Black History Month Come Read

Black History: Talking Points and thinking points

Assalamu Alaikum:

"Son of a Black woman."

It was literally true. Bilal was exactly that. But the tone, the way the comment was said, and the context clearly made it offensive. Prophet Muhammad responded with strong disapproval: “You are a man who still has traces of pre-Islamic ignorance," he said to the Muslim who made this comment. Allah’s peace and blessings be upon the Prophet.

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Stunned by this censure, Abu Dhar, who, like Bilal, was also a great Companion of the Prophet, immediately sought his Abyssinian brother’s forgiveness. He placed his head on the ground and asked Bilal to step on his face as a way of punishing him for the offensive insult. Instead, Bilal took his hand and hugged him. May God be pleased with them.

February is Black History Month. It is an ideal time for Muslims to acknowledge the contributions of Africans and African-Americans to Islam, as well as an opportunity for us to assess persistent prejudice against Africa, Africans, and blackness.

**Talking points**

These points can be used for a Khutba, a social media post, a blog, a call to a talk show, or in discussions with family and friends:

* Africans and Muslims of African origin have been instrumental in the development of Islam since the beginning of the Prophet’s mission. From modern-day [Ethiopia](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=pujl1PFY%2B70s49GVNaC%2Be2rQo3WM4WpD) to [America](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=CPqNSWYgl8JGB8rcmndp%2FmrQo3WM4WpD), they have shaped and molded the Muslim Ummah
* It was a Black woman, [Barakah](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=dOqBBA8lJx1jU8kEai%2B3fmrQo3WM4WpD) or Umm Ayman, who the Prophet described as my "mother after my own mother. She is the rest of my family." She was the only one who knew him from birth to death, and he said that she is a woman of Paradise
* An African nation, [Abyssinia](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=wzVWdvfx875oWQk5L8tZoWrQo3WM4WpD), and its king, Najashi, gave the Muslim community its first refuge from torture and persecution. At one point, 80% of all Muslims sought and were granted asylum there
* Notwithstanding personal and cultural prejudices throughout Islamic history, Africans have risen to positions of [power and influence](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=pYVOqzNPuzl%2FatTTyFjgCWrQo3WM4WpD) in scholarship, politics, and more

**Thinking points**

* God created human beings as one people as He tells us in the Quran (4:1) and it is human beings who divided humanity (Quran 2:213)
* [Am I a racist](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=AQKBX%2FDJqYmJovgdI%2FgnDGrQo3WM4WpD)? It’s a question every Muslim must ask and answer. Given the Islamic [emphasis](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=ifxZ6%2FOdZqY6SOWvy%2BWjBWrQo3WM4WpD) on brother- and sisterhood regardless of race or color, there is no room for racism or prejudice, as the Prophet’s example above illustrates
* How can I wage Jihad against racism and prejudice in my community? Start with these [ideas](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=bzgmGXICzSmyWTZuhB3u7mrQo3WM4WpD)
* What can [I](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=ErwYryRuxnxEszm4qtIGc2rQo3WM4WpD) do to highlight the contributions of Africans and African-Americans during Black History Month in my [Masjid](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=ASb%2B%2BUvLPTF9gcnYX3MhxGrQo3WM4WpD), my [MSA](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=Om6QeiL1bbjla5Uy2%2BKktmrQo3WM4WpD), my Islamic weekend or full-time [school](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=yP1NQ2te4sGEwU3XuM4h52rQo3WM4WpD)?

For the Prophet, the Muslim community was built through people who loved one another and treated each other as equals before God. And that is ultimately what we should gain from this month: A greater appreciation and respect for Barakah, Bilal, and Black history, as well as a willingness to challenge anything that undermines Islam’s message of unity in diversity.

Peace,

Sound Vision Team

[**What Muslims can do on Social media for Black History Month**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=787UYvtGAAfVSKt%2Fgg6X%2F2rQo3WM4WpD)[**(New)**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=TJwWvCLtyo235maGQBaZYGrQo3WM4WpD)

***Samana Siddiqui***

Social media is the ideal place to spread and discuss any ideas or information quickly, and to reach as many people as possible.  With Black History month beginning February 1, harnessing social media to spread vital information about the contributions of Black Americans in specific, and the people, countries, and cultures of Africa more generally, is critical. This is especially true given the longstanding [negative](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=HipHTmDgNuDlycZIpxkwQGrQo3WM4WpD) portrayal of Africa and everything related to it. Here are 4 ways to do that:

 [**>>>Read More**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=zBTbXraTTOB2qs3%2F4o%2BxMGrQo3WM4WpD)

[**The Haven of the First Hijra: an African nation is the Mulims' first refuge**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=VveT6vGIft%2F5YZh87I4KqGrQo3WM4WpD)

***Najib Mohammed***History has shown that the first migration to Ethiopia and the second migration to Madinah have indeed laid down the foundation on which Islam, as a universal religion, was built. Ever since that experience, the Muslim community, wherever they settled, shifted from the positive of minority to majority, from weakness to permanent strength, from tribalism to universal brotherhood that knows no defined political boundaries.[**>>>Read More**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=AHdzdNLFf5yvgroSxq5Ap2rQo3WM4WpD)

[**Umm Ayman: a notable African woman**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=2sL3HWJ1b5Dk03ky8K%2BugmrQo3WM4WpD)

If you're looking for an important Muslim African woman to talk about during Black History month, look no further than the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) , and the woman he described as his "mother after my own mother. She is the rest of my family."

[**>>>Read More**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=f2T1FcgWHTwXnDSipyHJ7WrQo3WM4WpD)

[**An Islam's Manifesto of Universal Brother-and Sisterhood**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=kjwlqR1WvUEsQuf5%2F9a6I2rQo3WM4WpD)

Our Prophet was a mercy to all human beings, regardless of their religious, racial, cultural, or ethnic background. We, as his followers, must live and spread this message today at a time when hatefulness and ugliness toward others, particularly Muslims, has become more prevalent. [**>>>Read More**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=TtgiVJ26INAV%2Bd%2BW8ci7lmrQo3WM4WpD)

[**6 SoundVision's Page on Black History Month**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=r8lqzNq6N9qoBhgca4AHTmrQo3WM4WpD)

A unique page on Black History Month, offering articles, perspectives, tips, and ideas about the month devoted to African and African-American history from a Muslim perspective: [**>>>Read More**](http://org2.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=YKiFQs75XlQG1ZPHQIf6a2rQo3WM4WpD)

 11 ideas for learning and teaching during Black History Month



Black History Month is an excellent opportunity to not only learn about the civil struggles of African Americans but also how Islam figures in the life and history of Africa and Muslim Africans. Here are some tips and ideas of what you, your school, Masjid or Muslim Students' Association can do during Black History Month.

1. Attend events held in your community, on campus, at your local library etc.

Not only will this show a Muslim presence. It will also show Muslim interest in the topic. Too often, Muslims are seen as being interested only in "their own" issues. Your desire to listen and learn will Insha Allah, provide you with more knowledge of the topic.

You can also provide an Islamic perspective there if there is none being presented.

2. Read a book about the history of Islam among African people in the United States and in Africa

Check out some good ones in our recommend bibliography.

3. Arrange to have a speaker knowledgeable of Islamic history among African-Americans to address your Masjid

This can actually become two events. One will be a lecture to educate Muslims. The second will be a mosque open house, where not only will non-Muslims learn about African-American Muslim history, but about Islam as well, Insha Allah. It will facilitate direct contact between Muslims and non-Muslims, which is one of the key ingredients of good Dawa.

Make sure there is plenty of publicity inside and outside the mosque of the event. And refreshments, of course.

4. Sponsor events with non-Muslim African-American organizations

This is a great way for the MSA, for instance, to organize an activity with another organization which may have more resources (i.e. money and contacts).

More importantly though, this is a way to show Muslim interest in African history through action (i.e. trying to arrange an event to educate others about the topic). Give the Islamic perspective as much as you can as you work with the non-Muslims.

5. Arrange for a small group discussion/video showing at your home or MSA concerning African-American history and its significance to the development of the Ummah in this part of the world

Deeper Roots: Muslims in the Americas before Columbus would be a great video to see here.
small, informal, but make sure the main organizers, and especially the moderator, know what they are talking about.

Also be sure there are refreshments for everyone at the end. Print out a couple of one-page articles or Dawa pamphlets on the African-American or African Muslims that people can take home, with Muslim contact names and numbers on the back.

6. Make bedtime story night for your kids a story about African or African-American Muslims

Do you read to your kids at night before they go to bed? If so, talk to them a bit about Black History Month (if they go to public school, they may already be doing something on the topic in class) and read a chapter of a book about notable Muslim Africans or African-Americans.

