

African Culture and History

If you walk through the African tents at the Heritage Festival, you will notice that many of them sell "Dashikis". Have you ever worn or do you own a Dashiki? Have you ever heard of women referred to as Nubian queens or Nubian princesses? Do you know the origins of the *dashiki* or of the term *Nubian*? In this module you will learn about the history of these two terms that are often associated with black identity.

Here is a list of activities you will work on:

- KWL Chart
- Reading

KWL CHART

K	W	L
What I know about the origins of Nubians or the Dashiki	What I want to know about the origins of Nubians or the Dashiki	What I learned about the origins of Nubians or the Dashiki

READING**Nubia**

Have you ever heard of women referred to as Nubian queens?

A Nubian queen is an endearing name that is used in African American culture. It refers to women as goddesses and pays them the highest level of respect. It is a term that people use to refer to beautiful, dark-skinned women. Have you ever wondered where this term originated?

There was a period of time when Egypt was ruled by black kings. They were known as the Nubian Kings. In the land of Kush, also known as Nubia, there lived a highly enlightened civilization of sophisticated, charismatic, powerful and compassionate Nubian kings who would become Egyptian pharaohs. They thrived, prospered and ruled for thousands of years. These same kings were students of the ancient mystery schools of Africa and worshippers of Amun (one God). The

ancient land of Nubia extended south along the Nile River from the First Cataract to the Shubaluga Gorge (Sixth Cataract). Today this region is located in modern Sudan.

In ancient Nubia, women held high positions in ancient African politics. It was they also appointed their successor through adoption. For instance, Amenirdis I, the High Priestess of Amun, had enormous power; she was very wealthy and was the number one political advisor to five of the seven Egyptian Pharaohs of the 25th Dynasty, the Kings of Kush.

The 25th Dynasty began when Nubians invaded Lower Egypt and took the throne of Egypt. By that time, Nubians already controlled Thebes and Upper Egypt under the reign of Piye. Piye's Nubian conquest of Lower Egypt established the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, which ruled until 656 BC. Piye was the first of the so-called black pharaohs—a series of Nubian kings who ruled over all of Egypt for three-quarters of a century as that country's 25th Dynasty. They were ultimately driven back into Nubia, where they established a kingdom at Napata (656-590 BC) and later at Meroë (590 BC - 4th century AD).

Until recently, theirs was a chapter of history that largely went untold. Only in the past four decades have archaeologists resurrected their story—and come to recognize that the black pharaohs didn't appear out of nowhere. They sprang from a robust African civilization that had flourished on the southern banks of the Nile for 2,500 years, going back at least as far as the first Egyptian dynasty. In fact, archeological discoveries have recently proven that earlier Egyptian lineage origins flow from Ethiopia (Grandmother) to Nubia (Mother) to Kemet, aka Egypt (Child).

Artwork from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome shows a clear awareness of racial features and skin tone, but there is little evidence that darker skin was seen as a sign of inferiority. Only after the European powers colonized Africa in the 19th century did Western scholars pay attention to the color of the Nubians' skin.

The cultural meanings of "Nubian queen" and "Nubian princess" among African Americans are derived from the homage that Afrocentric African Americans in the late 1960s and 1970s gave to historical Egypt and historical Ethiopia in general and to the ancient Nubian kingdoms of Kush and Meroe in particular.

During the late 1960s, if not earlier, Afrocentric African-Americans began using "Nubian queen" and "African queen" as referents for (usually physically

attractive) black women who are dark skinned. Eventually, the term "Nubian Princess" was also used to refer to the same population, or to refer to young, attractive, black, dark-skinned women.

The Dashiki¹



The dashiki is a colorful garment for men widely worn in West Africa and also worn in other parts of Africa. It covers the top half of the body. It has formal and informal versions and varies from simple draped clothing to fully tailored suits. A common form is a loose-fitting pullover garment, with an ornate V-shaped collar, and tailored and embroidered neck and sleeve lines.

The name dashiki comes from the word "danshiki" or "dan ciki" means "shirt" in Yoruba and Hausa, respectively - languages

spoken in West Africa, specifically Nigeria (Kuwala Co, 2016)

A Vlisco designer named Toon Van De Manakker based the design on a garment worn by a 19th century Ethiopian noblewoman. After seeing this design, he tried to recreate it, and that's how we have the 'traditional print' of today (Kuwala Co 2016). Where the Ethiopian noblewoman found the print, we may never know, but it's probably safe to say the original design came from somewhere in Ethiopia over 50 years ago.

The "traditional print" fabric actually goes by many names. In Congo and Ghana, it is most commonly referred to as the Angelina cloth. Why? The Angelina cloth was given its name because the popularity of the print coincided with the release of the hit song "Angelina" by the legendary Ghanaian highlife group The Sweet Talks.

¹ <http://www.kayafm.co.za/african-fabrics-angelina-dashiki-as-a-symbol-of-black-culture/>

This fabric has also been called Addis Ababa fabric, Miriam Makeba fabric, Mashallah fabric, or 'Dashiki Print' fabric.

The Dashiki print is instantly recognizable as an African look and associated with African cultures. While it has been worn for comfort in hot weather conditions in Nigeria and other African countries, black Americans wore it as a political statement during the civil rights movement.

In the 1960s in America, the Dashiki was worn to symbolise black pride, black unity and white counterculture movements. Pan African-leaning African Americans took on the dashiki as something else to help them feel connected to their African roots. The Civil Rights and Black Panther Movements of the 1960s and early 70s gave the dashiki its political potency. African Americans adopted the article as a means of rejecting Western cultural norms. This is when the dashiki moved beyond style and functionality to become an emblem of black pride.

Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a labour law in the United States that outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, African-derived clothing has been worn with pride as an expression of cultural heritage among African Americans.

Who owns the Dashiki?

In 2015, Elle Canada - a popular fashion magazine - received a lot of criticism over a claim they made about the dashiki. The Elle Canada team sent out a tweet calling the dashiki a "new" fashion item. Many Canadians and others of African origin were offended by the tweet. They complained that the tweet made it seem as if Elle Canada had just discovered the dashiki. But as we have learned, the dashiki has a long and very meaningful history of traveling through the world amongst black communities, symbolizing the power and freedom of black peoples everywhere. Elle Canada had to delete their tweet when it became clear that black people were offended that the history of their culture was not being recognized.

References

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