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| **WHY BLACK HISTORY IS IMPORTANT: BY USTADH AMMAR   ALSHUKRY** |

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| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  |  |   **THREE REASONS FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF BLACK HISTORY IN AMERICA**  *Ustadh Ammar is a long-time student of Mishkah's Dr. Salah Assawy and Dr. Hatem al-Haj, among others. He is also a teacher, khateeb, writer, and prolific poet.*    **1. It is part of our history**  There are estimates that anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of slaves that were brought from West Africa in the trans-Atlantic slave trade were Muslim (1). There should be no disconnect then between the story of America and the story of the Muslim ummah, as we have always been one ummah, an ummah that absorbs the history of all of its peoples. For just as the history of the Umayyads in Damascus, or the Abbassids in Baghdad,  the Berbers of North Africa, the culture of Andalusia, and the merchants of Yemen who found their way to South East Asia are all part of the story of the Ummah, then the million believing souls that were shackled on ships traversing the Atlantic to build a country that would become the mightiest nation on Earth is also part of our story.  And once it becomes a part of our story then the roots of every Muslim become deeper in the United States. For our presence did not begin in the 60s or 70s with student or work visas, but over 400 hundred years ago. It is a legacy that should not be forgotten or forsaken.  **2. It allows us to give credit where credit is due**  Speaking of student and work visas, knowing black history allows for the immigrant community to give credit where credit is due, and to recognize the value of the contribution of the African American community to their presence in the United States. It is not a coincidence that the earliest Muslim migrants were Albanian, Syrian and Lebanese, for the United States was not inclined to allow colored peoples to immigrate. It was not until the Civil Rights movement when America's consciousness towards colored people changed within the country and beyond it, that the United States began allowing immigration from the colored world. As such you will find that most Muslims from Africa and Asia began migrating to the United States after that movement. For many of us, our presence here is a direct result of the Civil Rights movement and this is a credit that is owed to the African American community and the struggle for all people to be seen as human beings.   **3. It creates bridges of understanding and empathy**  I have seen some immigrant communities confused as to why African American communities may struggle in a way that immigrant communities do not. If an immigrant is able to arrive in a country that is foreign to them, learn a new language, complete an education, build a life for themselves and their family, and maybe even purchase a house for themselves in the suburbs in the quintessential story of the American dream, what is stopping the African American community from doing the same? To me, it is a similar question that can be asked about Muslim countries; if they had been granted independence from Colonial powers over 100 years ago, what is stopping them from shaking off its cobwebs and joining the developed world? In other words, it has been a 100 years, why are they still broken?  An answer to that might be: the colonization of hundreds of years cannot be resolved in decades. Not when the colonizers left systems in place that would leave the newly formed countries dependent on them long after their military presence had left. Similarly if one were to look at the African American community post-emancipation, we would find a wide variety of systemic practices intended to keep the community subjugated. Examples would be the racial bias in the criminal justice system, with blacks being almost *four times (2)* as likely to be arrested for recreational drug offenses even though their usage is the same as whites, the removal of the right to vote from felons stripping those who have paid their debt to society from having a voice to change policies, among many, many other practices.  Knowing the *similar* challenges that communities face will in sha Allah build bridges of empathy and understanding.  ---------------------------------------------------------  (1) Muhammad, P.R, *Muslims and the Making of America,*Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2013.   (2) ACLU, *The War on Marijuana in Black and White* | |

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| **THE BLACK LEGACY IN ISLAM** |