For instance, read the stories of Barakah and Bilal ibn Rabah from Abdul Wahid Hamid's Companions of the Prophet or read them the book Tales From Sudan.

7. Have one of the kids do a presentation on one of the Sahabah from Africa or a more recent Muslim African-American personality during a family meeting

They'll teach everyone, learn something themselves, and know that Muslims have their own Africans and African-Americans to be proud of.

8. Have your school or local library include notable Muslim African-Americans in its display during Black History Month

Talk to the librarian. S/he has probably already decided to have a special Black History Month exhibit during February. But who has s/he decided to include. Give some suggestions of Muslim Africans and African-Americans who contributed to the development of the Ummah, America and the world.

9. Do the above for a museum

Contact the organizer of the exhibition and suggest a few names of personalities to include. If they're clueless even better: give them the information about these Muslims. And add a couple of articles or books about Islam while you're at it.

10. Write an article in your school and/or local paper about what Black History Month means to you as a Muslim

This can be done on an individual basis, or better yet, designate someone from the MSA or the Islamic center to do this. You can talk about the rich history of Muslim Africa, and how Muslim African-Americans have impacted the U.S.A. today.

11. Do a class presentation on a notable Muslim African or African-American

If this is a general class assignment, you've just found your topic. If not, suggest it to your teacher. If you're afraid your classmates will get angry you gave them extra homework, suggest doing this as a special assignment for yourself.

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8 things Masjids can do during Black History Month



[**Abdul Malik Mujahid**](https://www.soundvision.com/authors/abdul-malik-mujahid)

What would a Masjid have to do with Black History Month? Plenty.

As an institution of Islamic education and outreach to neighbors and the general public, Masjids must play an active role during Black History Month. Members of Masjids' adminstration and leadership, as well as general attendees, must learn about the contributions of Africans and African-Americans. They must also present African and African-American Muslims' contributions on this continent and abroad. Here are some ideas of the kinds of activities Masjids can organize to do this.

1. Weekend programs on Mansa Musa, Omar bin Said, Uthman Dan Fodio and other notable African Muslims

Imams and community leaders need to enlighten Muslims in their communities about great Muslims like Bilal ibn Rabah, the Prophet Mohammed's Companion and Islam's first muezzin; Umm Ayman or Barakah, about whom the Prophet said she was his "mother after my own mother. She is the rest of my family"; Mansa Musa, a pious, just and very rich king of Mali, a country that once had over 10,000 Islamic schools. Or of Omar bin Said a Muslim from West Africa who was enslaved then brought to North America via the Transatlantic slave trade.

These men, and millions like them, strove to stay Muslim and retain their Islam under the brutal yoke of slavery over a period of almost 500 years. By protecting Islam, they providing some of the earliest roots of the faith on this continent. Muslims of all backgrounds need to know more about them.

2. Show documentaries like Islam in Africa and Deeper Roots

These are two excellent videos featuring Islamic scholar and historian Abdullah Hakim Quick's research about Islam, Muslims, Africa and North America. They are wonderful starting points for an open discussion on Islam and how it impacted African and Africans. This is something you can invite non-Muslims to as well, making it a double event: a discussion forum and a mosque open house. Make sure to serve refreshments after the documentary.

3. In the Masjid bookstore

While the Masjid bookstore does need copies of the Quran, books of Fiqh and various other Islamic subjects, for Black History Month, stock up on some [books](https://www.soundvision.com/info/history/black/books.asp) that talk about Islam in Africa. Make sure to put them on display, along with free pamphlets and articles about Islam and various aspects of Africa and African history. Also, for every purchase made at the bookstore, include these freebies as a gift to your customer. This will encourage Muslims to buy and find out more about their Muslim African brothers and sisters.

4. Hold a workshop on how to deal with accusations against Islam about slavery

Muslims are being accused of supporting the enslavement of Africans in places like Sudan and Mauritania. We must develop ways of responding to challenge the false belief that Islam condones slavery. Islam has always been a liberating force. However, individuals of all fatih are capable of wrongdoings not encouraged by God. We should be first to condemn these type of people. A workshop by a knowledgeable and wise scholar and/or activist who has dealt with this issue first-hand is an excellent way to raise the topic in the Muslim community while providing Muslims with the tools to respond.

5. Islamic weekend school classes should do projects on Islamic African history

If your Masjid has a weekend Islamic school, make sure that they are given readings and class projects about notable Muslims from Africa. This way they will learn about part of their history as Muslims. They will also be able to contribute to Black History Month in their public schools by being able to share knowledge about what Africans of their religious heritage have contributed to the world.

6. Give a Khutbah (Friday sermon) on the universality of Islam

This is a great way to bring up the topic of African Muslims and their contributions to Islam. Discuss the universality and brotherhood of all Muslims regardless of race and ethnicity, and make Dua (supplication) for the millions of Muslims who died as slave-martyrs when coming to America. You can usethis manifesto against racism as notes for this kind of a Khutbah.

7. Hold a Muslim unity dinner with international food

What's one thing all humans have in common? They eat and most of them love good food. Host a potluck dinner during Black History Month. This is a great time to have a Muslim unity dinner that is open to the public. What a great way to show the universality of the Ummah, with people and food from different parts of the world.

8. Announce other programs that are relevant

The Masjid should announce suitable Black History Month events and lectures and encourage Muslims to attend. The purpose of this is to learn more about African-Americans and their contributions. The other aim is to provide some positive Dawa about the contributions of Muslim Africans and African-Americans while clarifying misunderstandings about Islam that may arise.

After Juma prayers is an excellent time to announce such programs. Make sure to have all of the details right (i.e. date, time, location, phone number for more information, etc.). Also, have a flyer for the event is posted in the Masjid.

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7 things individuals can do for Black History Month



[**Abdul Malik Mujahid**](https://www.soundvision.com/authors/abdul-malik-mujahid)

Black History Month is not simply a time for African-Americans to take pride in and to educate others about their history and achievements. It is also a time for Muslims to educate themselves.

It's a time to remember the struggle against slavery, oppression and racism, which continues to this day.

Here are 10 things you can do for Black History Month to make it a rewarding and enriching experience:

1. Find out what's going on in your community

So what's your Masjid, Muslim Students' Association or local community center doing about Black History Month? Are there any lectures, seminars, trips to museums, etc. planned? If not, why don't you become the catalyst for change. Convince your Masjid and MSA of the need to use Black History Month for the education of the Muslim community about African Muslim history. Work with them to use this time for sharing with others the Islamic legacy of African-Americans.

2. Discuss with your family

Hold a family meeting to discuss what Black History Month is and how everyone will participate in it. Make sure to be prepared with some basic information about what the month signifies and what kind of events are normally held.

Then, discuss which programs the family should participate in and how everyone can learn more about Africa, notable African Muslims and more. End the meeting with a Dua for the millions of martyrs who died as slaves.

3. Attend local events

Is there a museum commemorating African-American history? Is there an exhibit at the nearby college or community center? Look out for local events commemorating Black History Month for you and everyone in the family. Then make the arrangements to visit. Make this an educational and fun family outing!

4. Read up on it

Forgive the cliché, but knowledge really is power. Make sure you check out what's available in our bibliography, your local library and the Internet about African-American Muslims as well as Islam and Muslims in Africa. Develop a one-month reading plan for February composed of a list of articles and books to read on these topics during the month.

5. Where in the world is…?

During a family meeting in February, have one of the kids do a presentation about a Muslim country, like Mali. Don't just provide dry facts like the country's GDP and population. Include information about when Islam came to the area, how it was maintained, and some of the cultural traditions of the Muslims there (i.e. how they celebrate Eid, etc. ). If the project is good enough, have the student present it to his or her class.

6. Have an African food night

Get out your international cuisine cookbooks or borrow some from a library and whip up a tasty African Muslim meal the whole family will enjoy! Or go out to an African restaurant and sample the food. This will give you a whole different perspective on the culture. Food doesn't only fill our stomachs, it can break barriers and misunderstandings. Try it!

7. Invite a human being of other race group to your home

In our elevator culture we all remain divided. Let's share the beauty of diversity, culture and common humanity across racial barrier. Let's spice the visit with your warm hospitality and a great meal!

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From slavery to leadership: Muslims in North America



[**Taha Ghayyur**](https://www.soundvision.com/authors/taha-ghayyur)

El Hajj Malik Shahbaz, Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali are perhaps a few names that cross our minds when we consider the evolution of Muslim identity and community in North America. What often escapes notice is the sacrifice, discipline, social justice, leadership and cooperation modeled by such individuals and their communities.

The organized struggle of North American Muslims begins over seven centuries ago, with the civil rights movement led by multitudes of enslaved Muslim Africans. The spirit and movement continues today with millions of Arab and South Asian Muslim immigrants, as well as the Latin and First Nations indigenous Muslim converts in North America.

