

**K-12 Outreach: Lesson Plan Modules**

**Module Title:** Islam in Africa

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**Lesson Overview and General information:**

Islam has had a long and fascinating history on the African continent. From Morocco to Mauritius, from Cape Town to Cape Verde, Islamic civilization and spirituality have left an indelible mark on the continent. Even in non-Muslim African societies the influence of Islam can be detected in areas as disparate as governance and fashion, commerce and language, medicine and cuisine. While estimates vary widely, around 42% of people living on the African continent identify as Muslim (30% of people living in Sub-Saharan Africa). While Africa is home to nearly a quarter of the world's Muslims, it has the highest Muslim population by percent of any continent. So understanding Islam is essential to understanding the history of Africa, and understanding Africa is essential to understanding the history of Islam.

**K-12 Classes this could be used for:**

World History, World Religions, Current Events, background for books being read in ELA/Literature where Islam is discussed, MS Geography, AP World History, AP Comparative Government and Politics

*While religion can sometimes be a difficult topic to teach, teaching about all of the major world religions is not just permitted, but required in all state standards in world cultures, world history and world geography courses. Most of these are concentrated at the middle and high school levels (grades 6-12). An important thing to remember is that you are educating your students, but not promoting or denigrating any religion. The role of religions in world history is complex, geographically more diverse than the boundaries of any one civilization, and should be followed over time. This may also be a good time to teach your students about respecting people's different beliefs and values.*

*Standards-Based Framework Concepts:*

- Accurate discussion of the basic beliefs of each faith.
- Intellectual traditions, institutions and social change over time – not just political history.
- Spread and current distribution of religions – and significant minority populations.
- Religions in early modern history.
- Contemporary religious expression and the role of religion in modern life.

## Content:

### Islam

The history of **Islam** begins in Arabia in the seventh century CE when a man named **Muhammad** began receiving revelations while meditating in a cave outside of his home in **Mecca**, a small trading and pilgrimage center on the Arabian peninsula. These Arabic revelations continued for another 22 years and were later compiled into the **Qur'an**, the sacred scripture and literal word of God for Muslims. The Qur'an's primary message was that of the unity of the Divine, which contrasted with the polytheism and idol-worship common among the Arabs of Mecca at that time. The Qur'an also presented itself as the latest in a series of revelations confirming the divine messages given to a line of prophets going all the way back to Adam, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and others. The early Muslims also scrupulously recorded and transmitted the sayings and "doings" of the Prophet Muhammad which became known as the **Sunnah**. The Qur'an and the Sunnah, the word of God and the words and actions of the Prophet, are the two foundations of Islamic civilization.

Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah emphasize social unity, justice, opposition to oppression and the importance of learning. They form the basis of the **Shari'ah**, or Islamic Law, which outlines God's will for how Muslims should live their lives individually and collectively, governing everything from economic transactions to dietary restrictions to how prayers should be said. *Shari'ah* has been interpreted by Muslims differently in different places and times, but these interpretations have all been based on the basic tenets of the faith as outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Perhaps the best summary of the fundamental teachings of Islam comes from a **hadith** (or official narration of an event in the Prophet's life) known as the hadith Gabriel:

While we were sitting with the Messenger of God, may God bless with him and grant him peace, one day a man came up to us whose clothes were extremely white, whose hair was extremely black, upon whom traces of traveling could not be seen, and whom none of us knew, until he sat down close to the Prophet so that he rested his knees upon his knees and placed his two hands upon his thighs and said, "Muhammad, tell me about Islam" The Messenger of God said, "Islam is that you witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and you perform the [five-times daily] prayer, and you give the poor-tithe, and you fast [during the month of] Ramadan, and you perform the hajj if you are able." He said, "You have told the truth," and we were amazed at him asking him and [then] telling him that he told the truth. He said, "Tell me about *iman* [faith]." He said, "That you believe in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day... He said, 'You have told the truth.' He said, "Tell me about *ihsan* [excellence]" He said, "That you worship God as if you see Him, for if you don't see Him, He sees you." ...He went away, and I remained some time. Then he asked, 'Umar, do you know who the questioner was?' I said, 'God and His Messenger know best.' He said, "He was [the angel] Gabriel who came to you to teach you your religion."

The famous **five pillars of Islam** come from this hadith and are:

-The **Shahada**-to testify that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the messenger of God.

-**Salat**-the daily prayers are performed facing Mecca, five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night.

-**Zakat**-All Muslims who are not impoverished are required to give 2.5% of their assets as charity to the poor of their community.

-**Ramadan**-Muslims who are not sick or too young or old, fast during the month of Ramadan, abstaining from food and drink from dawn to dusk.

-**Hajj**-Those who are able are required to perform the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the center of Islamic world and the birthplace of the religion, at least once in their life.

Some people add *Jihad* as a sixth pillar to these five. *Jihad* literally means struggle in Arabic, and according to a hadith is divided into two kinds: **the Greater Jihad** (*Jihad al-Akbar*), which is every Muslim's struggle against his or her ego or lower soul, and **the Lesser Jihad** (*Jihad al-Asghar*) which is the military struggle in defense of Muslim life, land, and property. The *Shari'ah* also dictated how, when, and for what reasons *jihad* could be waged[3].

While the five pillars describe what Muslims should do, the section of this hadith on *Iman* (Arabic for belief or faith) described what Muslims should believe, and the section on *Ihsan* (Arabic for excellence) described how Muslims should relate to God. Islamic civilization developed specialists in each of these fields. Legal scholars or *fuqaha* (s. *faqih*) specialized in *Shari'ah* or Islamic Law, theologians or *mutakallimun* (s. *mutakallim*) specialized in doctrine and belief, while the mystics of Islam called **Sufis** specialized in the inner relationship of the believer to God. These groups were not mutually exclusive, for example, many *fuqaha* were also Sufis, and while all three groups played an important role on the African continent, the Sufis were particularly influential.

