The Unshakable Truth: A Love Letter to Black Brilliance, Sovereignty, and Community: Across Continents, Centuries, and Cultures—Before Colonialism, Enslavement, or Systemic Erasure Tried to Silence It.

By Tamara Thomas

I once read a comment that chilled me to the bone: “Without us inventing everything, Black people would still be living in huts.” The audacity of such ignorance is staggering. But more than that, it’s a deliberate erasure, a weaponized amnesia. It made me wonder: What happens when we remember who we’ve always been?

This work is not just research; it’s remembrance. A love letter to Black brilliance, sovereignty, and community: across continents, centuries, and cultures before colonialism, enslavement, or systemic erasure tried to silence it.

As June Jordan once said, “We are the ones we've been waiting for.”

Before lines were drawn, before lands were claimed, before names were changed to fit foreign tongues, there were empires. There was brilliance. There was us.

Our stories are not confined to one continent or chapter. They stretch across oceans, etched in stone and sung through the stars. The truth is: Black civilizations did not wait for discovery. We were building, charting, dreaming, and documenting long before our narratives were colonized.

Icons and Empires Before Borders

Across the chapels and cathedrals of Europe, one can find haunting, holy images of Black Madonnas; dark-skinned depictions of the Virgin Mary cradling Christ. These icons have long puzzled and fascinated historians. Some suggest the dark pigmentation is due to centuries of candle soot, but others, especially African spiritual scholars, read something far deeper.

The Black Madonna echoes the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis holding her son Horus. The parallels are striking. The tender pose. The divine motherhood. The power of Black femininity sanctified in religious iconography, buried beneath layers of Western reinterpretation.

Even early Christian images of Christ, especially in Ethiopian Orthodox traditions, depict him with tightly curled hair and skin rich with melanin. These representations were not anomalies. They were reflections—mirrors of the communities that revered them.

To remember them is to remember ourselves.

Pyramids are more than architectural feats, they are cosmological prayers in stone. And they are everywhere.

The oldest known pyramids in Africa are not in Egypt, but in Nubia, present-day Sudan. These royal burial grounds, particularly the pyramid of King Taharqo of the 25th Dynasty, predate many of their northern counterparts. His structure at Nuri was once the largest of its kind, towering 50 meters into the desert sky. Over 220 pyramids have been discovered in the region, built long before European empires were ever conceived.

Farther south, the ancient stone metropolis of Great Zimbabwe tells another story: one of trade, strategy, and strength. With dry stone walls soaring over 30 feet high, the city was part of a vast economic network, linked to Asia and the Middle East. Archaeologists have found Chinese

porcelain, Persian artifacts, and Arab coins within its walls, testament to Black global engagement long before "globalization" had a name.

And when we look across the ocean and see pyramids rising in places like Teotihuacán or other parts of Mesoamerica, we're left to wonder: were these echoes of a shared cosmic knowing? Is it possible that Black civilizations reached further than our history books admit, exchanging knowledge long before colonizers touched these shores?

These shared sacred geometries: pyramids rising from Kemet to Kush, Mexico to Peru are not coincidences. They are reminders. Proof that the universe speaks in symbols. And our ancestors listened.

Even in fiction, our power could not be denied.

Queen Calafia, the legendary Black Amazonian queen, first appeared in the Spanish fantasy novel *Las Sergas de Esplandián* around 1500. She ruled a mythical island named California, populated solely by powerful Black warrior women who tamed griffins and fought with unmatched precision. They needed no men. Their island was abundant with gold. Their freedom was unshakable.

Though born from myth, Queen Calafia became real enough to name a state after. Her legend is a testament to how Black femininity has always been imagined as divine, dangerous, and unstoppable even by those who sought to erase us.

Queens, Warriors, and World Builders

Long before invaders carved up kingdoms and renamed them colonies, Black women reigned. Not as figureheads, but as forces.

They were not exceptions. They were the order.