Keeping Faith Alive in the 'New World'

In the story of early African-American Muslims, we find fascinating and empowering historical events. The story of Job ibn Solomon Jallo, in the early 1700's, who was a well-mannered, intelligent, literate trader and Imam, reminds us of the Quranic and Biblical story of Prophet Yaqub's (Job) life. Captured in Gambia, Job wrote out three copies of the entire Quran from memory. He was later freed and reunited with his son and family.

The account of Bilali Muhammad (Ben Ali), an African scholar in the early 1800's, captivates many as we read about the vibrant Islamic community he built in Georgia, as a slave. His determination to hold on to Islamic principles, regardless of his circumstances, inspires awe and admiration. In many ways his life parallels the life of Bilal Ibn Rabah, an early African slave convert to Islam in Makkah.

As Amir Nashid Ali Muhammad explains in *Muslims in America: Seven Centuries of History (1312-1998)*:

In the 'New World', some of the African slaves suffered doubly tragic fate. Initially, they were enslaved because they were African, but when it was discovered that they were also Muslims, their suffering was compounded. They were tortured, burned alive, hung and shot unless they renounced their religion and their names. At least 20% of the Africans brought to the U.S. were Muslims from ….the coastal and interior regions of the Islamic empires of Songhai, Ghana, and Mali.

Early Muslim Participation in America

We discover with pride that there were Muslims, who, in the War of 1812, helped defend America against the British. In a lecture held at Concordia University, Montreal, Imam Khalid Griggs, a political activist and leader of a North Carolina mosque, highlighted the role Africans played in the American Civil War. He related the stirring account of one African Muslim named Mohammad Ali Ibn Said, who moved to the U.S. from Africa to volunteer for the all-Black 55th division:

“Mohammad Ali said, 'I do not want to just sit back and not do anything, I want to do something to help my brothers. The blood that joins me is deeper and stronger than the water that separates me from Africa to the United States,'…So he chose to come into a slave country at a time when he was risking his own freedom.”

Did You know?

1. The first person to request the freedom of all slaves in America was Muslim.
2. Muslims were known to live in at least 7 of the 13 original colonies, including Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia.
3. The early American Muslims have contributed many Arabic words found in English today, such as, admiral, algebra, atlas, banana, cable, camel, checkmate, coffee, cotton, jasmine, lemon, magazine, mask, rice, sofa, sugar, syrup, and zero to name a few.
4. Columbus was not the first adventurer to travel from Europe to the Americas. Around 986 AD, Moors (people from North Africa) crossed the Atlantic Ocean in ships, bringing back with them people from the new world.

Sadly, the impact of Black, African, and Muslim cultures on world history is often neglected in historical discourse. There are pages of history which tend to get ripped out.

Towards Contribution & Leadership

While it could be argued that faith in today's secular world is receding to the private quarters, North American Islam is manifesting itself as an urban phenomenon. Dr. Tariq Ramadan, a professor of Philosophy at the College of Geneva, in his monumental study, *To be a European Muslim*, reminds us of our role and responsibility in the secular context today. He explains:

At this time of globalisation and internationalisation, when all nations are subject to a new world order which denies or forgets God,…based on an exclusive economic logic, Muslims are facing the same responsibilities... Assertive and confident, they have to remind people around them of God, of spirituality and, regarding social affairs, to work for values and ethics, justice and solidarity. They do not forget their environment but, on the contrary, once in security, they should influence it in positive way.Contemporary North American Muslims possess a rich, seven centuries-old legacy of dedication, activism, community empowerment, justice, peace and tolerance, inherited from their Muslim forefathers in this land. They must now change their outlook from the reality of “protection” alone to that of authentic “contribution” to society. It is at this unique juncture of Islamic history, when we are constituting the largest and most diverse Muslim minority, that we need to study the contribution of African-American Muslims as the models that produced the great leaders we long for today.

The haven of the first Hijra (migration)



[**Najib Mohammed**](https://www.soundvision.com/authors/najib-mohammed)

An African Nation is the Muslims' First Refuge

In Islamic history and tradition, Ethiopia (Abyssinia or Al-Habasha) is known as the "Haven of the First Migration or Hijra."

For Muslims, Ethiopia is synonymous with freedom from persecution and emancipation from fear.

Ethiopia was a land where its king, Negus or Al-Najashi, was a person renowned for justice and in whose land human rights were cherished.

The meaning and the significance of "Hijra" is embodied in the Islamic calendar. Since its inception, the Islamic calendar represents a history of perpetual struggle between truth and falsehood, faith and blasphemy, freedom and oppression, light and darkness, and between peace and war.

The first migration [Hijra] of the Companions and relatives of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) to Ethiopia celebrates the birth of freedom of expression and beliefs, whereas, the Second Migration of the Prophet Muhammad to the Madinah celebrates the end of oppression.

"And dispute you not with the People of the Book, except with means better, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong; But say, we believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you: Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow in Islam: (Quran 29:46).

History has shown that the first migration to Ethiopia and the second migration to Madinah have indeed laid down the foundation on which Islam, as a universal religion, was built. Ever since that experience, the Muslim community, wherever they settled, shifted from the positive of minority to majority, from weakness to permanent strength, from tribalism to universal brotherhood that knows no defined political boundaries.

The Quran says: "O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly the most honored of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware (Quran 49:13).

With this spirit in mind, Bilal ibn Rabah, an Ethiopian slave living in Makkah, became a leading companion of the Prophet Muhammad. It was not a coincidence that his native land, Ethiopia, was the country chosen by the Prophet when his followers needed protection and freedom form oppression.

Muhammad Haykal, author of the "Life of Muhammad" said that the Prophet Muhammad trusted that his followers and relatives would be better off if they migrated to a country whose religion was Christianity-a scriptural religion whose Prophet was Jesus son of Mary. He was not afraid that his followers would convert and give up their faith in favor of any other established religion.

He was more convinced that Islam would be more protected in its infancy in a fertile and prosperous land ruled by the Scripture than among the ignominious pagans of Arabia.

The companions and relatives of the Prophet were prepared to sacrifice and suffer all sorts of hardship and alienation rather than give up their own conviction and freedom. The Prophet gave his companions the following letter to give the king when they reached Ethiopia.

"In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, Most Gracious, From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah to the Negus Al-Asham, king of Abyssinia.

Peace, I praise Allah to you, the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Faithful, the Watcher, and I bear witness that Jesus, son of Mary, is the Spirit of Allah and His Word, Which He cast to Mary the virgin, the good, the pure, so that she conceived Jesus. Allah created him from His Spirit and His Breathing as He created Adam by His Hand and His Breathing. I call you to Allah, the Unique without partner, and to His obedience, and to follow me and believe in that which came to me, for I am the Messenger of Allah.

I have sent to you my cousin Jafar with a number of Muslims, and when they come, entertain them without haughtiness, for I invite you and your armies to Allah. I have accomplished my work and my admonition, so receive my advice. Peace upon all those that follow True Guidance."

In view of this determination, the Ethiopian king, Negus As'ha'mah, undoubtedly recognized the significance of the Prophet Muhammad as a Messenger of Allah, and the need to treat the Muslims with kindness and dignity. The Christian church leaders who listened to the debate between the Muslims learned the truth about Islam.

Thus, they accepted the universality of the message of the Prophet based on the truthful similarity with the Scripture which prophesied the advent of Muhammad as a Prophet. The Quran describes their belief in these words:

"And when they listen to revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the Truth. They pray: ‘Our Lord! we believe; write us among the witnesses" (Quran 5:83).

In the sixth year of the Hijra, the Prophet wrote letters to different rulers of the world inviting them to Islam. Among the first leaders to receive the letter was the King of Ethiopia (Abyssinia). This second letter was sent with Amir ibn Umayya and reads as follows:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, Most Gracious. From Muhammad,t the Messenger of Allah, to the Negus Al-Asham, king of Abyssinia, Peace is for the one who follows the right guidance and believes in Allah and His Messenger. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah. He is one and has no partners. He has neither wife nor child. And Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger.

I call you to Islam for I am His Messenger. Accept Islam and you will be safe. O people of the Book! Come to something which is common between us and you, that we worship none by Allah; nor associate anything with Him; nor make any other our Lord besides Allah. If they turn away, then tell them we are obedient to Allah. If you deny it, the burden of the Christians, your people, will fall upon you." The seal of Muhammad, the Messenger.

The king received the envoy of the Prophet with great respect and showed him all the honor he deserved, and accepted Islam despite the objection of his family and the Church.

The king wrote back saying"...I testify that you are the Messenger of Allah, true and confirming those before you. I have given my allegiance to you and to your nephew and I have surrendered myself through him to the Lord of the Worlds."