Another important distinction is that between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, which arose during disputes as to who should succeed the Prophet as the leader of the Muslim community after his death. Those who would become known as Shi'ites supported the claim of 'Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin, arguing that the leader of the Muslim community should be both a spiritual and political leader, and from the family of the Prophet. Those who became known as Sunnis understood the position of leadership in a more political sense and believed that the leader should be elected. Upon the death of the Prophet, the Sunni view won out, and Abu Bakr a close friend of the Prophet was elected as his successor. Over time, Sunnis and Shi'ites developed different theologies and schools of law, but both groups share the same scripture and perform many of the same rituals, such as the Hajj and the fast of Ramadan, together. Around 10-13% of all Muslims are Shi'ite and the rest are Sunni. Nearly all African Muslims are Sunni, but during the Middle Ages, the Shi'ite Fatimid Empire ruled over much of North Africa, and in the 19th and 20th centuries many Shi'ite Muslims from South Asia settled in East Africa.

### **Islam in Africa: Origins**

Africa's first Muslims arrived on the continent in the year 615 CE as refugees fleeing the persecution of the non-Muslim Arabs of Mecca. A few years before he made his historic *hijra* or migration to Medina from Mecca, the Prophet advised his cousin

Ja'far to take a group of Muslims to seek refuge at the court of the Christian King of Aksum (present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea). As Islam spread gradually throughout the Arabian Peninsula, most of these refugees returned to Arabia. But close trade contacts between the **Horn of Africa** and the newly-Muslim Arabian Peninsula fostered the growth of what is today the oldest Muslim community on the continent.

Even before the first Muslims set foot on African soil, however, a large number of Africans and people of African descent living in and around Mecca converted to Islam. The most famous of these early African Muslims was **Bilal ibn Rabah al-Habashi** (Bilal the son of Rabah, the Ethiopian). According to Islamic tradition, Bilal converted to Islam while enslaved, and his master tortured him in a vain attempt to get him to recant. Hearing of his plight, the Prophet's friend Abu Bakr paid for Bilal's freedom, after which he became the chief *muezzin* (the person who gives the call to prayer, called the *adhaan*) of the young Muslim community. Some Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa have claimed descent from Bilal and many more have looked to him as a symbolic and spiritual forefather for centuries.

As you can see on the **Map**, Islam spread throughout Africa in many different ways. Arab military conquests established Muslim rule across North Africa between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, although Muslim rule did not necessarily mean conversion. On the basis of the Qur'an, Muslims gave a special status to people known as *Ahl Al-Kitab* or "People of the Book"—people who were following a revelation ("a book") given to one of the Prophets who came before Muhammad. Christians, Jews, and sometimes followers of other religions were counted as *Ahl al-Kitab*, and enjoyed special status and protection under Muslim rule. They were taxed at a higher rate than Muslims, but had their own legal system, and their places of worship and ways of life were supposed to be protected under Islamic Law. The 'Umayyads, the first dynasty that ruled over the expanding Islamic Empire actually discouraged conversion in order to collect more taxes from the communities of the People of the Book. This policy of pluralism is what led to the flourishing of Christian and Jewish minority communities in Muslim-ruled areas of North Africa, particularly Egypt and Morocco.

### **Gradual Spread to West, East and Southern Africa**

However, the process of conquest and gradual conversion was not repeated in areas of West, East or Southern Africa. In West Africa, Islam is thought to come to the southern edge of the Sahara in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by **Berber** traders and Kharijite preachers (members of a sect of Islam who had fled persecution in Arabia). Along the East African coast, migrating traders and scholars from Arabia and Persia brought Islam with them. Both the edge of the **Sahara desert** (imagined as a "great sea of sand") and the East African shoreline along the **Indian Ocean** are thought to have been staging areas for the gradual, peaceful diffusion of Islam, reflected in the Arabic term "Sahil" or "coastline.". People living along the East African coast were called "**Swahili**" or coastal peoples, while in the west, the term "Sahel" referred to the savanna area just south of the desert. Finally, in the late 17th century, the Dutch began to colonize the southern tip of Africa and imported slaves from their colonies in Southeast Asia (present day Indonesia and Malaysia) to work on their farms. Most of these slaves were Muslim. In the 18th century, British farmers in South Africa recruited workers from India, many of whom were Muslim, as inexpensive labor for their sugar plantations.

Unlike in North Africa and in northern Sudan, the gradual acceptance of Islam in West and East Africa was not accompanied by Arab migration and the adoption of the Arabic language. On the contrary, along the East African coast, settlers from the Arabian peninsula often lost Arabic as their mother tongue as their descendants began to speak Swahili, an African language that combines Bantu grammar and vocabulary with heavy borrowings from Arabic and Persian vocabulary. Similarly, while many West African Muslims learned Arabic and memorized the Qur'an, they continued to speak their own African languages such as Hausa, Fulbe, Manding, Wolof, and Yoruba, which became strongly influenced by Arabic, and were written in the Arabic script.

Scholars have broadly described the process of Islamization as occurring in three stages: **Isolation**, **Syncretism**, and **Reform**. Initially, Islam spread in towns through merchants who primarily resided there and traveled between cities for trade. These merchants largely kept to themselves and the rural poor had little contact with them or their religion. During this phase, families of Muslim scholars, some of whom were also traders and merchants, also settled in these small, isolated Muslim neighborhoods and towns. In fact, a long-lasting interpretive tradition emerged from the reality that Muslim traders traveling throughout West Africa often settled in areas where most people were non-Muslim. In the 16th century, **Al-Hajj Salim Suwari**, an influential Muslim scholar who lived in parts of present-day Mali, taught tolerance towards non-Muslims. He preached that non-belief resulted from ignorance rather than wickedness, that true conversion could only occur in God's time and that jihad against unbelievers was unacceptable. The **Suwarian tradition**, which emphasizes non-violence, flourished among groups of West African Muslim traders for centuries.