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| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  |  |   Islam was brought for all mankind, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or physical features. Indeed part of its greatest blessings is its integration of so many diverse people, all worshiping their One God, Allah Most High. No one is ever judged by how they look but by the level of their piety. **Black History Month** is a good time to reflect on some of the notable black people during Islam's early days - their integral presence should be a great lesson to us on how the Prophet (saw) and his followers lived with all people, and how we too should always strive as Muslims to break down barriers and foster connections that transcend race, ethnicity and nationality. This is part of our Sunnah.  Below are a few excerpts from a past article by **Dr Hatem al-Haj** on some of the notable black people in Islamic history:  *"It is a fact that the practice of the individual Muslims and some Muslim societies may depart from the purity and justice of Islam, at times. However, it remains to be said that this ummah, collectively, has had a much better record with regard to egalitarianism than all others. Islam, itself, is certainly the religion whose teachings abundantly flow with egalitarianism and equality of man."*  " .*. .As for the prominent blacks in our history, I can't give a list of them because they are countless. However, I will give quick examples:*  ***Of the Sahabah (Companions):***  - **Oum Ayman**: She raised the Prophet (peace be upon him), who called her mother ('ya um-ma') until he died.  **- Bilal** (may Allah be pleased with him): the Prophet (saw) entered the Ka'bah on the day of opening Makkah with Bilal on his one side, while Usamah ibn Zaid (ra), another black man was on the other side. That is the moment of the peak of Islam's victory.  **- Usamah** (may Allah be pleased with him): The beloved son of the beloved. Not only did the Prophet (saw) love him, but he also sent him at the age of 18 as a leader of an army that contained Abu Bakr and Omar.  **- 'Ubadah ibn as-Samit** (may Allah be pleased with him): When he was the head of the delegate negotiating the surrender of Egypt, the Christian Archbishop of Egypt, Cyrus said, "Take away the black man! I can have no discussion with him," The members of the Muslim delegation said, "you either talk to him or talk to no one, for he is the best, wisest and noblest of us." 'Ubadah said, "if you fear from me, be informed that our army has a thousand men who are blacker than me."  **Of the Tabe'een (the generation immediately after the Sahabah)**:This was called 'asr al-mawali, because the freed slaves, whether Arab, African or Persian dominated the scene, particularly as scholars and religious leaders.  **- Ibn Abza** (may Allah be pleased with him): he was chosen as the deputy ruler of Makkah during the time of Omar (may Allah be pleased with him), who later took him to al-Madeenah to pray for the people, and was later made by Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) the ruler of Khurasaan (Iran).  - **'Ata'**: The agents of the khaleefah would announce in Makkah during hajj that no one should give fatwas except 'Ata'. The khaleefas would go and sit in his class like all the rest.  **Of the following generations:**  - **Muslim ibn Khalid az-Zinji**: the shaikh of Imam ash-Shafe'ee.  - **Kafoor al-Ikhsheedi** : Cyrus, the Archbishop of Egypt who didn't want to talk to 'Ubadah (may Allah be pleased with him) because of his dark complexion would have not believed that in the fourth century, the ruler of Egypt would be black; that is Kafoor.  - **Az-Zaila'ees**: Two great Hanafi scholars by this name, Fakhr-ud-deen and Jamal-ud-deen. (Zayla' is in the horn of Africa.)  *Dr Hatem teaches Fiqh at Mishkah University and is also on the Academic Committee. These excerpts were originally published as part of*[*this article*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001ddsxZKIUlrZs7F1tCMkYpNrSpQG_Rwqqm5s121OiI1qeXLCzuL2NHtI1fEC8aeQ0dpl78Vi3-LKCGwQrqEZWKKjUL-LrA_qywSGTZZ7N2lVicVfOgJlWJaNHQCysEUDgzWgm8pHaxF3KzsYUJJjC6SNXgqpIFeWD0S9LqyabsPNM80nxmq9Ig9WFnpRzxqHOk8O0AhDXJlDancohG-qaCvkzMUUU0_lvPKndxaPFIgpzO8-YMCu7eaL6F2TcTy5F-ARLKDpqjKy8ZxGgtBrYv8nwqgL9A8WmiQ-zJL4n-jY=&c=kl6gYonNIx7-XajfucG_XzwG8ROS1g7aGRC1Jvm5XfNY_kVzZuttUw==&ch=ijuxKOC9LP3ZZ9fHJzRDpdRLe5QLcuAPQDIYrqbnzeNk6OhzE4rr-A==)*.* | |

[**Is Shaykh al-Kilbani the Sa’udi Obama?**](http://www.drhatemalhaj.com/history-and-biographies/islamic-civilization/is-shaykh-adil-al-kilbani-the-saudi-obama/)

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This post was written in response to a New York Times’ article that likened Sh. Adil al-Kalbani’s rise to the imamate of al-Haram (Holy Mosque of Makkah) to President Obama’s story.