In recognition of his kindness and when it was revealed to the Prophet that the Ethiopian king whom he had never met in person passed away, the Prophet offered the first funeral prayer in absentia in Islam (Salatul Ghaib) for the king who was named Ahmed Al-Najashi after he reverted to Islam.

Even though the family of the Ethiopian king, joined by the church, revolted against him because of his acceptance of Islam, and tried to stop the spreading of Islam, Islam rapidly and peacefully spread south of the Anunite kingdom.

By the fourteenth century, there were seven Islamic Sultanates [kingdoms]. The Sultanate of Yifat, Dawaro, Arbabini, Hadiya, Shakara, Bali, and Dara survived as Muslim enclaves until the northern Christian, with the help of European colonial powers, mainly from Portugal, expanded by force and by the late 18th century, formed "Ethiopia" as we know it today.

Based on the Europe World Year Book 1991 and UNICEF/ETHIOPIA the estimated number of Ethiopian Muslims, which ranges between 23.9 million to 27.7 million (45 percent-52 percent), ranks as the third largest Muslim population in Africa after Nigeria and Egypt.

Overall, it is three times as large as Somalia, Guinea or Niger, 1.2 times as large as the Sudan's Muslim population; twice as large as Yemen or Saudi Arabia or Syria; six times as large as Libya; 1.5 times as large as Iraq; 1.1 times as large as Algeria or Morocco.

Yet, despite the scale of abuses and suffering of the Muslim people of Ethiopia, their agony was largely ignored by the world community, especially by the Muslim world.

According to Ethiopian Muslims' estimate, their number is between 65 and 70 percent of the total population.

Government after succeeding government made the effort to portray Ethiopia as an island of Christianity by minimizing the number of Ethiopian Muslims.

For centuries, the policy of fear and distrust forced the monarchy, which was overthrown in 1974, and the church to espouse an oppressive posture in relation to the Muslim populace, a majority in Ethiopia, consisting of ethnically diverse groups largely living in rural areas.

Moreover, their distrustful policy towards the surrounding neighbors led to centuries of unwarranted isolation from the rest of the world.

The monarchs, with the blessing of the Church, committed unparalleled genocide against the Muslims of Ethiopia in order to create a one-religion and, if possible, a one-ethnic empire.

In their effort to uproot Islam from the country, they have employed the services of western missionary groups who relentlessly devoted their time and financial resources for the main purpose of converting Muslims, especially orphan children of famine and drought victims, to Christianity.

By contrast, any religious, educational, cultural or trade access to the Ethiopian Muslims from the surrounding neighbors used to provoke the anxiety of the isolationists who dominated the traditional political power structure over 700 years.

Very often when the Ethiopian Muslims performed Hajj or Umra pilgrimages in large numbers, it is considered as a sudden rise of "Islamic Fundamentalism" in spite of the fact that the annual pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the sacred pillars of Islam for those who can financially afford it.

To build Islamic schools was out of question. Yet Muslims were forced to financially contribute for church buildings, and in most cases their fertile lands were confiscated and handed over to the church.

Prior to 1974, the church owned a third of the fertile lands in the country.

To build their mosques, Muslims had to obtain building permits from the church, and in most cases they are denied. The injustices committed against the Muslims of Ethiopia are so enormous that it is impossible to fully detail them here.

It is indeed Divine intervention from Allah that Islam not only survived but also flourished in Ethiopia.

The struggle of Ethiopian Muslims to save their religion and protect their basic God-given human rights went unnoticed by the outside world.

A few among the most honored Muslim leaders in Ethiopia who struggled hard to save Islam by traveling throughout the country and teaching the religion are Sheikh Abadir of Harar, Sheikh Nur Hussein of Bale, Sheich Aba Budelah who is known as Aba Ramuz of Abret in Chancho, and Sheikh Tola and Sheikh Muhammad Sani Habib of Wollo.

These Muslim legends, with the help and Mercy of Allah, left behind a legacy of true dedication and struggle for us to emulate. There are thousands of their students who are following their footsteps.

Among the well-known Ulemas nowadays is Sheikh Muhammad Wale of Darra. He has been incarcerated since February 1995 for no reason other than trying to teach Islam and advocate the human rights of the Muslims.

Of late, it has been observed that the Ethiopian government-in conjunction with the Eritrean government and with the financial support of the American and Israeli governments, has revived a dormant Muslim phobia anchored in isolationist mentality and historically engendered feuds with neighbors across the Red Sea, and neighboring countries in East and Northeast Africa such as Somalia and the Sudan.

This act is a source of threat to the political and economic stability of the region.

The coordination of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim policies of the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments started with the subjugation of their own Muslim communities.

The Ethiopian government has fallen into the trap of the false beliefs of the New World Order. Espousing any policy that undermines freedom and is injurious to the self-image of Muslims is considered in the interest of the stability of the region from the so-called invaders or what euphemistically is known in the modern parlance of the political and religious opposition as fundamentalists.

This fabricated paternalistic insult to the Muslim is certainly detrimental to dialogue, peace and stability.

Since the peaceful December 1994 demonstration of Ethiopian Muslims demanding justice and equality, the government has taken drastic actions to suppress the Muslims community leaders elected to run the day to day affairs of the Muslim community are still languishing in the main prison of Addis Ababa.

Quranic schools were closed and all governmental and non-governmental Islamic humanitarian organizations were ordered to close and leave the country. Tens of thousands of imported written materials about Islam are sitting in the custom warehouses and are ordered to be burned. Yet again, the Ethiopian government has deliberately failed to refrain from direct involvement in the internal affairs of the Muslim people by conducting an election for the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and having its cronies control the Council.

Most of the so-called elected are not religiously qualified to run the affairs of the Muslims. The Council's first action taken was to pass a ruling that any volunteer who teaches Quran in mosques or any individual who wants to participate in Dawa work must obtain a license. This procedure is used as a control mechanism.

By contrast, there are over 100 church groups freely roaming the country teaching their religion. There are 96 different weekly and monthly Christian magazines and booklets flooding the country by the millions. Their primary target, as one official of the World Council of Churches stated, is to Christianize the entire population of Ethiopia.

It is irrefutable and historically true that the Muslim majority in Ethiopia have been the victims of horrific persecution for a long time under Ethiopian Christian rulers who are sustained by European powers.

The Ethiopian rulers, from the time right after Ahmed Al-Najashi all the way down to the present regime, have developed a deep-rooted hatred for Islam.

Religious persecution and cultural domination, characterized by the destruction of mosques and Islamic schools, detention and even execution of local Imams, religious leaders, Sheikhs, and the burning of the copies of the Quran and other religious books was rampant under the Christian rulers of Ethiopia.

It is time for Muslims around the world to open their eyes and see what is happening to their brothers and sisters in Ethiopia.

The land of the first Hijra is being groomed once again by the enemies of equality, justice and human rights to be the bastion of Christianity in East Africa. This i the New World Order in practice.

Insha Allah, they will fail miserably. Allah reminds us in the Quran: "Remember how the unbelievers plotted against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or slay thee, or get thee out of our home. Thy plot and plan. And Allah too plans, but the best of planners is Allah" (Quran 8:30).

Allah's Apostle said: A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim, so he should not oppress him, nor should he hand him over to an oppressor. Whoever fulfilled the needs of his brother, Allah will fulfill his needs; whoever brought his Muslim brother out of discomfort, Allah will bring him out of the discomforts of the Day of Resurrection, and whoever screened a Muslim, Allah will screen him on the Day of Resurrection (narrated by Abdullah bin Umar)

*When this article was first published, Najib Mohammed was the President of the Washington, D.C.-based Federation of Ethiopian Muslims in North America (FEMNA).*

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Umm Ayman, Barakah, may Allah be pleased with her



A Notable Muslim African Woman

If you're looking for an important Muslim African woman to talk about during Black History month, look no further than the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) , and the woman he described as his "mother after my own mother. She is the rest of my family."

Barakah or Umm Ayman was the name of the woman whom the noble Prophet esteemed so highly. She was the first person to hold him in her arms when he was born and the only person who knew him from that point until his death. She was one of the few Muslims who the Prophet assured of a place in Paradise.

"Be a mother to him, Barakah. And don't ever leave him," Amina instructed her about her son as she lay dying.

Umm Ayman did not fail in her responsibility.

Her beginnings were more than humble. In her youth, the Abyssinian girl was put up for sale in Makkah as a slave. In pre-Islamic Arabia, slavery was no shame, and slaves were treated like animals.

But Barakah was blessed to be treated with kindness.

She was bought by a noble and gentle man: Abdullah, the son of Abdul Muttalib. The father of the Prophet.

Barakah not only took care of Abdullah's affairs as a servant in his home, but after he married the Prophet's mother, she looked after Amina as well.