During the Syncretic, or "Court" stage, Islam spread to political capitals and ruling groups. This phase often began with rulers in trade towns inviting Muslim scholars to join their courts, and/or converting Islam at the hands of these scholars, such as at 14<sup>th</sup> century Lamu, on the coast of Kenya, or at Niani, the 14<sup>th</sup> century capital of the Mali empire. But in this phase, Islam did not spread far beyond these scholarly families and the aristocracy of the courts. This period saw the Islamicization of the empire of **Ghana** and rise of the great Muslim empires of **Mali**, **Songhai**, and **Kanem-Borno**. **Mansa Musa**, the ruler of the Malian Empire, went on a famous hajj in 1324 during which he gave away so much gold that he crashed the gold market in Cairo. This year-long journey reinvigorated the strong trade and religious ties between the Middle East, North Africa, and the Muslim courts of West Africa, as well as attracting the attention of traders in Europe. (See 1375 Catalan map).

One important aspect of this relationship was the trans-Saharan book trade. During this time, books were worth their weight in gold, and scholars at Islamic universities such as al-Azhar in Cairo, al-Qarawiyyin in Fes, Morocco (considered the oldest university in the world) exchanged ideas and books with their colleagues south of the Sahara. During Mansa Musa's reign, the University of **Sankore** in **Timbuktu** came to house one of the largest collections of manuscripts in the world and became an important center of Islamic learning. Both Sankore University and al-Qarawiyyin of Fes were founded and financed by wealthy Muslim women.

In East Africa, Arab and Persian coastal settlers and traders intermarried with the local inhabitants, giving rise to the Swahili culture and language. Founded in the 10th century, the **Sultanate of Kilwa** was the oldest and most influential Swahili settlement for centuries. The Sultanate grew prosperous trading gold and ivory from the interior,

and used this wealth to establish their influence and spread Swahili culture up and down the East African Coast. The Swahili people were virtually all Muslim, and although they traded with their Bantu neighbors in the interior, Islam remained confined to the Swahili coastal towns and cities.

Portuguese attempts in the late 15th and 16th centuries to control the rich Indian Ocean trade and convert the Swahili to Christianity were eventually ended when the Sultanate of Oman conquered the East African coast in the 1690's. In 1840, the Sultan of Oman moved his capital from the Arabian peninsula to Zanzibar in order to better control lucrative trade of cloves, ivory, and slaves along the coast. His successful political deals and bargains with the rulers of several Swahili city states expanded Islamic influence and education into the interior of East Africa. During this period, King Mutesa I of the kingdom of Buganda (in present day Uganda) converted to Islam.

African rulers valued the newer technologies of literacy, mathematics, credit, medicine and law that came with attachment to Islam and the larger worlds of the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean, but their political legitimacy in the eyes of their largely non-Muslim subjects was based on the rituals, symbols, and cosmologies of the traditional African religions. This tension was often mediated by acceptance of African religions and **syncretism** (but not among the scholarly families) that mixed Islamic ideas with local beliefs and practices.

This delicate balance changed during the third stage of reform during which large numbers of people began to convert to forms of Islam approved by the scholarly families. In West Africa, this process of reform was also facilitated through the organization of Sufi brotherhoods, called **Tariqahs**, such as the Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah. These reform movements sometimes took the form of jihads and spread across West Africa during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, affecting Muslim and non-Muslim Africans alike. Reformers challenged what they saw as the corrupt practices of urban merchants and ruling classes, such as heavy taxation and syncretic religious practices.

In addition to questions of religious doctrine, other factors such as the environment, demographics, and migration patterns affected the ways in which Islam was adopted by African societies in this period. Increased desertification and periods of drought in West Africa pushed nomadic populations such as the **Tuareg** and pastoralists such as the **Fulani** further south and east in search of water and good lands for grazing cattle. Farming communities that hosted them responded by imposing higher taxes and other limitations which contributed to a sense of isolation and vulnerability among the nomadic groups. In this context, Islam helped to unify Fulani peasants (some of whom had not previously converted) to resist what they viewed as oppression. **Uthman dan Fodio**, a Fulani leader of the Qadiri tariqah, led the most important and influential of these reform movements in West Africa. At the turn of the 19th century, he led a jihad against the non-Muslim and so-called "nominally Muslim" rulers of Hausa city states in Northern Nigeria, criticizing practices which he deemed un-Islamic such as levying unfair taxes and denying women education. He established the Sokoto Caliphate which stretched from parts of present-day Burkina Faso to Cameroon, making it the largest single polity of West Africa in the 19th century. Other Fulani Muslim scholars followed dan Fodio's example in establishing Muslim states, including Seku Ahmadu who established Masina in northern Mali and Umar Tal who by the 1860s controlled large sections of Senegal, Guinea and Mali. These scholars, their descendants and students also produced a vast body of literature and poetry in Arabic, Hausa, and Fulani that are read and studied today.

## **Islam and the Slave Trade**

One of the most controversial issues which these scholars addressed was the issue of slavery and the slave trade. In various forms, slavery has existed throughout the world at all times in human history. Africa, the world's second largest continent in terms of landmass and population, was affected by at least four major slave trades over many centuries: the Mediterranean, the trans-Saharan, the Indian Ocean, and the trans-Atlantic slave trades. The Mediterranean slave trade was controlled by the Barbary pirates, North African Muslim privateers who raided European towns and settlements on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, capturing and enslaving Christian Europeans to be sold in North African markets. Islamic law forbade the enslavement of Muslims, but permitted the enslavement of non-Muslims (although it stipulated rules for the proper treatment of slaves and for their manumission under certain conditions). When the Ottoman Empire took control of North Africa in the 16th Century, captives from the Slavic lands of eastern Europe also entered this trade.

