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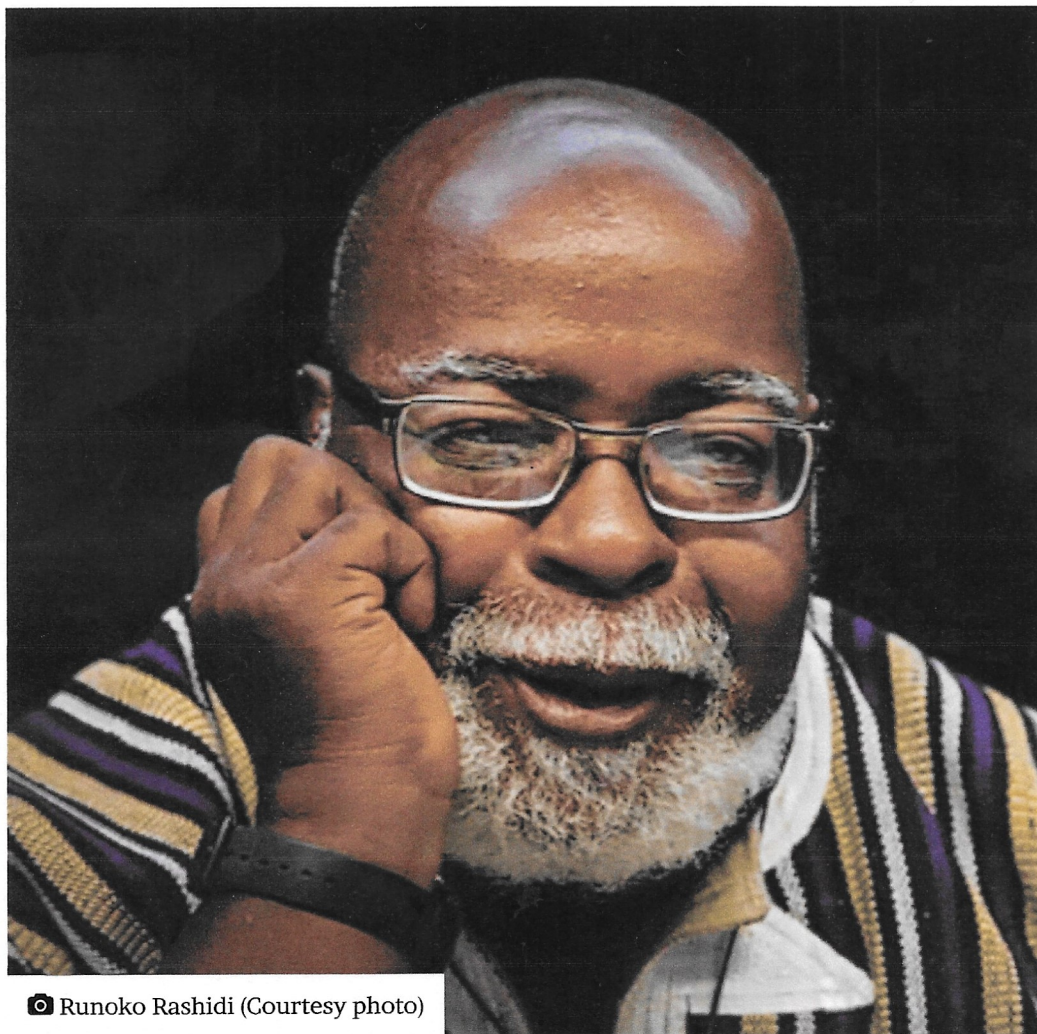


Community Obituary

Runoko Rashidi, a Giant in Pan-African Scholarship



Sam P. K. Collins • August 11, 2021 • 0 comments • 202 likes • 4 minutes read



Runoko Rashidi (Courtesy photo)



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Anthropologist and historian Runoko Rashidi unexpectedly died this month in Egypt. He was 67.

The cause of death was not disclosed.

He died Aug. 2 during one of the many tours that have garnered him a reputation as one of the foremost Pan-African scholars of his generation. He lived in Los Angeles, Calif.

Rashidi had traveled to 124 countries, spoken in 67 countries and written 22 books about the presence of African people on the African continent and around the world in the centuries before and following enslavement.

Rashidi's scholarship accentuated the work compiled by Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan, John Henrik Clarke, Asa Hilliard, Ivan Van Sertima and others who challenged Eurocentric narratives about Black inferiority.

His body of work has enhanced the view among Pan African scholars that global civilization began within Africa.

"Runoko dedicated his life to the upliftment of African people," said Anthony Browder, a cultural historian and Rashidi's close friend and colleague of more than 30 years.

"You'd be hard-pressed to find a brother or sister who's willing to read, study and travel as vigorously as Runoko did."

Weeks earlier, in observance of Father's Day, Browder and Rashidi headlined a virtual dialogue titled "Brother 2 Brother" in which they reflected on aspects of their personal and professional development and other issues of significance to Black people.