It was Umm Ayman who slept at the foot of Amina's bed and comforted her when, only two weeks after her wedding, her husband was instructed to leave for that journey to Syria, after which he never came back. It was Umm Ayman who took care of Amina during her pregnancy.1

It was Umm Ayman who gave Amina the news of her husband's death at Yathrib (her son, too, would one day be buried there), what was later to be known as Madinah.

As the Prophet faced tragedy upon tragedy, Umm Ayman was there for him. From the time when his mother died when he was six, to when his grandfather Abdul Muttalib died when he was eight, Umm Ayman stayed with the Prophet.

It was only after the Prophet married Khadija (may Allah be pleased with her) that she married, and that too, on their insistence.

She married Ubayd ibn Zayd from the Khazraj tribe of Yathrib and they had a son named Ayman, thus her name Umm Ayman.

When the Prophet received the prophethood, Umm Ayman was among the first Muslims, and like the others, bravely faced the punishments of the Quraish for those who dared to believe in La ilaha illa Allah Muhammadur Rasool ullah.

She and Zayd ibn Harithah, another companion who lived in the Prophet's household, put their lives on the line to find out about the plots and conspiracies of the pagan Makkans against the Prophet and the Muslims.

During the Battle of Uhud she gave out water to the thirsty soldiers and took care of the wounded. She accompanied the Prophet on some expeditions.

She tied her well-being to that of Islam. During a visit from the Prophet, he asked: "Ya Ummi! Are you well?" and she would reply: "I am well, O Messenger of Allah so long as Islam is."

Umm Ayman's husband died not very long after their marriage. When she was in about her 50s, the Prophet, when speaking to his companions said, "Should one of you desire to marry a woman from the people of Paradise, let him marry Umm Ayman."

It was Zayd who stepped forward and agreed to marry her. They had a son named Usamah who was described as "the beloved son of the beloved." In other words, the Prophet loved both he and his father.

One example of Umm Ayman's dedication to Islam and the Prophet was when she trekked across the burning desert through sandstorms on foot from Makkah to Madinah to join the Prophet. Despite the harshness of the journey though, she persisted, and was given good news when she reached her destination.

When she got to Madinah, swollen feet, dust-covered face and all, the Prophet said to her,

"Ya Umm Ayman! Ya Ummi! (O Umm Ayman! O my mother!) Indeed for you is a place in Paradise!"

She became a widow again, after Zayd was killed during the Battle of Mutah in Syria. She also lived to see her son's martyrdom at the Battle of Hunayn.

Ayman lived to see her other "son" die as well: the Prophet. But it was not for him she cried. When asked, she said, "By Allah, I knew that the Messenger of Allah would die but I cry now because the revelation from on high has come to an end for us."

Umm Ayman died when Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) was Khalifa.

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Timbuktu's desert scrolls: Re-writing the history of Africa



[**Taha Ghayyur**](https://www.soundvision.com/authors/taha-ghayyur)

You may have witnessed a moment, an event or a discovery that would change the future of a community. This event or discovery would have to be something exceptional and dramatic to write a new chapter in the books of history.

But imagine witnessing a moment or discovery that would *re-write* the history of an entire nation! That has got to be something spectacular to erase and replace the pages of history.

This is precisely what has happened in Timbuktu, Mali in the last five years. Over a million manuscripts have been re-discovered and about 20 million more in West Africa overall. These manuscripts date back to 12th to 16th century period.

"Prior to the re-discovery of manuscripts, people thought Africa had no literacy and that it was a simple oral tradition,” says Okolo Rashid, Executive Director of International Museum of Muslim Cultures (IMMC) in Jackson, Mississippi.  "As a team of 25 scholars and historians study this newly uncovered global legacy of literacy in Africa, they believe it's enough evidence to re-write the history of Africa,” Rashid continued.

It is by far the most astounding revelation of its kind ever since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Intellectual Legacy of Africa

The Timbuktu manuscripts are a symbolic representation of the impact and influence of the early schools and universities (12th-16th centuries) that existed in West Africa.

"The fact that the trade of books in Mali was considered the most profitable business at that time shows how much West Africans loved literacy and education,” said Emad Al-Turk, Chairman and co-founder of IMMC.

These manuscripts, incredibly rich in style and content, illustrate the depth of knowledge and intellect of students and scholars in this center of learning.

The variety of topics these manuscripts cover is phenomenal. Some of the religious topics include: jurisprudence (Fiqh), human and women's rights, and Quranic commentary (Tafseer). In science, they cover everything from astronomy and medicine to mathematics.

"Interestingly, about 85 percent of manuscripts were written in Arabic, which indicates that writers were well-versed in Arabic and Islam, even though they may be addressing non-religious topics,” added Al-Turk.

Okolo Rashid described her trip to Timbuktu, Mali, in January 2004, as "indeed a moving and deeply spiritual journey.”

She said she marveled at these manuscripts "so beautifully bound in leather with calligraphy and illustrations painted on them.”

About one million manuscripts were hidden in Mali for over 500 years. As she explains, "it's God's Will that they survived, partly due to the arid environment.”

Opportunity to Tell the True Story

The rediscovery of ancient manuscripts offers an amazing opportunity to tell the true religious, political, social, and economic history of Africa to the world.

According to Al-Turk, this rediscovery is "extremely important for the educators in the American public school system because they need to teach students the correct story.”

It will also bring to light Muslim accomplishments in African history.

"For example, the concept of ‘global peace'. There is a large body of knowledge in the manuscripts developed around conflict resolution and mediation. This study will impact our global discourse on peace and justice. Through the writings of ‘scholars of peace' five centuries ago, we can learn from and adopt their unique model for local and global peace-keeping,” explained Rashid.

As we study these manuscripts, we realize that these people had developed a sophisticated socio-economic model for the publication industry. Africans in Timbuktu were at the forefront of the global Islamic knowledge industry at the time. They developed generations of local scholars who wrote books about everything. These books were then beautifully bound and exported.

Moreover, the manuscripts reveal that many Africans brought to America were very established and educated individuals. Some of them were judges, teachers, and merchants prior to the transatlantic slave trade. They were not brought over to be ‘civilized'.

"In fact Muslim Africans were the first cultural group to bring a revealed religion to America,” said Rashid.

These manuscripts may also serve as a "missing link” between African-Americans and Islam. "It will allow African-Americans to look at Islam and Muslim not as strangers anymore. This is the link that has been missing from our Black and African studies in universities all this time,” added Rashid.

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Servants of Allah: African Muslims enslaved in the Americas



[**Abdul Malik Mujahid**](https://www.soundvision.com/authors/abdul-malik-mujahid)

Abbu, the diary of a Muslim enslaved in America is being auctioned in New York. Muslims should purchase that." That's how my son alerted me to the Arabic diary kept by Omar ibn Said in North Carolina. Before we had gathered all of the information, the diary was auctioned off to a collector Derrick J. Beard, by Swann Galleries, New York. This is when my personal journey in search for the Muslim past in the Americas began several years ago.

Omar ibn Said (1770-1864) is one of the most well-known Muslims who was brought to America as a slave. He was brought in 1807 to North Carolina. Although it is said that he converted to Christianity, the myth evaporates fast if you know a bit of Arabic. Just before Omar's death, a North Carolina newspaper published a photo of what it called the "The Lord's Prayer," written in Arabic by him. However, when one reads the Arabic, it is Sura An Nasr (Chapter 110) of the Quran. Considering that it was written 40 years after Omar had been living under slavery, it is good Arabic. I noticed only one significant mistake; he added three words from Surah Al-Saff (Quran 61:13) to it. One must also consider that this was written verbatim when he was about 90 years old, shortly before his death.

About six months ago, I visited the website Amazon.com to purchase Allan D. Austin's book African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles. Amazon.com, in the style of the new online book selling culture, suggested that customers of Austin's book had also purchased Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas by Sylviane A. Diouf. Intrigued, I bought them both.

Austin's book contains information about the life of about 80 African Muslims enslaved in America between 1730 and 1860. All of these Muslims were educated and left some record of their presence. Austin's book became the first to offer a detailed record of these Muslims that brings to life aspects of American history that are known by few. The book is enhanced by a good collection of photos and manuscripts. Austin is a professor of African-American Studies in Massachusetts.

Diouf goes beyond Austin. While Austin honestly records and brings together the material scattered in museums and manuscripts, Diouf uses this type of information and adds sources from West Africa to build a thorough sociopolitical history of the four century-long struggle against slavery. Using fragments of evidence from slave narratives, diaries of slave traders and the Muslim history of West Africa, Diouf tells a compelling story that puts the Muslim struggle against slavery on the map of scholarship. This is probably the first book that focuses on Muslims' struggle against slavery.