The Indian Ocean slave trade captured non-Muslim black Africans, known in Arabic as **Zanj**, from East and Central Africa and sold them in markets in the Middle East, from present-day Turkey all the way to India. To this day, the descendants of these enslaved Africans still have distinct communities and identities in these Middle Eastern and Asian countries. The trans-Saharan slave trade, thought to have existed for at least a millennium, captured mainly non-Muslim women and children in West and Central Africa to be sold in North African markets. Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, traders from several parts of western Europe operated the trans-Atlantic slave trade that carried about 12 million Africans throughout the Americas, affecting both Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Africa. One of the main reasons Uthman dan Fodio and other leaders of Fulani jihads gave for their revolutionary movements was to put a stop to the capture and sale of African Muslims in the trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic slave trade (although he supported the enslavement of non-Muslim Africans). However, the wars and conflicts started by these revolutions destabilized the region and actually increased the volume of Muslim slaves, particularly in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Current estimates indicate that as many as 15-20% of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas were Muslim, and their cultural presence can be felt in the blues, the ring-shout, Arabic names, and other African-American traditions. A series of slave revolts in Bahia, Brazil in the 19th century were organized by enslaved Muslims, many of whom fought in Uthman dan Fodio's jihad. Some of the Arabic documents from these revolts, containing declarations of jihad and prayers for protection have been preserved (See pictures). Nearly a millennium earlier, slaves of East African descent participated in a revolt in Iraq called the Zanj rebellion which rocked the 'Abbasid caliphate.

## **Islam in Africa: The Colonial Period**

It was during the colonial period that Islam made its largest inroads into the interior of East Africa. The colonial powers increased mobility between the coast and the interior in order to maximize the profitability of their colonies, and this led to greater interaction between the Muslim populations of the coast and the non-Muslim people in the interior. Perhaps more importantly, faced with the destruction of their traditional kingdoms and way of life, many East Africans saw Islam as a viable alternative to the Christianity brought by European missionaries, particularly because the Islam of their Swahili neighbors seemed culturally and religiously more familiar and acceptable than the

missionary religion which forbade polygamy and had little to say about the world of spirits. Sufi tariqahs, particularly the Qadiriyyah and Alawiyyah, played a significant role in this process.

The situation was somewhat similar in West Africa, where colonization actually facilitated the spread of Islam in Senegal and Nigeria, but Western education in the form of missionary schools led to many conversions to Christianity, particularly in English colonies. Sufi tariqahs also played an important role in this process of Islamization in West Africa, just as they did in resisting colonial powers.

In Algeria, the famous Emir ‘abd al-Qadir, himself a Shaykh, or spiritual master, of the Qadiriyyah order led a jihad against the French occupation of his country for seventeen years until he was forced to surrender in 1847. He was greatly respected by his French opponents for his magnanimity and kind treatment of captured soldiers. In Sudan, Muhammad Ahmad, a leader of the Sammaniya Sufi order, declared himself to be the Mahdi (a messianic figure in Islam who heralds the second coming of Christ) and led a jihad against occupying British and Turkish troops. His forces captured Khartoum in 1885, dealing the British one of their few defeats on the continent. Later, in neighboring Libya, Umar Mukhtar led the members of his Sanusi tariqah in a jihad against the Italian occupation of their country until he was captured and killed in 1931. In Somalia, a shaykh of the Salihyyah tariqah, Muhammad Abdullah Hassan (nicknamed the “Mad Mullah”) fought Italian, British, and Ethiopian forces at the turn of the twentieth century. In West Africa, Umar Tal, a shaykh of the Tijani tariqah, briefly established his own Muslim state in West Africa by waging a series of jihads against non-Muslims kingdoms, the French, and neighboring Muslim states. His conquest was short-lived, however, and the French claimed the area he conquered shortly after his death in 1863.

Many Sufi leaders, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th century, when colonial power was well-established, chose to focus on spreading Islam, Islamic education, and the greater jihad of spirituality. These leaders often collaborated with colonial powers when it suited their agendas of spreading Islam or establishing their spiritual communities. During this period, the Algerian Shaykh Ahmad al-’Alawi (d. 1934) spread his branch of the Shadhili Tariqah into Europe, the Middle East, and East Africa, Senegalese Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba (d. 1927) established his tariqah, the Muridiyyah, in Senegal, and his countryman Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé (d. 1975) spread the Tijani tariqah throughout West Africa.

### **Islam in Africa: Current Issues**

The political and economic domination of the Muslim world by Western powers led to a serious crisis for many Muslims who had associated the success of Islamic civilization with Divine favor. Three or perhaps four distinct responses have emerged to this crisis of faith which has significantly influenced contemporary politics across the African continent.

The **Modernist response** argued that the west conquered the Muslim world because Islamic civilization was backwards and needed to be updated by learning from the West and changing to adapt to the realities of a world of secular nation-states. In essence, the modernist response advocated taking Western ideologies such as socialism, capitalism, and nationalism, and trying to adapt them to the local context. Most Muslim heads of state in Africa and their political parties have been modernists.

In contrast, the **Salafi** response (often called fundamentalist or Wahhabist) argues that God allowed the Muslims to be conquered because they were not following Islam correctly, and that to become strong again, the Muslim world must return to a strict, pure, and austere version of the faith. Salafism or Wahhabism is officially endorsed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which has used its oil wealth to spread the influence of this form of Islam throughout the world, particularly in Africa through the establishment of charities, mosques, and schools, the distribution of Salafi literature, and sponsoring the education and training of local Salafi scholars. Moreover, the fact that Mecca and Medina, which millions of Muslims from around the world visit every year on pilgrimage, are located in Saudi Arabia, has also helped the Salafi response become more mainstream around the world.

Salafism takes many forms but is usually characterized by its emphasis on the exoteric or outward aspects of Islam, its opposition to Sufism, and its own unique interpretation of Islamic law, often perceived as harsh. Some extremist Salafi groups have been influenced by the writings of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, which call for military jihad against non-Islamic states and the Muslims who support them. Although these militant groups are similar to some other Salafi groups in that they regard those outside of their ranks as non-Muslim or unorthodox, they should not be confused with mainstream, non-militant Salafi groups. This militant ideology has inspired the destruction of Sufi shrines in Timbuktu and Somalia, al-Qaeda bombings in North and East Africa, and the Nigerian extremist group, Boko Haram, to attack Nigerian government buildings and churches.

