



INSTITUTIONALIZING THE AFROCENTRIC INITIATIVE: SECURING A CENTERED WAY FORWARD

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On Saturday, 2012 March 17 in Philadelphia, Dr. Molefi Asante, his wife and co-worker, Ana Yenenga Asante, and his colleague, Dr. Ama Mazama, opened the Molefi Kete Asante Institute, an African think tank dedicated to research, intellectual exchange and policy development for the world African community. Below are excerpts from the keynote address I delivered for this occasion.

Habari gani. On behalf of my friend, wife and companion in all things good and beautiful, Tiamoyo; the advocates and members of our organization, Us, the African American Cultural Center, and the National Association of Kawaida Organizations; Dr. Segun Shabaka, chair of New York NAKO, who accompanied us here, and myself, we bring you greetings of *solidarity, support, celebration and continuing struggle* on this historic occasion of the opening of the Molefi Kete Asante Institute for Afrocentric Studies.

We have come here to mark and reaffirm the meaning of this momentous event, the opening of this center of learning and life called by our ancestors, *Per-Ankh*, the House of Life. Indeed, this is not only the opening of another important institution, but also the independent, communal institutionalization of one of the most valuable, influential and intellectually generative paradigms of thought and practice of our times, i.e., Afrocentricity. And the founding of the Institute is further enhanced and made an even more singular event by the fact that the founding theorist of Afrocentricity, Dr. Molefi Kete Asante, is launching this project himself in his lifetime, self-consciously and rightfully constructing an institution that will give structure and added strength to his life's work and enduring legacy.

The Asante Institute lists as its three principle research themes: (1) establishing the basis for an African Renaissance on the African continent and in the African

diaspora; (2) combatting all forms of oppression; and (3) promoting efforts for national and international peace and harmony. This initiative recalls critical questions Cheikh Anta Diop raises in his last and summing up work. They translate as a task of both discovering and developing Africa's rich and varied insights into the human project; reconciling African history with human history thru a critical and corrective thrust; building a new body of human sciences; and renewing African culture so that it may repair and rebuild itself and make its own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history. The community of scholars the Institute has assembled speaks to the comprehensiveness, diversity and determined character of its project on the national and international level.

It is a bold initiative by an intellectually audacious activist-scholar whose history of precedent setting and paradigm building is well-known and respected. Indeed, when the discipline of Black Studies was being silenced, sidelined, and threatened with dismantling, Asante stepped forward with the Afrocentric initiative which renewed its life, and transformed the dialog, not only in Black Studies, but in the academy, the community and the country. In fact, the theory and discourse of Afrocentricity reached around the world and inspired others to talk its language of centering, location, agency, and being subjects of one's own history within their own cultural framework. Now, when

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many highly visible Black scholars are timidly talking a language of post-racial fantasies and favor-seeking from the established order, Asante dares to reaffirm the centrality of the Afrocentric initiative in any meaningful program and project for both understanding and changing the African world.

In the *Husia*, there is a description of the ideal intellectual by Rekhmira which I cite in profound respect and rightful recognition of Molefi. It says that he or she is: "One wise in the writings and versed in the texts; one who delves deeply in the texts; one who has an open mind and heart; one who is skilled in communication and clear of vision; one whom a mentor has taught to do what is to be done; one balanced in heart and mind and patient; one who is courageous in questioning; and one who is wise and who listens to the teachings of the ancestors". Such an activist-scholar is Molefi Kete Asante and in this, he models and maintains the ancient and ongoing activist intellectual tradition of the ancestors.

The Asante Institute and its founder, following the upward paths of our ancestors, seek to give new and added impetus and insight to an ancient mission. It is a mission rooted in a Maatian philosophical anthropology which defines humans as *rekhyt*, knowing and wise beings, and as *nebu shepesu*, possessors of dignity and divinity and worthy of the highest respect. Thus, there is attached to this conception of humans, a moral imperative and human right to know, to acquire and share knowledge and to apply that knowledge, understanding and wisdom in the service of our people, humankind and the world as a whole. In a word, as the ancients phrased it, it is to be in

the service of "all the sun encircles".

Moreover, it is, as Amenomope in the *Husia* describes, a project and process of acquiring and sharing knowledge "for life, well-being and flourishing" in every sense. Therefore, the sacred texts tell us that, as dignity-bearing *rekhyt*, we are to cultivate the life of the *ib*, the heart and mind; to search after *Maat*, truth, justice and rightfulness, day and night; to listen to *Maat* and ponder it in our hearts and minds; and to think deeply and constantly about what is good, useful and uplifting for the people and the world. This is at the heart and core of the self-understanding and the intellectual and social commitment of the Molefi Kete Asante Institute.

This critically important and awesome task which Molefi Kete Asante, Ana Yanenga Asante and Ama Mazama have taken up, is not just theirs, but also ours. By ours is meant not only the distinguished assembly of scholars and fellows among whom I'm honored to be counted, but our community as a whole. Indeed, if the Institute is to establish itself on a firm foundation, develop and do the vital work for African people and the world it has assigned itself, it must be supported by each and all of us throughout the world African community. This is the dual message and meaning of this historic moment.

We have come today to celebrate a beginning; may we never know its ending. And in the words of our ancestors in the *Husia*: "May we be granted life, health and flourishing, the blessings of being on earth, knowledge of *Maat* like the one who brought it into being, and a depthful grasp of all that is yet to be done". Hotep. Ase. Heri.