Diouf's study is groundbreaking not only in its theme but also its approach. This meticulously researched book for the first time introduces French scholars reporting from the eastern side of the Atlantic about the socioeconomic picture of those being enslaved. France occupied parts of West Africa as the French joined British slave dealers in occupying Africa. The book takes its audience back and forth between West Africa and the Americas in piecing together a history of African Muslims over four centuries.

Muslims were certainly not at ease with their slavery. They were the early protesters and liberation leaders. The result was that as early as 1503 requests were being sent from Hispanola (Dominican Republic) to Spain to ban the import of Muslim slaves to the New World. However, the demand for slaves was so strong that no one paid attention to the pleas of the Spanish governors to stop the Muslims from coming.

Starting as early as 1522, when Muslims of the Wolof nation in the sugar plantation of admiral Don Diego Colon, son of Christopher Columbus, revolted in Hispaniola, Muslims have been in the forefront of the freedom struggle of slaves throughout the Americas. Some of the significant revolts were as follows: Mexico 1523, Cuba 1529, Panama, Venezuela and Peru in the 16th century, Guatemala 1627, Chile 1647, Florida 1830-1840, Brazil Bahia 1835. Most of these revolts were unsuccessful as far as freedom was concerned. These freedom fighters were ruthlessly crushed, hanged, burned, and even thrown in boiling oil.

The Haiti revolution, however, succeeded. Macandel and Boukmen both were major leaders of that revolution and both were Muslims like most of the other leaders of the slave revolts. Muslims did not just lead Muslims; they were leaders of the struggle for freedom of all slaves. The language of secret communication among the revolutionary leadership was Arabic. Many Arabic documents seized in the Bahia revolution of 1838 in Brazil have been translated. Slaves who escaped established free villages called maroon villages. In many of these maroon villages and in the slave quarters Muslims often developed their system of education and secret Masjids.

Diouf not only painstakingly documents the history of Muslims enslaved in the Americas, but also sheds light on how Muslims became the natural leaders of slaves. Diouf asserts that Muslims in West Africa were highly educated people. Therefore, those brought to the Americas as slaves were also educated and thus provided the necessary prerequisite for leadership. Based on the French documents from West Africa, she tells us that 60% of the Senegalese Muslims in 1880 were literate. She quotes Baron Roger, a governor of Senegal, who said that in 1828 "there are villages in which we find more Negroes who can read and write the Arabic, which for them is a dead and scholarly language, than we would find peasants in our French countryside who can read and write French!"

Unlike others who say that West Africa was predominantly Muslim (McCloud 1995 & Muhammad 1998), Diouf asserts that Muslims in West Africa were a minority during the 16th and 18th centuries. It was through the Muslim struggle against the Transatlantic slave trade that Muslim states and tribes rallied non-Muslims to their cause. Their territory became a haven of safety for not only Muslims but also non-Muslims to safeguard themselves against armed slave dealers. Islam became associated with resistance to foreign rule and protection of the weak. Uthman Dan Fodio is the leading name in this struggle. Although the Muslim struggle in West Africa did not succeed in stopping the slave trade, which was purposefully being fueled by the English and the French through arms and funds to conflicting parties so they could harvest prisoners as slaves, it did, however, result in Islam becoming the dominant religion of West Africa by the 19th century.

Muslims in America like all other slaves faced great difficulties in establishing families and communities. Muslims were subjected to double oppression in cases: one for being a slave and another for being Muslim. In several states it was illegal to even own a paper. However, wherever, it was possible they used their literacy to educate their children in Islam. Diouf does a great job in piecing together the first, detailed account of how a connection with the Quran was maintained by Muslim slaves and how Salat, Saum, and Zakat were established. We learn, for example, that African Muslims were using Arabic grammar written in French to teach Arabic in the secret Muslim schools in Brazil.

Muslims' love for education continued in slavery wherever possible. Gilberto Freyre, the Brazilian scholar is quoted as saying "in the slave sheds of Bahia in 1835 there were perhaps more persons who knew how to read and write than up above, in the Big Houses [of slave owners]". Diouf gives us an encouraging account of how African Muslims preserved their faith and maintained their religious lifestyle in the midst of a hostile environment to the best of their abilities.

What happened to these Muslims when slavery was officially over? Diouf's book does talk a bit about why early Muslims in the Americas disappeared despite their heroic four centuries-long struggle. But, it seems that Diouf decided to leave this topic for another scholar who can provide a similarly through work on the subject. The topic is important not just for historical purposes, but for the community that is living Islam in the Americas today. A Guyanese Muslim leader I met recently in Trinidad wondered aloud why and how Islam disappeared. His question is legitimate, considering that we can draw valuable lessons from our past.

Diouf does report narratives recorded as late as the 1940s about how Islam was practiced by some African-American descendants of slaves in the islands of the North Carolinas. Steven Barboza (1993) also mentions that in 1910 there were some 100,000 African Muslims in Brazil. Diouf asserts that the impact of the Islamic past survives in many things African-American's do today including jazz music.

However, I suggest, the struggling Muslims in slavery are survived by tens of "halfway houses" towards Islam, that is religious movements that were established and flourished during the nineteenth and twentieth century. They began even before the disappearance of Islam in the early twentieth century. Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple (North Carolina, 1913) and the Nation of Islam (1930) were the two major examples of movements which challenged black Christianity. If the surveys are to be believed, about 45% of the six million Muslims in America are African-Americans today. The movements that declare Islam as their faith deserve the credit for preserving the quest for Islam from the end of the slavery to the current time.

Aminah Beverly McCloud's African American Islam (1995) and Richard Brent Turner's Islam in the African-American Experience (1997) pick up where Diouf's history stops. Both write essentially about this transition period of Islamic history that I am calling halfway houses towards Islam. McCloud writes about how, in the first decades of the twentieth century, African Americans began to actively form communities that defined themselves as Islamic. McCloud writes about more than ten communities that define themselves as Muslims in the first thirty years of the twentieth century.

In the 1960s Muslims, particularly those from the Nation of Islam, had a tremendous impact on the consciousness of Black movements. The Muslim heavyweight boxing champion, Muhammad Ali, ignited pride and dignity not just within the Black community but also among Muslims and people of honor everywhere. Later in the twentieth century many individuals like Malik Shahbaz (Malcolm X) joined real Islam leaving the halfway houses behind them.

But the most significant change came when Imam Warith Deen Mohammed led and helped hundreds and thousands of his father Elijah Muhammad's followers make a transition to real Islam in 1975. This was the single largest acceptance of Islam in modern history and a tribute to the millions who struggled to preserve Islam through four centuries of slavery.

Focus on the legacy of the four century-long resistance against slavery does not, however, provide satisfactory answers for those struggling to preserve their Islamic identity in the twenty-first century in the Western Hemisphere. Did they disappear because of the efforts of the Christian abolitionists' missionary efforts? Was it because of the dominant Christian culture? Or was it due to continued oppression by the white majority that made it impossible for Muslims to survive? Was it the absence of education with hardly any contact with the world of Islam and forced conversions that lead to the gradual disappearance of Islam? Maybe it was a combination of all of these factors which will require a fresh look on the subject by the next Diouf.

Suppression of Islam and oppression of Muslims cannot be ruled out as a major factor. Answers will also require a thorough study of the last major rebellions in Florida, USA and Bahia, Brazil in the 1830s. What happened to those freedom fighters when their revolution failed? It may uncover the types of massacres that resulted in the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous nations of Americas.

Forced mass conversion of slaves was a norm in the Americas not an exception. Therefore, we are not wondering about the disappearance of all, we are only asking about what happened to those African Muslims who fought slavery, resisted conversions, freed themselves and whose heroic struggle to keep Islam alive is documented by Diouf.  Could the culprit be freedom itself? Could it be freedom which finally diluted the spirit of resistance and survival which built the Muslim communities and maroon colonies? Did they gradually assimilate and lose when slavery was officially abolished?

The challenges of the West are coercing "free" Muslims in America today to lose their Islam as well. It is not easy to be a Muslim in America. It is not just socioeconomic pressures, stereotyping, discrimination, and a $4 trillion dollar per annum strong Christianity, but also the media tools of this civilization which bring Haram choices to your living room. The challenges of freedom must be met by making the choice of good at least as charming and presentable as the choices of evil.

