

The life of Anton Wilhelm Amo

Wilhelm Amo was the first Black African Doctor of Philosophy in Europe. He was a Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Arts, in Axim on the Gold Coast in Africa. He lived for about 30 years in Europe. In 1707, Amo was presented to Duke Anton Ulrich as a gift. Later, Amo was again enslaved by his son August Wilhelm.

Consequently, Amo was able to pursue his studies in Halle and Wittenberg. He was promoted to Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Liberal Arts in 1727. Soon after, his enslaver died he returned to his motherland. There, he lived a solitary life and acquired the reputation of a prophet. Amo spoke Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and High and Low German. He was skilled in astrology and astronomy.

Researchers are sure that Amo was born in or near Axim in 1703, but they don't know why he left. They record that he was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Nevertheless, Abraham explains that he may have been sent to Europe to be raised as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. He was afforded the rarity of keeping his name Amo, which was not afforded to the enslaved.

Amo was awarded the Master of Philosophy and Liberal Arts (which would soon be known as Doctor of Philosophy). In September 1729, he joined Wittenberg University.

In Wittenberg, Amo studied medicine, physiology, and psychology.



Portrait of Anthony Ulrich, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel



University Square of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Halle / Saale, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany.

ANTON WILHELM AMO AND HIS STUDIES

In addition to lecturing, copies of the dissertation that earned him the degree of Master of Science can still be found in the libraries of various universities in Germany and Ghana.

The thesis Amo wrote solidified him as a scientist. His works criticised Descartes (a French philosopher) and his theories.

Amo became a powerful voice in philosophy. Unfortunately, he spent much of his life outside of history. However, his story is revitalising and grounding when you revisit and unearth it.

Amo's life is another example of how, repeatedly, Black people have defied the expectations of both those who preceded them and those who would follow. As the justification of enslavement and dehumanisation of Black bodies still transform the lives of Black people into 'lesser' figures, Anton Wilhelm Amo still made one of the greatest but underestimated contributions to philosophy by studying the human mind.



Portrait of René Descartes, French philosopher, mathematician, and writer.

TRIBUTE TO AMO'S LIFE

"Mohr" is not the only word in German-speaking countries whose name bears a racist subtext. While the term "Negro" has disappeared from advertising and product naming, the "Blackamoor" translated "Mohr" is still very present in Austrian and German culture.

Debates on the usage of "Blackamoor" images, street names and monuments continue to this day.



The street is soon to be renamed Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Strasse after the recent BLM protests.

Considering the difficult history of the term “blackamoor,” is highly problematic. The “court blackamoors” of the 18th and 19th centuries were mostly abducted children, who were taken to Europe, put into “oriental” costumes, and served their masters as “toys.” The “court blackamoor” was considered a status symbol, and frequently aristocrats would have their deceased “court blackamoors” prepared by taxidermists to put them on display. Until today, the term “blackamoor” has retained its belittling, trivialising connotations, which romanticises the bloody history of slavery and exploitation that is inextricably linked to the fate of “court blackamoors.”

“Tradition” does not hold as a valid argument for retaining images of otherness that perpetuate racist stereotypes and ideologies. There continues to be a lack of understanding that minoritised groups reject certain terms because of their ambivalent history.

It is imperative for the sensibility of language be heightened, if problematic images of otherness continue to circulate in advertisements, rendering (more or less) subtle racism socially acceptable.

This brings us to the debate surrounding the renaming of Mohrenstraße to Anton Wilhelm Amo Strasse, which has been the focus of Black activists and German supporters for quite some time. The aim is to decolonise the names given to the city’s streets and monuments such as the Mohrenapotheke in Germany. ‘Moor’ was a description for the first people of African descent to live in Berlin, a word which is considered highly offensive by Black people.

CONCLUSION: AMO AND HIS AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Amo's ideas need to be viewed as one-of-a-kind because he never saw himself as a European or an African but as a human among humans. Therefore, his philosophy can be applied universally.

Amo's ideas on philosophy starkly contrast the ideas of many famous thinkers, for example Locke and Descartes. Still, all Amo's these ideas help us debate the soul and show how the study of Amo had a significant impact.

LANGUAGE TASKS

KS3

	SCHRITT 1	SCHRITT 2	SCHRITT 3
	Übersetze!	Verwende das Wort in einem Satz!	Schritt 3 Erweitere den Satz mit einem Konnektoren or setze den Satz in einer anderen Zeit!
das Auge			
das Ohr			
der Schmerz			
der Mund			
die Schokolade			
die Freude			
die Religion			
die Seele			
die Sinne			

KS4

Test your might! Quizlet link



REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING



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