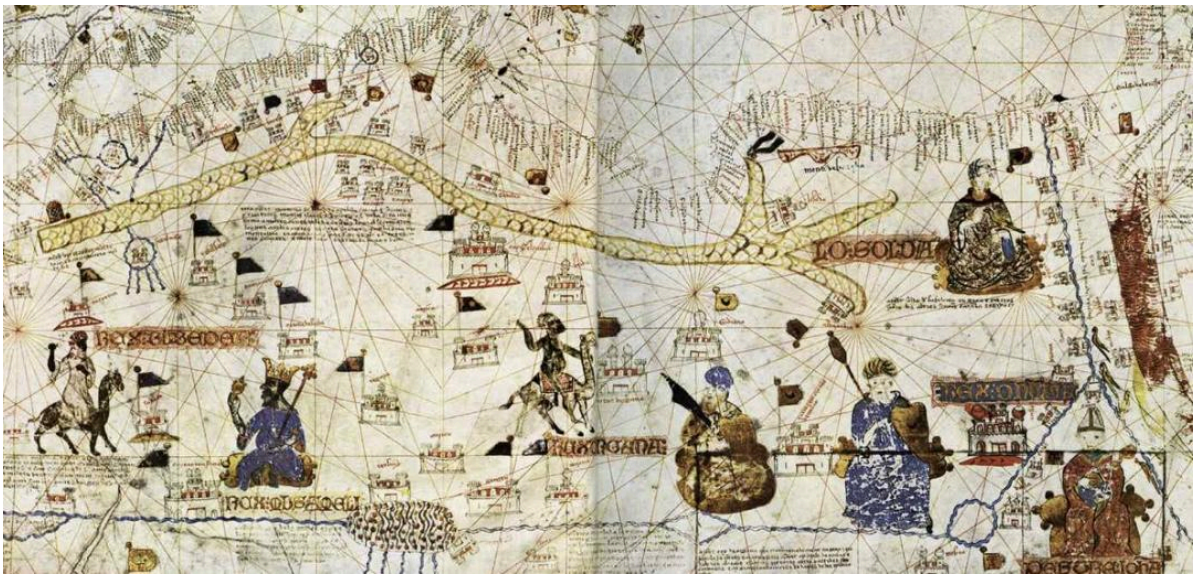
When the Portuguese came for Angola, Queen Nzinga stood in their path. Diplomat by day, general by night, she negotiated peace and waged war with equal grace. When denied a seat at the negotiating table, she turned her servant into a throne, not out of cruelty, but as a declaration: *I kneel for no man.*

In 1900, when British forces demanded the sacred Golden Stool of the Ashanti, Yaa Asantewaa rose, not as backup, but as the commander. She led the last great war of resistance in Ghana's history, reminding the world that when the sacred is under threat, the divine feminine becomes the front line.

Centuries before Cleopatra, Hatshepsut ruled as Pharaoh, not consort. She donned the royal beard, commanded with vision, and built temples that still stand. They tried to chisel her memory from stone. But truth, like spirit, resurfaces.

A queen both feared and revered, Ranavalona defended Madagascar from European encroachment with uncompromising resistance. Her reign was fierce and controversial, but she held the line while nations around her fell. She didn't rule to be loved. She ruled to remain free.

Our foremothers didn't wait for someone to hand them freedom or dignity. They took it. Not through domination, but through deep spiritual conviction and commitment to their communities.



Why didn’t Africa invade the world? This isn’t a question of capacity. It’s a question of character.

Pre-colonial African societies were not organized around domination. They were organized around *balance*. Harmony with nature. Communal wealth. Sacred law. The goal was not to conquer others, but to sustain one another.

Empires like Mali, Songhai, and Axum had the military strength, organizational prowess, and economic power to expand endlessly, but they didn’t. Because expansion for expansion’s sake was not a virtue. Invading the world would’ve been a violation of the spiritual codes that governed life.

Africans didn’t need to prove power through plunder. Power was already known, inherited, and expressed through order, lineage, and reciprocity.

African governance was diverse and sophisticated monarchies, councils of elders, federations of clans, age-grade systems. Leadership wasn’t about ego. It was spiritual stewardship.

In the Oyo Empire, the Alaafin (king) was checked by the Oyomesi, a council of nobles who could even compel the king to commit ritual suicide if he abused his power. Among the Igbo, decisions were often made collectively, and women had formal political power through assemblies like the Umuada.

Power was not absolute. It was accountable to the ancestors, to the people, and to cosmic law.