Although a popular phrase repeated in the American media sates that Islam is the fastest growing religion in America, the fact is that not more than four percent Muslims in America attend Masjids on Fridays as compared to more than 40% Christians who attend church at least once a week. A good number of immigrant Muslims hug the American dream so steadfastly that they wake up to Islam only when it's too late for their children. Less than one percent of children attend any kind of Muslim schooling whereas 80 percent of Jewish children attend some form of Jewish education in America. A recent study found that more than 60% of people who accept Islam in the state of New York leave it within a few years (Ilyas Ba-Yunus 2001). Some say the historical movement towards Islam among African-Americans, which started at the heel of civil right movement of the sixties and seventies, has substantially slowed down. According to Imam Khalid Griggs, most of the top writers in the African-American press today are anti-Islam, unlike in the sixties and the seventies. American foreign policy and the conflict with Sudan is helping the Christian crusade under the flag of anti slavery movement in Africa, which explicitly blames the "Arab of Sudan" for keeping the slavery alive in the "African South". Hollywood has been also very thoughtful in picking its terrorism fighters who are now depicted as Blacks fighting Arab Terrorists to save America.

There is a great curiosity among American Muslims about their history in America. It has given birth to a whole genre, which includes books and essays asserting Islam's presence in America as early as the thirteenth century. Steven Barboza's American Jihad (1993), Richard Wormser's American Islam (1994), N. Brent Kennedy's The Melungeons (1997), Richard Brent Turner's Islam in the African-American Experience (1997), Abdullah Hakim Quick's Deeper Roots (1996), and Amir Muhammad's Muslims in America (1998) are just a few of these books. Several monographs by Al-Ahari must be mentioned here which provided an early insight into this subject.

This history may be the reason that the younger generation of immigrant Muslims in America is more attracted towards African-American Muslim leaders whose rhetoric for social justice resonates the centuries-long struggle against slavery and oppression. Four of the five most popular speakers of Islam in America today are Africans.

It seems that writers of the last decade of the twentieth century have finally picked up where Alex Haley's book Roots and C. Eric Lincoln's book the Black Muslims in America left off. Haley placed Muslims at the heart of Africans enslaved in America. His was a novel with imagination and insight about a people who were his ancestors. Diouf's work, however, is the first through account of that historical struggle against slavery that began in the early 16th century on both sides of Atlantic and continued until the late nineteenth century. Diouf provides a detailed examination of an area of Black History that was pretty much ignored.

I hope this work will fuel further research–it certainly inspired me to study further. After reading in Diouf's book that a first surviving copy of the Quran from the slave era was recently discovered in Trinidad, I started contacting Muslims, journalists and historians in Trinidad. While I was unable to trace who has that copy of the Quran, it led me to visit a historical site in a dense rain forest of Trinidad where free Muslim slaves had established a maroon colony long before slavery was officially abolished. The site still needs full excavation. However, the Hindu-led government of Trinidad is showing hardly any interest in the heritage of African Muslims.

One of the significant notes to this study of the literature on African-American Islam is how Qadianis find a good position and reference. Their mission in America is about 80 years old and active essentially among African-Americans. Turner and McCloud devote a good portion of their discussion to them, while many other American authors including John Esposito routinely refer to their sources as well. It seems that the Qadianis' mission with the African-American community is regarded with respect while these scholars are either unaware of their not being Muslims or this fact has been relegated to being some Pakistani preoccupation. In a recent conference of the Nation of Islam in Chicago, it was noticed that the most dominant translation of the Quran was that of Muhammad Ali, a Qadiani of Lahori branch.

I thank God for Diouf and I pray for more scholars like her, not just for the extraordinary quality of groundbreaking research but for its timing also. Hardly a few months pass by when someone does not blame Islam for the continued slavery in Africa. While Islam got some blame for the African custom of female circumcision, not much independent study is coming out regarding the social conditions which are being described as slavery. I wonder when Christian missionaries and American foreign policy will discover untouchability in India, which is the most persistent form of slavery still being practiced upon 200 million people in India.

The American Library Association has given Diouf's book the Outstanding Academic Title Of The Year award (Choice 1999) which this reviewer also had the honor of receiving (Choice 1991) for the book Conversion to Islam: Untouchables' Strategy for Protest in India. Despite being an Academic book, Diouf's work is easily accessible. I recommended it for anyone who cherishes freedom and justice for all.

Sylviane A. Diouf, Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas, New York, New York University Press, Washington Square, New York, NY 10003, USA, 1998, pp. 254

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Senegal: Muslim country profile



Background:

Independent from France in 1960, Senegal joined with The Gambia to form the nominal confederation of Senegambia in 1982. However, the envisaged integration of the two countries was never carried out, and the union was dissolved in 1989. Despite peace talks, a southern separatist group sporadically has clashed with government forces since 1982. Senegal has a long history of participating in international/ The Gambia is almost an enclave of Senegal peacekeeping.

Senegal and Islam

The Toucouleur people, who were among the early inhabitants of Senegal, converted to Islam in the 11th century, but their religious beliefs retained strong elements of animism. Other sources say that the Berbers brought Islam to Senegal in the eigth century.

Although Senegal is neither a large nor a strategically located country, it has nonetheless played a prominent role in African politics since its independence. As a black nation that is more than 90% Muslim, Senegal has been a diplomatic and cultural bridge between the Islamic and black African worlds.

The Toucouleur and Fulani peoples of interior Senegal helped spread Islam across large areas of West Africa, from Mali to Nigeria. During the 1990s the Muridiyah, an Islamic brotherhood, remained a powerful force in Senegalese society.

Today, Islam in Senegal is mainly based on the Brotherhoods, centred around two great marabout families. In fact, nowhere else do marabouts command as much influence as in Senegal where several Brotherhoods are active. Most Senegalese Muslims tend to place themselves under the authority and direction of the Great Marabout, in much the same way as a Catholic obeys the Church's commandments. The Brotherhoods are led by Khalifs, always chosen from the Founder's family. To belong to a marabout family is to be someone special. It's not a clergy but something like it.

Senegal and slavery

Gor?e Island became a major center for the Atlantic slave trade throughout the 1700s, when millions of Africans were shipped from there to North America.

The British took parts of Senegal at various times, but the French gained possession in 1840 and made it part of French West Africa in 1895. In 1946, together with other parts of French West Africa, Senegal became an overseas territory of France. On June 20, 1960, it became an independent republic federated with Mali, but the federation collapsed within four months.

Geography

Location: Western Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania
Geographic coordinates: 14 00 N, 14 00 W
Map references: Africa
Area:
total: 196,190 sq km
land: 192,000 sq km
water: 4,190 sq km
Area - comparative: slightly smaller than South Dakota
Land boundaries:
total: 2,640 km
border countries: The Gambia 740 km, Guinea 330 km, Guinea-Bissau 338 km, Mali 419 km, Mauritania 813 km

Climate

Tropical; hot, humid; rainy season (May to November) has strong southeast winds; dry season (December to April) dominated by hot, dry, harmattan wind
Terrain: generally low, rolling, plains rising to foothills in southeast

Elevation extremes:
lowest point: Atlantic Ocean 0 m
highest point: unnamed feature near Nepen Diakha 581 m

Natural Resources:

fish, phosphates, iron ore

Land use:
arable land: 12%
permanent crops: 0%
permanent pastures: 16%
forests and woodland: 54%
other: 18% (1993 est.)
Irrigated land: 710 sq km (1993 est.)

People

Population: 9,987,494 (July 2000 est.)
Age structure:
0-14 years: 45% (male 2,237,678; female 2,213,632)
15-64 years: 52% (male 2,501,649; female 2,729,412)
65 years and over: 3% (male 152,236; female 152,887) (2000 est.)
Population growth rate: 2.94% (2000 est.)
Birth rate: 37.94 births/1,000 population (2000 est.)
Death rate: 8.57 deaths/1,000 population (2000 est.)
Net migration rate: 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2000 est.)
Sex ratio:
at birth: 1.03 male(s)/female
under 15 years: 1.01 male(s)/female
15-64 years: 0.92 male(s)/female
65 years and over: 1 male(s)/female
total population: 0.96 male(s)/female (2000 est.)
Infant mortality rate: 58.08 deaths/1,000 live births (2000 est.)
Life expectancy at birth:
total population: 62.19 years
male: 60.6 years
female: 63.82 years (2000 est.)
Total fertility rate: 5.21 children born/woman (2000 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Senegalese (singular and plural)
adjective: Senegalese

Ethnic groups:

Wolof 43.3%, Pular 23.8%, Serer 14.7%, Jola 3.7%, Mandinka 3%, Soninke 1.1%, European and Lebanese 1%, other 9.4%

Religions:

**Muslim 92%**, indigenous beliefs 6%, Christian 2% (mostly Roman Catholic)

Languages:

French (official), Wolof, Pulaar, Jola, Mandinka

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write
total population: 33.1%
male: 43%
female: 23.2% (1995 est.)

