

## A World Without Black People

**Excerpt** from a keynote speech by Emeagwali [emeagwali.com] delivered on September 18, 2004, at the Pan-African Conference on Globalization, Washington DC USA

The entire **transcript** is posted at <http://emeagwali.com/speeches/globalization/the-truth-about-globalization/index.html>

### **Excerpt**

We need to tell our children our own stories from our own perspective.

We need to decolonize our thinking and examine the underlying truths in more than just movies.

We need to apply the same principles to history and science, as depicted in textbooks.

Look at African science stories that were retold by European historians; they were re-centered around Europe.

The earliest pioneers of science lived in Africa, but European historians relocated them to Greece.

Science and technology are gifts ancient Africa gave to our modern world.

Yet, our history and science textbooks, for example, have ignored the contributions of Imhotep, the father of medicine and designer of one of the ancient pyramids.

The word "science" is derived from the Latin word "*scientia*" or "possession of knowledge." We know, however, that knowledge is not the exclusive preserve of one race, but of all races.

By definition, knowledge is the totality of what is known to humanity. Knowledge is a body of information and truth, and the set of principles acquired by mankind over the ages.

Knowledge is akin to a quilt, the latter consisting of several layers held together by stitched designs and comprising patches of many colors.

The oldest patch on the quilt of science belongs to the African named Imhotep. He was the world's first recorded scientist, according to the prolific American science writer Isaac Asimov.

The oldest patch on the quilt of mathematics belongs to another African named Ahmes. Isaac Asimov also credited Ahmes as being the world's first author of a mathematics textbook.

Therefore, a study of history of science is an effort to stitch together a quilt that has life, texture and color. African historians must insert the patches of

information omitted from books written by European historians.

There are many examples of the mark Africans have made on world history. Americans are surprised when I tell them Africans built both Washington's White House and Capitol.

According to the US Treasury Department, 450 of the 650 workers who built the White House and the Capitol were African slaves.

Because the White House and Capitol are the two most visible symbols of American democracy, it is important to inform all schoolchildren in our globalized world that these institutions are the results of the sweat and toil of mostly African workers.

This must also be an acknowledgement of the debt America owes Africa.

Similarly, discussions of globalization should credit those Africans who left the continent and helped build other nations throughout the world - most nations on Earth.

Africans who have made contributions in Australia, in Russia, and in Europe must be acknowledged so our children can have heroes with African roots - so they can know their own roots and be proud of them.

The enormous contributions of Africans to the development and progress of other nations has gone unacknowledged.

We have yet to acknowledge, for example, that St. Augustine, who wrote the greatest spiritual autobiography of all time, called "Confessions of St. Augustine," was an African; that three Africans became pope; that Africans have lived in Europe since the time of the Roman Empire; that Septimus Severus, an Emperor of Rome, was an African; and that the reason Beethoven was called "The Black Spaniard" was because he was a mulatto of African descent.

Why are we reluctant to acknowledge the contributions and legacies of our African ancestors?

We cannot inspire our children to look toward the future without first reminding them of their ancestors' contributions.

Look at the long struggle of African Australians, who recently became citizens with rights on their native continent.

Africans have been living in Australia for 50,000 years. Yet, African Australians were granted Australian citizenship just 37 years ago, in 1967.

According to *CNN*, African Australians were not recognized as human beings prior to

1967. They "were governed under flora and fauna laws." African Australians were, in essence, governed by plant and animal laws.

For many years, African Australians were described as the "invisible people." In fact, the first whites to settle in Australia named it the "land empty of people."

The contributions of Africans to Russia must be reclaimed. Russia's most celebrated author, A.S.(Aleksandr Sergeyeovich) Pushkin, told us he was of African descent. Pushkin's great-grandfather was brought to Russia as a slave.

Russians proclaim Pushkin as their "national poet," the "patriarch of Russian literature" and the "Father of the Russian language."

In essence, Pushkin is to Russia what Shakespeare is to Britain. Yet Africans who have read the complete works of Shakespeare are not likely to have read a single book by Pushkin.

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#### BIO:

Emeagwali helped give birth to the *supercomputer* - the technology that spawned the *Internet*. He won the 1989 Gordon Bell Prize, which has been dubbed the "Nobel Prize of Supercomputing."