WHO CAME HERE FIRST?

The Black Presence In America Before Columbus

In December of 1975, the *New York Times published a story* entitled, "Bad News for Columbus, Perhaps: Archeology's Discovery of an African Presence in America." The article revealed a number of facts pointing to the presence of black people in the Americas long before Columbus reached the New World.

This story brings to the forefront a fact that numbers of black historians, including Drs. W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson and J. A. Rogers considered in much of their early work, but which was then and remains today largely ignored. Fortunately, the current celebration of the American Bicentennial offers an opportunity to again focus on the presence of black people in America before Columbus and thereby add another dimension to the significance of black people in the development of American civilization.

The most substantial evidence supporting the presence of early Blacks in the Americas are ancient skeletons. In addition to the widely publicized 1975 discovery, by a Smithsonian Institution team of scientists, of two "Negro male skeletons" in a grave in the United States Virgin Islands dating back to A. D. 1250, a number of other anthropologists have long insisted that many early American skeletons represent black men.

Earnest Hooton and Roland Dixon have found skulls in pre-

Ancient skeletons provide substantial evidence of early existence of Blacks

Columbian layers in the valley of the Pecos River, in northern Mexico and southern Texas that, in Hooton's words, "closely resemble crania of Negro groups coming from parts of Africa." Moreover, both scientists have labeled as "Australoid" — a variant of the black race — skeletons unearthed along the Pacific coast in California and lower California that represent the most ancient human remains thus far discovered in the New World.

Skeleton of these early Blacks have also been discovered in Central and South America. Griffith Taylor, for example, speaks of the most ancient human skulls of Brazil and Ecuador as indicating "the presence in the far past of Negroid peoples in the American Continent.

In agreement with this anthropologist are such distinguished scientists as Rene Verneau, Paul Rivet, A. H. Keene, H. S. Gladwin, A. C. Haddon, Carlos C. Marquez, Frederick A. Peterson and others.

Of greater importance to the layman, perhaps, are the sculptural remains that have been discovered. Sculptures of the human face and from dating back to the archaic and pre-classical periods of Mexico, Central and South America, bear unmistakable characteristics of black or African people.

In the words of historian Ivan Van Sertima, the sculptures capture "not only the dense close curl and kink of Negroid hair, the occasional goatee beard (unknown to the American-Indian chin), projecting jaws, coloration, broad noses and full-fleshed lips, but also

Scientists conclude that dark Melanesians sailed the Pacific to America very early

At least a dozen colossal stone heads, such as the one above, have been excavated from ancient Olmec sites in Mexico and support early Indian legends and skeletal remains that suggest that Blacks were the first settlers of the Americas Americas.

By Legrand H. Clegg II

Now an attorney with the Greater Watts Justice Center of the Legal Aid Foundation, Legrand H. Clegg conducted research into the pre-Columbian presence of black men in America for the African Bibliographic Center and the African-American Historical Assn. His work on the subject has been published in the periodical, A Current Bibliography on African Affairs.

He is in private law practice in Los Angeles County and lectures on various college campuses in California.

African ear pendants, headdresses, coiffures, facial tattoos and sacrification."

The most widely recognized of these sculptures are the colossal stone heads, over a dozen of which have been unearthed in Mexico. Described by the archeologist, Matthew Stirling, as "amazingly Negroid," these heads, along with other extraordinary art work, were fashioned by the Olmecs (B.C. 2000 to A.D. 300), viewed by some scientists as a nation of Blacks who laid the foundation of New World civilization.

Skeletons and sculptural artifacts do not, however, represent the sole evidence supporting the black man's early presence in America. Historians Leo Wiener and M. D. W. Jeffreys and botanist Karl Echwerin have looked to certain foods and plants to support this position. From the study of particular words used in early Africa and America to designate yams, and from an analysis of the early letters of Amerigo Vespucci, Wiener and Jeffreys have concluded that early Africans brought yams to the Americas long before Columbus reached the New World.

Jeffreys, moreover, offers evidence to the effect that taro (which is indigenous to Africa) and maize and manihot (both indigenous to the Americas) were growing in both places prior to A.D. 1492 and insists that this, too, was due to trading between early native Americans and African peoples; while Echwerin has presented evidence that, as early as A.D. 4000, simple watercraft manned by ancient Africans transported an African cultivated cotton that is now recognized as an ancestor of American hybrid cottons.

Other scientists have found a host of cultural parallels between ancient Africans and native Americans, including similar petroglyphs, coins, languages and religions. Indeed, some native American tribes

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Historical Calendar Cites Achievements

For eight years a calendar has served as a vivid and authentic almanac of black achievement in the United States. Started in 1969, the Black Historical Calendar, revised and issued annually by Seagram Distillers Company as a public service, has recorded the significant activities of blacks in America from colonial days to the present.

Appropriately, the 1976 Bicentennial edition highlights the important contributions of black patriots to America's struggle for freedom. With 12 magnificent 12" x 20" full color original paintings by gifted black illustrator Jerry Pinkney, the Bicentennial issue depicts the events in black history which led to personal and national freedom during America's founding years.

"Pursuit of Freedom," the painting for January, 1976, points out, for example, that one of the first cries for freedom in the Colonies came as early as 1766 from a courageous black woman named Jenny Slew. A slave, she sued her master, John Whipple, for her freedom.

Jenny lost her first court battle, but the decision was reversed in Superior Court and she was awarded judgment plus costs.

The case of Jenny Slew vs. John Whipple is the earliest of its kind mentioned in the records of the Colony of Massachusetts. The decision paved the way for a large number of individual freedom suits in the North.

"Heroes and Fighters," Pinkney's painting for March, 1976, illustrates that the first American to give his life in the confrontations between the colonies and England was a young black sailor named Crispus Attucks.

Attucks, a runaway slave, was a spokesman for an angry crowd of Bostonians who faced the British muskets at Custom House on King Street on March 5, 1770. When the British opened fire, Attucks and two compatriots fell dead and several others were wounded.

The event is recorded in American history as the Boston massacre. Other paintings in the 1976 edition show the contributions of merchants, agents poets, educators and scholars.

Since the inception of the calendar eight years ago, each edition has featured original paintings of black builders of the American heritage, famous living black Americans or scenes associated with black contributions to America.

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Pauline Myers wants more Philadelphia high schoolers to succeed in business.

Pauline Myers knows what it takes to succeed in the business world. And she's working hard to make sure inner-city youngsters in Philadelphia do, too.

An administrative account specialist with IBM, she helped create the "Philadelphia Business Academy," now operating at Philadelphia's University City High School.

This program, backed by the Urban Coalition, gives students an opportunity to "major" in business skills. Not just typing and shorthand, but bookkeeping, personnel practices, business communications — the practical skills needed in business.

Over the past three years, Pauline has spent many hours counseling students about the business world, taking them on field trips and offering them individual advice.

Why does she do it?

"If we're ever going to break the old patterns," she says, "inner-city youngsters need a chance at some of the better jobs around. I'd like them to be prepared."

Some of this work is done during IBM business hours. We're glad to make this possible. IBM is proud of people like Pauline Myers who work to help meet the needs of their communities, and we want to help in any way we can.

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