Government and politics

Government type: republic under multiparty democratic rule
Capital: Dakar

Administrative divisions: 10 regions (regions, singular - region); Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaolack, Kolda, Louga, Saint-Louis, Tambacounda, Thies, Ziguinchor

Independence: 4 April 1960 from France; complete independence was achieved upon dissolution of federation with Mali on 20 August 1960 (The Gambia and Senegal signed an agreement on 12 December 1981 (constituted February 1982) that called for the creation of a loose confederation to be known as Senegambia, but the agreement was dissolved on 30 September 1989)

National holiday: Independence Day, 4 April (1960)

Constitution: 3 March 1963, revised 1991

Legal system: based on French civil law system; judicial review of legislative acts in Constitutional Court; the Council of State audits the government's accounting office; Senegal has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:
chief of state: President Abdoulaye WADE (since NA 2000)
head of government: Prime Minister Niasse MOUSTAPHA (since NA 2000)
cabinet: Council of Ministers appointed by the prime minister in consultation with the president
elections: president elected by popular vote for a seven-year term; election last held 27 February 2000 (next to be held 27 February 2007); prime minister appointed by the president
election results: Abdoulaye WADE elected president; percent of vote in the second round of voting - Abdoulaye WADE (PDS) NA%, Abdou DIOUF (PS) NA%

Legislative branch: unicameral National Assembly or Assemblee
Nationale (140 seats; members are elected by direct popular vote to serve five-year terms)

Eelections: last held 24 May 1998 (next to be held NA May 2003)
election results: percent of vote by party - PS 50%, PDS 19%, UDS-R 13%, And Jef 5%, LD-MPT 4%, CDP 2%, FSD 1%, PDS-R 1%, RND 1%, BGC 1%, PIT 1%, other 2%; seats by party - PS 93, PDS 23, UDS-R 11, And Jef 4, LD-MPT 3, CDP 1, FSD 1, PDS-R 1, RND 1, BGC 1, PIT 1

Judicial branch: under the terms of a reform of the judicial system implemented in 1992, the principal organs of the judiciary are as follows: Constitutional Court; Council of State; Court of Final Appeals or Cour de Cassation; Court of Appeals

Political parties and leaders: African Party for Democracy and Socialism or And Jef (also known as PADS/AJ) [Landing SAVANE, secretary general]; African Party of Independence [Majhemout DIOP]; Democratic and Patriotic Convention or CDP (also known as Garab-Gi) [Dr. Iba Der THIAM]; Democratic League-Labor Party Movement or LD-MPT [Dr. Abdoulaye BATHILY]; Front for Socialism and Democracy or FSD [Cheikh Abdoulaye DIEYE]; Gainde Centrist Bloc or BGC [Jean-Paul DIAS]; Independence and Labor Party or PIT [Amath DANSOKHO]; National Democratic Rally or RND [Madier DIOUF]; Senegalese Democratic Party or PDS [Abdoulaye WADE]; Senegalese Democratic Party-Renewal or PDS-R [Serigne Lamine DIOP, secretary general]; Senegalese Democratic Union-Renewal or UDS-R [Mamadou Puritain FALL]; Socialist Party or PS [President Abdou DIOUF]; Union for Democratic Renewal or URD [Djibo Leyti KA]; other small parties

Political pressure groups and leaders: labor; Muslim brotherhoods; students; teachers
International organization participation: ACCT, ACP, AfDB, CCC, ECA,

Diplomatic representation in the US:
chief of mission: Ambassador Mamadou Mansour SECK
chancery: 2112 Wyoming Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008
telephone: [1] (202) 234-0540

Diplomatic representation from the US:
chief of mission: Ambassador Harriet L. ELAM-THOMAS
embassy: Avenue Jean XXIII at the corner of Avenue Kleber, Dakar
mailing address: B. P. 49, Dakar
telephone: [221] 823-4296, 823-7384
FAX: [221] 822-2991

Flag description: three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), yellow, and red with a small green five-pointed star centered in the yellow band; uses the popular pan-African colors of Ethiopia

Economy

Overview: In January 1994, Senegal undertook a bold and ambitious economic reform program with the support of the international donor community. This reform began with a 50% devaluation of Senegal's currency, the CFA franc, which is linked at a fixed rate to the French franc.

Government price controls and subsidies have been steadily dismantled. After seeing its economy contract by 2.1% in 1993, Senegal made an important turnaround, thanks to the reform program, with real growth in GDP averaging 5% annually in 1995-99. Annual inflation has been pushed down to 2%, and the fiscal deficit has been cut to less than 1.5% of GDP. Investment rose steadily from 13.8% of GDP in 1993 to 16.5% in 1997. As a member of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), Senegal is working toward greater regional integration with a unified external tariff.

Senegal also realized full Internet connectivity in 1996, creating a miniboom in information technology-based services. Private activity now accounts for 82% of GDP. On the negative side, Senegal faces deep-seated urban problems of chronic unemployment, juvenile delinquency, and drug addiction. Real GDP growth is expected to rise above 6%, while inflation is likely to hold at 2% in 2000-2001.

GDP: purchasing power parity - $16.6 billion (1999 est.)

GDP - real growth rate: 5% (1999 est.)

GDP - per capita: purchasing power parity - $1,650 (1999 est.)

GDP - composition by sector:
agriculture: 19%
industry: 20%
services: 61% (1997 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share:
lowest 10%: 1.4%
highest 10%: 42.8% (1991)
Inflation rate (consumer prices): 2% (1999 est.)
Labor force - by occupation: agriculture 60%
Unemployment rate: NA%; urban youth 40%

Budget

Revenues: $885 million
expenditures: $885 million, including capital expenditures of $125 million (1996 est.)

Industries

Agricultural and fish processing, phosphate mining, fertilizer production, petroleum refining, construction materials
Industrial production growth rate: 7% (1998 est.)
Electricity - production: 1.2 billion kWh (1998)
Electricity - production by source:
fossil fuel: 100%
hydro: 0%
nuclear: 0%
other: 0% (1998)
Electricity - consumption: 1.116 billion kWh (1998)
Electricity - exports: 0 kWh (1998)
Electricity - imports: 0 kWh (1998)

Agriculture

Products: peanuts, millet, corn, sorghum, rice, cotton, tomatoes, green vegetables; cattle, poultry, pigs; fish
Exports: $925 million (f.o.b., 1998)
Exports - commodities: fish, ground nuts (peanuts), petroleum products, phosphates, cotton
Exports - partners: France 22%, Italy, India, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali (1998)
Imports: $1.2 billion (f.o.b., 1998)
Imports - commodities: foods and beverages, consumer goods, capital goods, petroleum products
Imports - partners: France 36%, other EU countries, Nigeria, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Algeria, US, China, Japan (1998)
Debt - external: $3.4 billion (1998 est.)
Economic aid - recipient: $647.5 million (1995)
Currency: 1 Communaute Financiere Africaine franc (CFAF) = 100 centimes
Exchange rates: Communaute Financiere Africaine francs (CFAF) per US$1 - 647.25 (January 2000), 615.70 (1999), 589.95 (1998), 583.67 (1997), 511.55 (1966), 499.15 (1995)
note: since 1 January 1999, the CFAF is pegged to the euro at a rate of 655.957 CFA francs per euro
Fiscal year: calendar year

Communications

Telephones - main lines in use: 82,000 (1995)
Telephones - mobile cellular: 122 (1995)
Telephone system:
domestic: above-average urban system; microwave radio relay, coaxial cable and fiber-optic cable in trunk system
international: 4 submarine cables; satellite earth station - 1 Intelsat (Atlantic Ocean)
Radio broadcast stations: AM 10, FM 14, shortwave 0 (1998)
Radios: 1.24 million (1997)
Television broadcast stations: 1 (1997)
Televisions: 361,000 (1997)
Internet Service Providers (ISPs): 4 (1999)\

Transportation

Railways:
total: 906 km
narrow gauge: 906 km 1.000-meter gauge (70 km double track)
Highways:
total: 14,576 km
paved: 4,271 km
unpaved: 10,305 km (1996 est.)
Waterways: 897 km total; 785 km on the Senegal river, and 112 km on the Saloum river
Ports and harbors: Dakar, Kaolack, Matam, Podor, Richard Toll, Saint-Louis, Ziguinchor
Airports: 20 (1999 est.)
Airports - with paved runways:
total: 10
over 3,047 m: 1
1,524 to 2,437 m: 7
914 to 1,523 m: 2 (1999 est.)
Airports - with unpaved runways:
total: 10
1,524 to 2,437 m: 5
914 to 1,523 m: 4
under 914 m: 1 (1999 est.)

Military

Military branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, National Gendarmerie, National Police (Surete Nationale)
Military manpower - military age: 18 years of age
Military manpower - availability:
males age 15-49: 2,218,920 (2000 est.)
Military manpower - fit for military service:
males age 15-49: 1,158,893 (2000 est.)
Military manpower - reaching military age annually:
males: 109,381 (2000 est.)
Military expenditures - dollar figure: $68 million (FY97)
Military expenditures - percent of GDP: 1.4% (FY97)

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