At the time of Rashidi's death, the pair had another installment of "Brother 2 Brother" in the works.

Browder's last presentation with Rashidi took place in Oakland, Calif. a

month before the pandemic forced much of the world inside.

In 2016, he and Rashidi traveled to Sudan to explore Nubian and Kushite monuments. That trip counted among the numerous times since the 1990s the two men either made travel plans together, or crossed paths while making separate tours.

“Runoko has traveled to the four corners of the Earth where African people are, documenting his visits with photography,” Browder told The Informer.

“He opened the eyes of the world to the greatness of African people.”

A STORIED CAREER

The circumstances of Rashidi’s Aug. 2 transition bear some similarity to that of Asa Hillard, a professor of educational psychology who passed in the same month 14 years prior while on a similar mission in Egypt.

Rashidi, a resident of South Central Los Angeles who was born on Aug. 16, 1954, came into his African consciousness during the Black Power Era. At the age of 19, he acquired his fully Africanized name, which means “handsome counselor” while traveling and encountering people living in the eastern and southern regions of the African continent.

Rashidi is a product of the Los Angeles public school system and earned his bachelor’s degree at California State University at Northridge. He also briefly attended the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), where he studied anthropology and archeology.

While participating in study groups during the 1970s, Rashidi said his academic interests were inspired by Chancellor Williams’ “The Destruction of Black Civilization,” in addition to speeches and writings of Marcus Mosiah Garvey and Malcolm X.

He said a chance encounter with Sertima at UCLA in the early 1980s placed Rashidi along a path to becoming a consummate writer and

researcher. By 1982, he often contributed to, and later edited, Sertima's "The Journal of African Civilizations."

Over the course of his career, Rashidi studied under and alongside Sertima, Clark and Hilliard, along with Edward Scobie and John G. Jackson. He authored 22 books, including "Introduction to the Study of African Classical Civilizations," "My Global Journeys in Search of the African Presence" and "The Black Image in Antiquity."

Rashidi conducted tours to India, Australia, Turkey, France, Belgium, and Vietnam in addition to travels throughout Africa.

At the time of his death, Rashidi, a curatorial and academic board member of the Pan-African Heritage Museum in Ghana was conducting research about the African presence in museums.

Legrand Clegg II, an attorney closely associated with Rashidi, told The Informer the scholar had been exploring development of a Black history channel.

Other projects in the works involved a visual representation of ancient African history for K-12 students.

Clegg, a researcher focused on ancient Kemet and the city attorney emeritus for Compton, met Rashidi in the early 1980s after Rashidi read Clegg's essay about the African presence in the Americas before Christopher Columbus' arrival.

The pair would go on to collaborate on various projects, including Clegg's "When Black Men Ruled the World" tape to which Rashidi contributed.

With Clegg on the trustee board at Compton Community College, Rashidi participated in the African People's Conference throughout the early 1980s.

That annual event, launched and hosted by college faculty member Dr.

Billie Moore, not only attracted the likes of Dr. Frances Cress Welsing, Dr. Ben Jochannan and others, but raised Compton Community College's profile as an epicenter of Afrocentric history and culture.

He said Rashidi's scholarship was comprehensive.

"There is no one currently among Black scholars who has traveled as extensively as did Rashidi, and who is as personally familiar with various Black populations around the world," said Clegg.

"First, Rashidi identified the people. He then conducted research regarding them," Clegg continued.

"Thereafter, he often visited the people, wrote about them and then presented graphic lectures about them and their various cultures and civilizations. In this regard, he was a great pioneer."

A GLOBAL LECTURER AND ORGANIZER

Throughout the 1980s and beyond, Rashidi would also go on to independently advance his scholarship through keynote addresses at conferences and other events.

The First All-India Dalit Writers Conference in Hyderabad, India counted among the first. Other notable events included the Diaspora Forum at the Fesman Conference in Dakar, Senegal in 2010 and the International Reunion of the African Family in Latin America in Barlovento, Venezuela in 1999.

Last October, amid the pandemic, Rashidi spoke before affiliates of the North American Pan-African Federalist Movement during its virtual convention.

Rashidi's other appointments and accolades include a designation as traveling ambassador for the Universal Negro Improvement Association-African Communities League Rehabilitation Committee 2020.

He also received an honorary doctoral degree from Amen-Ra Theological Seminary in Los Angeles.

Rashidi told Browder during the virtual “Brother 2 Brother” event that Black love stood at the root of how he navigated the world, and life.

In studying and talking about Black people, he was advancing the work of those who came before him and showed him the ropes.

“Once I started [traveling], I never wanted to stop,” Rashidi said on June 20.

“It was like a treadmill. I love Black people and I’m proud of that. I want all of us to be proud of that. Never feel the need to apologize or whisper or make people comfortable at our expense.”



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