The third response of **Mahdism or millennialism** was more prominent during the early phases of colonialism, but the influence of the movements which embraced this response remains strong to this day. This response viewed the conquest of Muslims as a sign of the approach of the end of times, and many Muslim leaders throughout Africa either claimed to be the Mahdi or claimed their movements were linked with his imminent arrival. This response took different forms in different places, from the 19th century jihad of Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi of Sudan, to the hijra, or flight, of members of the Sokoto Caliphate from Nigeria upon British conquest.

The fourth response is really more of a counter-response, particularly to the Modernists and Salafis. This **traditionalist response** has sought to re-assert Islamic traditions criticized by the Salafis as not being Islamic enough and by the modernists as not being modern enough. Often, but not always, associated with Sufism, the traditionalist response has tried to emphasize continuity with local Islamic traditions, adapting them to modern conditions. Unlike modernists, traditionalists frequently criticize modern Western education, and have attempted to set up parallel educational institutions. Unlike Salafis, traditionalists usually support Sufi practices and local traditions of Islamic law. Some traditionalists actively participate in politics, others prefer to remain aloof, and the vast majority has argued against military jihad. Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba and his Muridiyah order in Senegal, Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé and his Tijani followers across West Africa, the Ba 'Alawi in East Africa, and the various branches of the Shadhili Sufi order in North and East Africa are all representative of this response.

### **Conclusion**

The increasing influences of North American culture, Pentecostal Christianity, and secularism on the African continent are creating interesting contemporary challenges for Islam in Africa. Modern advances in communication and transportation have also

increased communication between Muslims in Africa and other parts of the world. This has led to an increased influence of Muslim thinkers and movements from South and Southeast Asia on contemporary Islam in Africa. Conversely, this has also led to an increasing influence of African Muslim thinkers and movements on contemporary Islam in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world with African immigrant populations. Increased mobility and migration between African countries has led to the establishment of sizeable Muslim communities in every African country. Islam remains a dynamic and important part of the spiritual landscape of the African continent.

As this brief overview demonstrates, the history of Islam in Africa is a long and fascinating story of kings and slaves, scholars and Sufi mystics, empires and villages, caravans and ships, religion and culture. The African continent has left an indelible mark on Islamic civilization by shaping and giving birth to some of its greatest and most influential men and women, a number of the most important empires and kingdoms, and some of the most enduring and beautiful traditions of Islamic Art from calligraphy to architecture to Qur'anic recitation. Islam has also left a deep and lasting influence on the African continent. Besides governing the daily lives of nearly half the continent's residents, elements of many traditional non-Muslim cultures such as dress, mythology, art, and language bear a strong Islamic influence. For example, the traditional clothes that are commonly worn by Africans from Senegal to South Africa are actually derived from the dress of the African Muslims of the Sahel. In addition to the legacy of indigenous African civilizations and the enduring influence of modern Western civilization, Islamic civilization forms an integral part of Africa's triple heritage.

**Please see the timeline in the final section for further details about Islam as a religion and its development in Africa.**

#### **Recommended Resources:**

##### **a. General List**

*\*For further advice on teaching religion in the classroom, with a focus on the Islamic Faith, please visit The Council on Islamic Education. This organization was founded to support and strengthen American public education, and features a number of resources on teaching about Islam and Muslim history and culture.*

##### **Reference Books:**

Levtzion, Nehemia, and Randall L. Pouwels, eds., The History of Islam in Africa, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.

Robinson, David. Muslim Societies in African History, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004

Hiskett, Mervyn. The Development of Islam in West Africa. New York: Longman, 1984

Pouwels, Randall. Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast (800-1900). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987

Ibn Battuta in Black Africa, Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, NJ, 2004, Expanded edition. Editors Said Hamdun and Noel King.

Mack, Beverly B. and Jean Boyd. One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000.

### **Films:**

*Wonders of the African World with Henry Louis Gates Jr.* (particularly "The Swahili Coast," and "The Road to Timbuktu"); directors, Nicola Colton, Nick Godwin, Helena Appio. Alexandria, VA, PBS Home Video, 2004. DVD.

*The Africans: A Triple Heritage with Ali Mazrui* (particularly Episode 3, "New Gods."); Written and presented by Ali A. Mazrui ; senior producer, Peter Bates. Santa Barbara : the Annenberg/CPB Project, c1986.

*Prince Among Slaves*. The story of a Muslim Fulani noble from today's Republic of Guinea sold into slavery in Mississippi in the 19th century; directed by Andrea Kalin and Bill Duke. Alexandria, VA, PBS Home Video, 2008. DVD. Highly recommended.

*The Lion of the Desert*. The Story of Omar Mukhtar's resistance to Italian Colonial domination in Libya.; Producer-director, Moustapha Akkad, England: s.n. 199? Falcon International Productions, VHS recording. Highly recommended.

*Khartoum*. The story of the uprising of the Mahdi of the Sudan against British and Turkish rule. Long and old, but good.

*Si-Gueriki (The Queen Mother)*; Set in northern Benin Republic, the documentary tells the story of film-maker Idrissou Mora Kpai's attempt to honor his father, a member of the Muslim nobility of the Borgu people. However, the Kpai discovers instead the worlds of his mother and sisters when to his surprise his mother is elevated to the status of "Queen Mother" for their community. California Newsrell, 2001.

### **Novels:**

*Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamadou Kane (Heinemann, 1971)- novel written by Senegalese Muslim in the 1950s that reflects the fascinating and confusing confrontation of the traditional Africa Islamic worldview with a European society. Told through the eyes of a young boy who attends a traditional madrasa and a French colonial school in Senegal before going to college in France and returning to Senegal. Highly recommended.

*Segu* by Maryse Conde ( Penguin, 1996)- this sweeping epic traces the fate of a family across West Africa (and the Atlantic) during the tumultuous 18th and 19th centuries many of the figures, events such as the Fulani jihads and places mentioned in this module

feature prominently in this work.

*The Beggar's Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall (Prentice Hall Press, 1981). This humorous short story highlights the important role beggars and marabouts play in modern Senegalese society, and is a wonderful window into the worldview of a contemporary African Muslim Society.

