every time I read this passage it brings tears of anger to my eyes. I shall quote him: "... the period when children ate dirt and the bark from the trees, when it was a great occasion if food enough could be found for two or three meals a week; when to find a water hole or a little stream that had not completely dried up was even more joyful than finding something to eat, and a time when some mothers would steal away into the bush with their little skeleton-like children with swollen bellies to die quietly in the shade—this was Starving Times." And the most ironic metaphor of all is that the ... Sahara Desert is a blazing blinding white monster ever on the move. Our Black brothers



are victims of a conspiracy of two great white monsters. Nature and the nature of the white man. And again of course to realize that the "Starving Times" are with us in Mother Africa.

This undoubtedly explains the lack of planning for the future on our part. For it is not possible to be concerned with the future when you're in a life and death struggle for mere survival. Black folk throughout this earth live a hand-to-mouth existence so that our planning tends to be from day-to-day and hand-to-mouth. But Blacks were once the most progressive people on earth. How to explain this turnabout? Dr. Williams sets out for us the "pre-conditions for progress."

They include: "(1) The people must become famine-free, and be able to end their perennial roaming from place to place in search of food and water and settle down. (2) Having found suitable territory, the leaders must proceed through negotiations with other neighboring societies and fragmented groups, to *nation-building*. (3) There must be developed—and this is a crucial pre-condition—a sense of national

community among the various language groups that make up the country. This is so important that it cannot be left to wishful thinking or chance. It must be *programmed* in such a way that a sense of loyalty and of being an important part of a great united brotherhood, which is the nation itself, will develop naturally. (4) A strong army of defense. (5) The reign of law and justice, applying equally to all classes in the society. The people must feel absolutely secure as individuals, and that in their country there is equal justice for all.

"In short, certain conditions in a country can bring about internal peace, stability, and confidence which unshackle the mind. There is now *time to think*. No more trekking with bleeding feet for hundreds of miles across rocky deserts. No more seeing your kinsmen fall out and welcome death along the way. A home at last, better farms, plenty of food, And now ... *Time to think.*"

This book traces the migration of a great people forced to give ground by nature and the white invaders; they sought for



"Africa's greatest daughter," Queen Nzinga of Angola, leading her troops against the Portuguese armies against which she fought for forty years.

places to settle and oftentimes they constructed great civilizations and set up African constitutions and institutions. This book tells us that we need not look to Europe or to Asia for an ideology, that states were set up in Africa based on the purest form of democracy long before the term was heard of in Europe or in Asia. Dr. Williams tells us of the kingdoms and empires of Ethiopia and around Meroe and Memphis then further west he takes us to places like Mali and Ghana and Songhay with seats of world learning at Timbuktu, all of this a testimony to the glory that was once Africa's, a time when Black was not a term of scorn but a term of approbation, when men recognized the great worth of the Black man and Black woman.

He gives us a close-up view of Mossi, the kingdom with a typical African constitution ruled (served) by a Council of Elders with a King or Emperor who was elected not to rule over but to serve his people. There were "absolute" rulers who became despotic and complained about the complacency of the people who failed to check them on their despotism. Even Shaka of the

great Zulu Empire complained because the Council of Elders failed to check him and his excesses. This was typical of many African nations and their constitutions. Dr. Williams tells us that we don't need to adopt Capitalism or Communism as a way of life, but that we can take something from both and synthesize a system based primarily on African traditions, a system more suitable to our own needs and our traditions. This book tells us that the Mossi nation, with its capital at Wagaduga (now Ouagadougou in Upper Volta) saw Islam and Christianity as the white man's vehicle of conquest. It was the only Black nation to see this—in time. Indeed Mossi prophesy held that "when the first white man appeared in the land the nation would die." For a long time white men were not allowed inside the country. Therefore, the nation flourished and prospered. But trading was, and still is, an absolute necessity for a nation with a thriving economy, and the Mossi nation ultimately allowed a few Muslim traders inside their borders who went about setting up trading posts. The Mossi nation set up a "Ministry of Muslims"

to supervise the traders. All Muslim activity was restricted to trade. The teaching of or conversion to Islam was strictly forbidden. The Mossi held steadfastly to their own religion and African institutions for 500 years till they were finally overrun by France well into the 20th Century.