Trade routes stretched from West Africa to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, long before European maps acknowledged them. The Trans-Saharan trade connected empires like Ghana and Mali to North Africa and beyond, exchanging gold, salt, textiles, ivory, kola nuts, and ideas.

Timbuktu was a hub, not just of trade, but of scholarship. By the 14th century, it had already developed a reputation as a global intellectual capital. Its wealth came from wisdom, not war.

In Great Zimbabwe, the architecture of stone cities built without mortar revealed engineering genius. In the Swahili city-states along the East African coast, Africans engaged in oceanic trade with Arabia, India, and China centuries before European contact.

This was not isolation. It was *integration* on African terms.

Learning was not confined to classrooms. It was embedded in the land, the language, the lineage.

Griots in West Africa were living libraries: keepers of genealogy, history, and law. They preserved memory not with ink, but with voice, song, and rhythm. Across the continent, spiritual education was passed through initiation systems, rites of passage, and sacred storytelling.

Knowledge wasn't a commodity. It was a communal right. A sacred duty.

In places like Timbuktu and Djenne, formal universities housed hundreds of thousands of manuscripts on astronomy, philosophy, law, and medicine written in Arabic and Ajami (African languages using Arabic script). These manuscripts rivaled, and in some cases predated, Europe's earliest centers of learning.

Black Wall Street

Each of these places was more than a town. They were testaments. Testaments to what Black people could build when given even the smallest chance to breathe.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Greenwood District rose from the red dirt with elegance and ambition. By 1921, it was home to more than 300 Black-owned businesses; a thriving network of banks,

hotels, law offices, newspapers, libraries, and grocery stores. There were jazz clubs and barbershops, dressmakers and doctors, tailors and teachers.

Sunday mornings rang with the sound of choir voices spilling out of churches.
Weekdays buzzed with children headed to school; pressed collars, oiled hair, heads high.
Evenings echoed with swing and saxophones drifting from Black-owned nightclubs.

They called it *Negro Wall Street*, not just for the money that flowed through it, but for the pride. The mutual respect. The brilliance that could not be denied.

This was self-determination in motion.

Rosewood, Florida was more than a town, it was a sanctuary by the Gulf, where Black families owned their homes, ran their own businesses, and lived in deep-rooted connection. In Durham, North Carolina, Black enterprise flourished so powerfully that Booker T. Washington once described it as a stronghold of the Black middle class. From banks to newspapers to insurance companies these institutions were built from the ground up.

Farther west on the plains of Kansas, Nicodemus rose from hope and hardship. Formerly enslaved people journeyed there after Emancipation, armed with faith and a vision. They laid the foundation for a town that endures to this day.

These communities weren't exceptions to the rule, they were the rule. Evidence of a wider movement. A people building, believing, becoming.

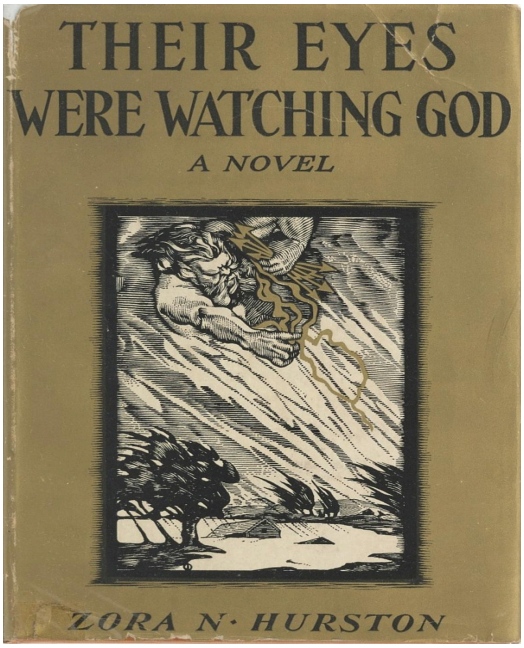
These towns weren't just shaped by Black prosperity, they were shaped by Black love.

Mutual aid groups supported families through birth, death, and everything between. Churches were spiritual homes and civic hubs. Neighbors taught each other to read and write. Elders safeguarded stories, passed down seeds, and preserved surnames.