*Bound to Violence* by Ouloguem Yambo ( Heinemann, 1971). A historical novel depicting seven centuries of Malian history through a fictitious state called Nakem-Zuiko.

*Allah is not Obligated*, a novel by Ahmadou Kourouma about a child soldier caught in the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone of the 1990s. Heinemann, 2006.

*God's Bits of Wood*, a novel by Ousmane Sembene. Set in colonial French West Africa of the 1940s tells the story of a railroad workers strike.

### **Picture Books**

*A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts in Urban Senegal*. Roberts, A., Roberts, M., Armenian, and Gueye. Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 2003

*Mansa Musa: The Lion King of Mali*. by Burns, K. Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. New (Harcourt Children's Books, 2001)-**All ages**

*Kings and Queens of West Africa* by Sylviane Diouf. (Franklin Watts, 2000)-**All ages**

*Kings and Queens of Central Africa* by Sylviane Diouf. (Franklin Watts, 2000)-**All ages**

*Kings and Queens of East Africa* by Sylviane Diouf. (Franklin Watts, 2000)-**All ages**

### **Memoirs/Slave Narratives**

Alford, Terry. *A Prince Among Slaves: The True Story of an African Prince Sold Into Slavery in the American South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Story of Abdul Rahman, a prince of the Futa Jallon region of West Africa who was sold into slavery and lived in Natchez, MS.

*The Biography of Mahommah Gardo, Baquaqua, His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*, Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy. Markus Weiner Publishers, Princeton, NJ, 2009, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised and expanded edition. Narrative of an African born in the Sokoto Caliphate (in a town located in the modern country of Benin) sold as a slave to Brazil who then traveled to New York, Boston and Canada to escape slavery. He was involved in the US abolition movement and later converted to Christianity.

*The Life of Omar Ibn Said, A Muslim American Slave, (1770?-1863 or 1864)*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2011. Autobiography of Muslim American slave who was born in eastern Senegal and died in North Carolina on the eve of

Emancipation. Ibn Said, who had learned to read and write in Africa before being captured in war and sold into slave, penned his story in Arabic script.

### **Websites/Online resources**

**Africa Map:** <http://africamap.harvard.edu>

#### **Ibn Battuta:**

in West Africa:

<http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his311/lectures/17battut.htm>

in East Africa:

<http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his311/lectures/16battut.htm>

**African American Studies Center, Oxford University Press:** Online reference resource with thousands of articles, images and maps related to African American history and culture. [Www.oxfordaasc.com](http://www.oxfordaasc.com)

**Documenting the American South.** This University of North Carolina website contains primary source documents related to African-born Muslims who were enslaved in the United States, including Ibrahima Abdul Rahman, Omar ibn Said, Mahommah Baquaqua and Job ben Solomon Diallo. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>

**Prince Among Slaves.** A website featuring with educational resources related to the story of Abdul Rahman, a Fulani prince captured in war in the Futa Jallon and sold into slavery in Mississippi in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Features maps, images and useful background articles. <http://www.princeamongslaves.org/>

**Passport to Paradise.** A website featuring a virtual tour of an exhibit on the art produced by the Mouride Sufi order (founded by Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba) in modern Senegal hosted at UCLA's Fowler Museum. Excellent images and explanations. <http://www.fowler.ucla.edu/passporttoparadise.htm>

**Women in World History.** A site that features a description of the life of Nana Asma'u, daughter of the Fulani leader Uthman dan Fodio of northern Nigeria, and an excerpt of her writing for use in classroom activities. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/p/214.html>

**The Story of Africa.** Information compiled by the BBC of the history of Africa including helpful sections on Islam, Christianity and traditional African religions. Also includes timelines, resource links and video clips. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index.shtml>

**West African Manuscripts project,** University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, [www.westafricanmanuscripts.org](http://www.westafricanmanuscripts.org)

**Arabic manuscripts from West Africa**, A Catalogue of the Herskovitts Library Collection, Northwestern University,  
<http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/arbms/index.html>

**Timelines:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/7generic3.shtml>

<http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum211/timelines/htimeline2.htm>

**Potential Activities or Discussions:** (*could include ideas for games, creative projects, discussion questions, etc.*)

1. Create your own map of Islam in Africa. Identify some key places in the history of Islam in Africa. Describe these places. What countries are they in? What is the environment like? What do people there do for a living? Have students pick one Islam country to research and learn more about – then have them present back to the class what they have learned.

2. Students should be able to define the term “jihad” and identify places on the map where major jihads occurred in West Africa.

3. View the documentary *Prince Among Slaves* or read sections of the book by Terry Alford. This story of a Fulani Muslim noble from today's Guinea in West Africa who was enslaved 40 years in Natchez, Mississippi, is especially suitable for both World History and US History classes. Rahman visited President John Quincy Adams at the White House, led a fundraising campaign to buy his family's freedom that brought him to Boston and eventually returned with his wife to Liberia where he died.. Students may use the internet to research encyclopedia articles about the life of Ibrahima Abdul Rahman. Students may also use primary source documents to learn about Rahman whose campaign was covered in US newspapers in Boston, New Haven, CT, New York and Natchez, Mississippi--all accessible on internet databases. The University of North Carolina also hosts a website where students can read about Rahman and other African-born Muslims enslaved in the United States. (See resources)

4. After reading about Ibn Battuta, create a map of Ibn Battuta’s travels in West Africa or East Africa. Who were the people that he met in those places and what were their societies like? What things did Ibn Battuta find strange? What things were familiar to him?

5. Using the pictures of [mosques](#) in [Africa](#) as your [guide](#), create your own mosque out of clay or paper-maché. Your mosque should have a minaret, a tower or platform where the muezzin can give the call to prayer, and a mihrab or prayer niche on one of the walls which points to Mecca, and plenty of open space for people to pray.