This book tells us of the African Queen, Ann Nzinga of Angola, who waged a ferocious and successful war of attrition against the Portuguese. She declared open warfare against the slave trade. She outsmarted the Portuguese at every turn, raiding slave camps and liberating slaves. She issued a proclamation offering sanctuary to runaway slaves, welcoming them to her country where they would be forever free. They flocked to her ranks by the hundreds and joined with her in the struggle against slavery. There was a reward out for her capture dead or alive. It was never collected. She fought them till the day she went into the everlasting sleep. Like Harriet Tubman who was a great enemy of American slavery, Queen Nzinga was the greatest enemy of the slave trade on the African continent. How different would be the impact if Black films gave us the story of the great Tubman and Nzinga, instead of "Foxy Brown" and "Cleopatra Jones." But we stand in line to see these flicks and thereby subsidize our own degradation. How long? How Long? Wake up, Black people! Those long lines should be picket lines.

The story of white destruction repeats itself from place to place throughout the African continent with a terrible monotony. Driven from place to place by nature and the great invading tide of white men; if fortune serves them, they construct a viable civilization based on African democratic tradition; enter the white man, then comes our inevitable destruction as a people and society. Meanwhile, the original people have divided into separate

36 languages and tribes, then the changing of African names to Christian and Islamic names, and ultimately losing memory of your heritage and growing to distrust and despise your own Black brothers and sisters, while welcoming the white man who will inevitably bring you death and vast destruction.

Ultimately also we see the African caught in a vicious trap between the men from the East with their *jihads* (holy wars) as they conquer, kill and devastate in the name of the Prophet, and the men from the West with the "Christian brotherhood and civilizing missions" and their missionaries who construct harems to satisfy their insatiable lust in the name of Jesus Christ. Rape, murder and destruction were the end results. It was the same in the days of American slavery. This is how we became the most multi-colored race of people on this earth. As I have stated elsewhere, "It did not happen because Uncle Tom raped Little Eva."

Dr. Williams makes another telling point: "Caucasians will wage frightful wars against other Caucasians, but will quickly unite, as though by instinct, against non-whites, not only in wars but in international policies. They have developed a kind of built-in solidarity in their relations with non-Caucasian peoples. This fact, as much as anything else, helps to explain their positions as masters of the world."

With this nightmare of recorded facts, even if only half of them were true, there is an inevitable conclusion that one must face up to. And Dr. Williams does not back away from it. He says: "The whites are the implacable foe and everlasting enemy of the Blacks." He states further in the same paragraph: "— and a possible solution of racial crises can begin, strangely enough, only when Blacks fully realize this central fact in their lives, *the white man is their bitter enemy*. For this is not the

ranting of wild-eyed militancy, but the calm and unmistakable verdict of several thousand years of documented history."

We are already into the final portion of the book which the author calls "The View from the Bridge," a summing up and a bold plan for Black struggle, which must get underway at once, for "we are at the crossroads."

His plan is bold but a practical one. And boldness and practicality are called for at this very crucial moment. He makes it clear that his statement that the white man is the implacable enemy is not a call for "honky" chants and hate-the-white man incantations. Screaming hatred will not cut it. Action, based on a realistic plan, is the thing. To build Black unity, not Black disunity; in the words of poet Mari Evans, to build "Black impregnability." An impregnability that loves and respects its own. Dr. Williams speaks of how some of us get positions such as clerks in department stores, etc., how we show wide grinning smiles to the white customers but contempt and disrespect for our own people.

In his plan he places a principal stress on cooperative economics in which all, the well-off and the poor, will share and share alike. A national organization served as per the African tradition, not ruled, by a *Council of Leaders*. The National Council gets its strength and sustenance from regional councils on the grass roots level. Each council on all levels is responsive and responsible to its grass roots constituency which may recall a particular leader at time, for cause. Repeat, the leader is a servant of the people, not a ruler.

There is not enough time and space to outline for the reader the intricacies of this bold elaborate plan. You must get this book and read it for yourself. For this is a book that begged to be written,

a book that all serious Black folk, young and old must read and take to heart, and implement. The message is clear; Unite, Black folk, or perish! For we are at the Crossroads, and it's later than we think. □

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