Alhamdu-li-llah wa as-Salatu wa as-Salamu ‘ala Rasool-il-llah.  
Despite the fact that some may consider this NY Times’ article, about a black imam leading the prayers in al-Haram, positive, I find it somewhat problematic.  
It is a fact that the practice of the individual Muslims and some Muslim societies may depart from the purity and justice of Islam, at times. However, it remains to be said that this ummah, collectively, has had a much better record with regard to egalitarianism than all other religious communities.  
Islam, itself, is certainly the religion whose teachings abundantly flow with egalitarianism and the equality of man.  
Our fellow Americans, from non-African descent, deserve credit for electing Barack Obama to the highest office, and I am sure many of them rose above the filth of racism long before that. However, it must also be said that it will not be enough for me to see a Muslim lead the UN, the EU or the US until I see all Muslim people treated fairly and equitably. The same applies to every religious or ethnic community.  
Now, with regard to the article, it makes the reader feel that Sh. Adil (may Allah preserve him) is an exception from a long lasting rule of exclusion of blacks. This is not true.  
At times of fragile religious commitment, people relapse into various states of ignorance that are reflections of man’s self-centrism, such as tribalism, racism, nationalism…etc. When this happened to our ummah, it was accompanied by other manifestations of impiety such as the abandonment of prayers and other acts of worship, the corruption in transactions as well as moral decay. This article is not to absolve any wrongdoers (Muslims or not) of guilt, but to emphasize that neither Islam nor the ummah is to be judged by the doings of such people. It also remains true that that the type of racism and racial injustice practiced by some, which included mass killings and torture of even the children, (like those who had their hands cut off by the Belgian Monarch Leopold in Belgian Congo when they refused to work or slacked off!); the burning of villages in Africa and lynching there and here in the New World as well…etc. All of that never happened in our ummah. (Keeping in mind that I don’t mean by “some” all Europeans, because that would be injustice to many of them, particularly those who fought for equality. I also don’t mean by our ummah the Arabs or any particular ethnic group, but rather those who were blessed with Islam, whether they are Pakistani, Arab, Albanian or Nigerian.)  
As for the prominent blacks in our history, I can’t give a list of them because they are countless. However, I will give very few examples:  
Of the Sahabah (Companions):  
• Oum Ayman ل: She raised the Prophet ρ, who called her mother (‘ya um-ma’) until he died.  
• Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him)τ: the Prophet (peace be upon him) ρ entered the Ka’bah on the day of opening Makkah with Bilal on his one side, while Usmah ibn Zaid (may Allah be pleased with him)τ, another black man was on the other side. That is the moment of the peak of Islam’s victory.  
• Usamah (may Allah be pleased with him)τ: The beloved son of the beloved. Not only that the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him)ρ loved him, but he also sent him at the age of 18 as a leader of an army that contained Abu Bakr and Omar.  
• ‘Ubadah ibn as-Samit (may Allah be pleased with him)τ: When he was the head of the delegate negotiating the surrender of Egypt, the Christian Archbishop of Egypt, Cyrus said, “Take away the black man! I can have no discussion with him,” The members of the Muslim delegation said, “you either talk to him or talk to no one, for he is the best, wisest and noblest of us.” ‘Ubadah said, “if you fear from me, be informed that our army has a thousand men who are blacker than me.”  
Of the Tabe’een (the generation immediately after the Sahabah):This was called ‘asr al-mawali, because the freed slaves, whether Arab, African or Persian dominated the scene, particularly as scholars and religious leaders.  
• Ibn Abza (may Allah be pleased with him)/: he was chosen as the deputy ruler of Makkah during the time of Omar (may Allah be pleased with him)τ, who later took him to al-Madeenah to pray for the people, and was later made by Ali (may Allah be leased with him) the ruler of Khurasaan (Iran).  
• ‘Ata’ /: The agents of the khaleefah would announce in Makkah during hajj that no one should give fatwas except ‘Ata’. The khaleefas would go and sit in his class like all the rest.  
Of the following generations:  
• Muslim ibn Khalid az-Zinji /: the shaikh of Imam ash-Shafe’ee.  
• Kafoor al-Ikhsheedi /: Cyrus, the Archibishop of Egypt who didn’t want to talk to ‘Ubadah (may Allah be pleased with him)τ because of his dark complexion would have not believed that in the fourth century, the ruler of Egypt would be black; that is Kafoor.  
• Az-Zaila’ees: Two great Hanafi scholars by this name, Fakhr-ud-deen / and Jamal-ud-deen /. Zayla’ is in the horn of Africa.

As for the current era, Muslims are divided into small countries, and every people rule themselves, so the President of Senegal will likely be black and that of Albania likely white. However, in a country like Egypt where you find all grades of color, As-Sadat’s dark complexion didn’t exclude him from the presidency.  
The belief or statement that their little mention about slavery may infer that slavery in the Muslim countries was like slavery elsewhere. That argument is false, for, amongst other differences, slavery in the Muslim history was not a racial practice, but there were slaves of all nations.  
For more on slavery in Islam, go to the following site: [**http://drhatemalhaj.com/qa/index.php/category/misconceptions-answered/**](https://muslimmatters.org/2016/04/17/an-issue-with-slavery-dr-hatem-al-haj/)

Finally, I hope that President Obama succeeds in healing our country and improving the realities of the various communities who suffered from injustice. As for Shaykh Adil (may Allah preserve him), I wish for all of us to pray behind him in the most sacred precinct, and be touched by his outstanding recitation and beautiful voice. I am sure the vast majority of those praying behind him will not even notice his African features, because that is not new to the Haram, and it is not what comes to mind there.

Allah knows best.