(websites for reference: <http://www.travel-images.com/mosques2.html> ;

<http://archnet.org/library/images/sites.jsp?select=collection&key=563> ;

[http://www.kamit.jp/27\\_mali/mal\\_eng.htm](http://www.kamit.jp/27_mali/mal_eng.htm))

6. Using the [pictures](#) of [calligraphy](#) as your guide, create your own [calligraphy](#) of the word “[Allah](#)” in Arabic. Get creative and use different materials, colors, and patterns to make your particular design reflect some of the things you’ve learned in this module. For example, one student drew the word over a map of Africa placing the letters in areas where Muslims live. Another student wrote the word with water in sand to symbolize how Islam came to Africa across the desert and the ocean.

(websites for reference: <http://www.bu.edu/today/2011/yelimane-fall/> ; <http://islamic-arts.org/2011/islamic-calligraphy-600-to-1250-a-d/> ; <http://www.superstock.com/stock-photos-images/1606-74271> ; <http://www.shutterstock.com/pic-86118577/stock-vector--variations-of-allah-name-muslim-s-god-in-kufi-fatimiyyah-arabic-calligraphy-style.html>)

7. In small groups, take the events from the timeline your teacher hands out to you and try to arrange them in chronological order, do you think some events helped to cause others? If so, how? Then as a class, paste each event onto a big timeline on the wall/board and try to assign dates to each event.

8. Write some bolded terms from the Summary out on index cards and put them into different hats. Break the students up into small groups, giving each group a hat with the same ten terms in it. Have the students take turns pulling terms out of the hat and writing definitions on the back of the index cards. Then bring the groups back together and share their definitions and discuss differences.

9. Anywhere Islam went in Africa, poetry flourished, and many of the textbooks used in Islamic education were turned into long poems to make them easier to remember. One particular type of poem that became very popular in Sub-Saharan Africa is the acrostic poem (one modern Nigerian poet even composed a poem in Arabic celebrating the moon landing using Arabic transliterations of the astronaut’s names: Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, etc.) Have your students pick a word or a phrase like “Islam in Africa” or “Mansa Musa” and write a rhyming acrostic poem (Rhyme is important in Arabic poetry, in fact, European languages got their rhyming from Arabic poetry via Spain) :

Mansa Musa was a great and wealthy king  
A king who had more gold than anything  
No one knew of this great king until  
Seeking Mecca, he climbed his camel  
And went on the hajj, with his friends and his gold...

For inspiration, you can listen to and read a translation two famous acrostic poems by Senegalese Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GosMcXAnxwo>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znd0bKZGgMI&feature=related>

10. Watch the video of the annual Durbar in Kano:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7FrVzBMEwk>

Try to identify which aspects of the festival show Islamic influence, which show Western influence, and which show the influence of indigenous African cultures.

## Timeline

~ 570 CE Muhammad born in Mecca

610 Muhammad receives the first revelation of the Qur'an in a cave outside of Mecca

615 Group of Muslims flee Mecca for Aksum, Ethiopia, protected there by the Ethiopian king or Negus

622 Muhammad leaves Mecca to establish Muslim community in Medina. Hijra. Year 1 of the Muslim calendar, Anno Hejira

632 Death of Prophet Muhammad

639 Muslim invasion of Egypt challenging Roman Byzantine rule

640-750 Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus, Syria (BBC)

642-Muslim forces expel Byzantine forces from Alexandria and found the city of Cairo.

~642 Bilal ibn Rabah al Habashi, an ex-slave from Ethiopia and close friend of the Prophet. A soldier in Muhammad's army who served as the first "muezzin" or caller to prayer, dies.

657 Kharijite sect of Muslims migrates to the west Maghreb.

670 Qairawan founded in what is today Tunisia. An important trade town, it becomes a center for Islamic political and legal thought in North Africa.

711 'Umayyad army of Muslim Berbers conquers Southern Spain and Portugal, naming it al-Andalus

750 Abbasid dynasty replaces the 'Umayyads, moves the capital of the caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad.

700-800 Islam rapidly spreads across North Africa

8<sup>th</sup> century first Muslim migrants from southern Arabia and Persian Gulf settle in northern section of east African coast

800 Beginning of the Ghana empire which grows rich on the trade of salt and gold, and gradually embraces Islam over the next two centuries

859 al-Qarawiyyin mosque founded in Fes, Morocco later becomes an important madrasa

900 Beginning of kingdom of Kanem (northern Nigeria)

910. Fatimid dynasty comes to power in Qairawan and later conquers Egypt.

975 al-Azhar University founded in Cairo

~10th C-Sultanate of Kilwa founded and expands influence along the Swahili coast

1000 City of Timbuktu founded.

1000. First Hausa state thought to be formed. (BBC)

1067 Al-Bakri compiles traveler's accounts of Ghana.

1076 Ghana empire declines due to Almoravid pressure, and later is absorbed into the Mali Empire

1085 Hume Gilme becomes the first ruler of Kanem to proclaim Islam as a state religion. (NEA)

1235 Empire of Mali formed under Sundiata Keita.

14<sup>th</sup> century Swahili trade cities flourish on the coast of East Africa

1304-1368 or 1369 Ibn Battuta lived and traveled throughout the Muslim world from Mali to China.

1310. Mansa Abubakar II of Mali sets out to cross the Atlantic Ocean and is never seen again. Mansa Musa becomes emperor of Mali.

1324 Mansa Musa travels to Mecca through Cairo.

1331 Ibn Battuta visits Mogadishu and Kilwa on the East African coast

1332 Polymath and father of modern social sciences, Ibn Khaldun born in Tunis.

1348-Black death reaches North Africa from Sicily and kills over a quarter of the population of the region.

1355 Ibn Battuta visits the Mali Empire

1374-1378 Ibn Khaldun writes his Muqaddimah (universal history).

1440s Portuguese first reach mouth of Senegal river

1444 First slaves brought to Portugal from northern Mauritania

1453. Ottoman Turks take Constantinople. Rise of the Ottoman Empire absorbs slaves from Slavic lands. Increased importance of slaves from West Africa to Portuguese.