Even under the constant shadow of segregation and racial violence, these communities made the audacious choice to live fully. To create joy. To protect each other.They weren't waiting on permission to exist with dignity. They were practicing freedom, every single day.

Tulsa was not the first tragedy of its kind, nor the last, but the 1921 massacre remains one of the most harrowing. As documented in *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, what began as resentment became coordinated devastation. White mobs, aided by law enforcement and local officials, set fire to a thriving Black district. Bombs fell from planes. Homes and businesses were reduced to ash. Lives were taken, and dreams scattered.

But even fire cannot erase legacy. What was built in Tulsa and in Rosewood, Durham, Nicodemus, cannot be undone by violence. The memory endures. The blueprint remains.



Black Women Writers as Memory Keepers

Black women writers have long held the role of griots—oral historians, memory keepers, and truth tellers. They wrote us into existence when the world tried to write us out. From Wheatley's poetic genius to Morrison's lush prose, from Hurston's cultural preservation to Angelou's poetic truth, our literary foremothers laid the groundwork for us to remember. Their stories didn't just entertain; they preserved history, reframed our humanity, and passed down the tools of survival.

I write this not just for myself, but for my daughter and for every child who deserves to know where they come from. Our past is not a wound. It is a foundation. Every time we remember, we build. Every time we speak truth, we heal.

We are not waiting to be rescued. We are returning to ourselves.

Scholarly and Educational Sources

- Barris, E. (2017). *Queen Calafia: The real Wonder Woman—Deciphering between the myth and facts of the Queen of California*. Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/34758132/Queen_Calafia_The_Real_Wonder_Woman_Deciphering_between_the_Myth_and_Facts_of_the_Queen_of_California
- Exploring Africa. (n.d.). *Module ten: Activity two 2*. Michigan State University. https://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/module-ten-activity-two-2/
- Hinkel, F. W. (2019). *SARS_SN04_Hinkel_opt*. Sudan Archaeological Research Society. https://www.sudarchrs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SARS_SN04_Hinkel_opt.pdf
- Msingi Afrika Magazine. (2022, January). *The history and development of education in Afrika*. https://www.msingiafrikamagazine.com/2022/01/the-history-and-development-of-education-in-afrika/#:~:text=African%20societies%20aren't%20a,they%20needed%20on%20the%20continent
- National Geographic. (n.d.). *Great Zimbabwe*. National Geographic Education. https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/great-zimbabwe/
- Prime Progress. (2022). *How pre-colonial African trade networks powered the world's economy*. https://primeprogressng.com/perspective/how-pre-colonial-african-trade-networks-powered-the-worlds-economy/

Historical and Biographical Sources

- Black History Month. (n.d.). *Queen Nzinga Mbande: The unyielding beacon of resistance and sovereignty*. https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/african-history/queen-nzinga-mbande-the-unyielding-beacon-of-resistance-and-sovereignty/
- BlackPast. (2018). *Yaa Asantewaa (Mid 1800s–1921)*. https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/yaa-asantewaa-mid-1800s-1921/
- Edward Asare. (n.d.). *The true face of Yaa Asantewaa*. https://edwardasare.com/the-true-face-of-yaa-asantewaa/
- Ancient Egypt Info. (2012, January). *Taharqa, Nubian king (690–664 BC)*. https://www.ancient-egypt.info/2012/01/taharqa-nubian-king-690-664-bc-taharqa.html?m=1

Museums, Archives, and Official Repositories

- Library of Congress. (n.d.). *Calafia*. https://guides.loc.gov/border-art/calafia

- National Museum of African American History and Culture. (n.d.). *Object: nmaahc_2014.315ab*. Smithsonian Institution. https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2014.315ab

---

Cultural Commentary and Online Publications

- The Black Wall Street Times. (2020, February 14). *Disregarded history: A brief look at Black Wall Street*. https://theblackwallsttimes.com/2020/02/14/disregarded-history-a-brief-look-at-black-wall-street/
- Science and Nonduality. (n.d.). *The return of the Black Madonna*. https://scienceandnonduality.com/article/the-return-of-the-black-madonna/

Images and Media

- Shelton, S. (n.d.). *Califia [Image]*. https://susanshelton.com/Portals/0/Califia.jpeg?ver=6YC42TajWfcEd5rmI1oxfQ%3d%3d