15<sup>th</sup> century Rise of Songhay. Capital at Gao. Gold trade, slaves

1464 King Sunni Ali becomes leader of Songhay and defeats Mali.

1493 Askia Muhammad comes to power in Songhay and expands the empire establishing a highly organized system of government and sponsoring Muslim scholars in Timbuktu. Under Askia Muhammad I, Islam becomes the official state religion

1498 Portuguese arrive on southern Swahili coast. Series of military conflicts with Muslim city states in the name of Christian holy war.

1510 Leo Africanus visits Gao, capital of Songhay

1515 Ottoman Turks conquer Egypt.

1543 Ethiopian Christians defeat Ethiopian Muslim army of Adal with the help of the Portuguese.

1591 Moroccan army invades Timbuktu, capturing the important trade city and ending rule by the Songhai empire.

1664 circa. Ibn al-Mukhtar writes Tarikh el Fattash (an account of the Songhai and Mali Empires) in Timbuktu.

1652-The Dutch East India Company establishes the Cape Coast colony in South Africa and begins importing enslaved Indonesian and Indian Muslims. They also exile several Muslim political dissidents and leaders from Indonesia to the Cape Colony. These exiles and slaves form the first Muslim community in South Africa

~1655 Abd al-Rahman al-Sadi writes the Tarikh as-Sudan (the most important historical account of the Mali and Songhai Empires)

1673 Nasir al-Din, a Qadiri Sufi, leads a predominantly Berber jihad against Arab merchants (Bani Hassan), French commerce at St. Louis, local nominally Muslim rulers who sold their own subjects into Saharan slave trade and pagan rulers; goal was to establish strict religious orthodoxy. Berbers lose the war

1690 Portuguese expelled from east African coastal possessions.

1725 Fulani scholars in Futa Jalon rebelled against Mande rulers to establish Fulani Muslim state

1737 Tuaregs seize Timbuktu.

1750s Wahhabi movement in Arabia challenges Ottoman rule

1754 Uthman dan Fodio born

1776 War of the Marabouts in Futa Toro. Qadiri Shaykh Abdel Kader Kane Almami, influenced by Berber Islamic reform movement of Nasir al-Din, leads one of the first Fulani jihads in Futa Toro, establishing an Islamic State.

1782 Tijiani tariqah founded in Algeria.

1798 Napoleon invades and conquers Egypt

1801. Ottoman and British forces expel the French from Egypt

1804. Uthman dan Fodio launches jihad in northern Nigeria

1809 Sokoto Caliphate established. Single largest polity in 19<sup>th</sup> century West Africa

1815 Seku Ahmadu establishes Muslim state of Hamdallahi at Masina in today's northern Mali

1817 Uthman dan Fodio dies.

1826 Fulani jihadists (Massina) conquer Timbuktu

1830 France invades conquers Algiers. The subsequent conquest of Algeria and related epidemics reduces the population of Algeria by a third from 1830-1872.

1835-The Male slave revolt in Bahia, Brazil. Slaves of Muslim Hausa origin organize one of the biggest slave rebellions in Brazilian history

1840 The Sultan of Oman moved his capital from the Arabian peninsula to Zanzibar

1852 Umar Tal begins his jihad from Futa Jalon in present day Guinea

1853 Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba born, his Sufi order, the Muridiyyah becomes very influential in spreading Islam in Senegal. He writes thousands of didactic poems and establishes an Islamic educational system that runs parallel to colonial schools. He dies in 1927.

1860s Kabaka Mutesa, ruler of Buganda, in modern Uganda proclaims himself Muslim.

1869-Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawi born in Algeria. He spreads his branch of the Shadhili tariqah across North Africa, into the Middle East, East Africa, and Europe. In his writings, he opposes Westernization and the adoption of western clothing, but supports the translation of the Qur'an into French and Berber. He dies in 1934.

1880s Samori Toure leads organized military resistance to French imperialism across portions of west Africa stretching from Senegal to the Ivory Coast.

1881 Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdullah declares himself Mahdi and led resistance to colonization of the Sudan by combined British, Egyptian, and Turkish forces.

1912 Omar Mukhtar begins leading the Libyan resistance to Italian colonization

1900 Muhammad Hassan Abdullah leads his army against Ethiopian, British, and Italian forces

1900 Shaykh Ibrahim Niassa born, he leads a spiritual movement spreading the Tijani tariqah across West Africa. He dies in 1975

1903 Sokoto Caliphate collapses under British and French pressure, but survives under the colonial period through indirect rule

1932 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia founded, bringing Mecca and Medina under the rule of the Saud monarchy and Salafi Islam.

1950's-60's-African nations begin to gain their independence, rise of Arab nationalism and Islamic socialism

1970's Saudi oil money spread Salafi Islam throughout Africa

1980's and 90's Clashes between Salafi and Sufi Muslims occur across the continent, the Sufi practice of visiting the graves of deceased saints is a flashpoint of conflict

1990's Al-Qaeda carries out a series of bombings in East Africa, and North Africa, and establishes a chapter in the Sahara desert

2000's Al-Shabab, a militant group, begins fighting and bombing the forces of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and desecrating Sufi graves and mosques. They establish a harsh and idiosyncratic form of Islamic law in the territories they control (For example, they ban samosas, because the triangle is a symbol of the Christian trinity).

2008, Somali Sufis retaliate by forming their own militant group, Ahl Sunna wa'l Jama'a to fight al-Shabab.

2008 President Barack Obama, a descendant of East African Muslims, becomes President of the United States

2012, al-Shabab becomes a branch of al-Qaeda

2011/12 Nigerian militant group Boko Haram begins an unprecedented series of attacks, including suicide bombings on Nigerian government buildings, churches, and homes of Muslims who oppose them.

2012 Militant Islamist groups al-Qaeda (AQIM) in the Maghreb and Ansar ad-Din participate in the Tuareg rebellion in Northern Mali, then subsequently take over the region won during the conflict including Gao and Timbuktu, where they begin desecrating Sufi graves and mosques and establish a harsh and idiosyncratic form of Islamic law.