

Five Pillars of Islam: Practice, Survival, Resistance and Adaption from Africa to the Americas

Overview

This multi-day lesson will focus on the role of Islam in the Kingdoms of Western Africa, where Islam influenced the area tremendously in the time period prior to the Atlantic slave trade. The geographic focus will be on Africa that now encompasses the modern countries of Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, and Nigeria. Students will also learn that Islam was brought to the Americas by enslaved African Muslims. The overall theme of the lesson will be the practice, survival, resistance and adaptation of the five Pillars of Islam in Colonial and Antebellum America.

Grades

The first section of the lesson and resources can be used for 6th grade social studies. The whole lesson can be directed for 8th grade social studies and World History in high school.

Essential Questions

- What are the five pillars of Islam?
- How did Islam influence the kingdoms of Western Africa prior to the Atlantic Slave Trade?
- What impact did the Atlantic Slave Trade have on Africa?
- What were the differences and similarities in experiences of Omar bin Said and Abdul Rahman Ibrahima Sori in Colonial and Antebellum America?
- How did individuals that were enslaved in the Colonial and Antebellum America continue to practice the Five Pillars of Islam?
- What role did Islam have on the slave rebellions in the Americas?

Materials

- The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKo-XxfywK>
- Africans before Captivity, reading from ANCHOR: <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/africans-atlantic-slave> (Students will either need devices connected to the internet to access the reading, or teachers can also print the text)
- Africans before Captivity graphic organizer (attached)
- Map of Muslim Africa: <http://ayat-upf-dih.tv.s3.amazonaws.com/files/2011/02/03/MapMuhammad%20Africa.jpg>
- Pillars of Islam reading: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1859>
- Five Pillars of Islam Worksheet (attached)
- Obmar ibn Said Autobiography – primary source reading: <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/community/text3/religionomaribnsaid.pdf>
- Documenting the American South - Adul Rahman Ibrahima Sori – secondary source reading: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/ibrahima.html>
- Omar ibn Said and Abdul Rahman Venn diagram (attached)
- Bahia Muslim Slave Revolt article: <http://lostislamichistory.com/the-bahia-muslim-slave-revolt/> • “Servants of Allah” written by Sylviane Diouf excerpts (attached)

Duration

This lesson should be completed in four to five days.

Procedure

Activating Strategy: The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes

1. The teacher should begin by previewing the unit material and providing a road-map for what students will learn in the multi-day lesson. After reviewing the essential questions, the teacher should play the animated video, "The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes," that shows the number, dates, and name of slave ships leaving Africa and going to the Americas (http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_history_of_american_slavery/2015/06/animated_interactive_of_the_history_of_the_atlantic_slave_trade.html). Before asking students some questions, stop or click on certain slave ships and have students investigate the origin and destination of these ships. After showing the video, pose questions to spark discussion with students:
 - How might the movement of people, also known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade have impacted and altered the people and cultures of Africa?
 - What major religion would the majority of enslaved people leaving Africa practiced in this time period?
 - After viewing the video, what are your feelings or impressions as you were witnessing the number of ships leaving Africa and heading towards the Americas?
 - How might you have handled being transporting against your will to a new land, cultures, economics and faith?
 - What ways or strategies could a group of people maintain their religious and cultural identity in the face of this enslavement?

Africans Before Captivity

2. In this activity, students will detail and explain the role of Islam on the Kingdoms of Africa prior to Atlantic Slave Trade. Have students log on to (or pass out copies of) "Africans Before Captivity" from ANCHOR: <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/africans-atlantic-slave>. Ask students to read this secondary source on the different influential empires and the influence of Islam. As students are reading the secondary source, ask them fill out the attached graphic organizer for better understanding. Project a map of Muslim Africa, like this one from 1375 for reference: <http://ayat-upfdih.tv.s3.amazonaws.com/files/2011/02/03/Map-Muhammad%20Africa.jpg>.
3. After students have read and filled in the graphic organizer, ask students to answer one of the following summarization questions by writing individually in a journal or on paper to prove their understanding of the first learning activity. This can be done in class or as homework. If there is time, discuss responses as a class.
 - What role did Islam have on the development of Ancient Ghana and the influence of the Arabic scholars Al-Bakri and Al-Idrisi?
 - How was the rule of Mansa Musa influential the on the Empire of Mali and his embrace of Islam in the 14 century Africa?
 - What role did Timbuktu serve in the establishment of Islam in Western Africa?
 - Overall how did the Transatlantic Slave Trade influence and impact Western Africa in the 14th and 15th centuries?

Five Pillars of Islam

4. In this second section of the lesson, students will detail and identify the five Pillars of Islam that members of the faith are expected to follow. Exceptions exist for the sick, elderly, young and pregnant women

concerning fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Tell students that the Five Pillars include the following:

1. Shahada – professing that Allah is the true God and Muhammad is his messenger.
2. Salat – praying five times a day in the direction of Mecca.
3. Zakah – paying a tax or giving a certain amount of money to charity.
4. Sawm – fasting from the sun up to sundown during the holy month of Ramadan.
5. Hajj – going on a spiritual journey (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

5. To assist in student understanding of the Five Pillars of Islam, students should read and analyze this secondary resource provided by the Oxford Dictionary of Islam: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1859>. Either print copies for students, or direct them to the website. Pass out copies of the Five Pillars of Islam worksheet, and have students answer the following guiding questions. Students should think about an enslaved person adhering to all five pillars.
 - What obstacles would enslavement present concerning Salat, the requirement of praying five times a day?
 - Why might have been the reaction of people living in the Americas to a person speaking the Shahada?
 - Do you think that an enslaved person practicing Islam have any reservations about saying the Shahada to strangers? Why or why not?
 - What was the early impression of Americans about Islam?
 - How could any enslaved person or community make a journey to Mecca for the Hajj?
 - Could there be an alternative to these practices in the Americas? Please describe.
6. Discuss student responses to the worksheet out loud as a class. These questions will be the foundation for the section of the lesson when students read about the lives of Omar ibn Said and Abdul Rahman Ibrahima Sori in Colonial America. Discuss: how did slaves practice the Five Pillars of Islam in the brutal and repressive conditions of slavery in the Americas?
→ **Teacher Note:** The website, Prince Among Slaves, is an excellent online resource with supplemental information regarding African Muslims enslaved in the United States. Teachers may wish to explore this site to gather more information or photos to share with students.
(http://princeamongslaves.org/module/?module_id=4d4a79a98ead0e8166030000&content_id=4fdbaad9aa8eec121f00000d).

Compare and Contrast Omar ibn Said and Abdul Rahman Ibrahima Sori

7. Students will compare and contrast the experiences of Omar ibn Said and Abdul Rahman Ibrahima Sori in Colonial America, two African Muslims who were brought to America as slaves. Students will read one primary and two secondary sources that detail the two enslaved individuals who continued to be practicing Muslims in Colonial America.
8. Introduce these two men: tell students that Omar ibn Said spent a large percentage of his life in North Carolina and produced an autobiography. Share more information about Omar ibn Said's life using the secondary source from Documenting the American South: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/omarsaid.html>. Tell students that Adul Rahman Ibrahima Sori was a prince in Africa and was captured and brought to America. Eventually, Mr. Sori was able to return to Africa in 1829. The film, Prince Among Slaves, recounts Mr. Sori's story. Consider playing the film's trailer for students from Unity Productions Foundation (<https://vimeo.com/19235584>).
9. Either with printed handouts or online, have students read the sources detailing the life of Omar ibn Said

(<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/community/text3/religionomaribnsaid.pdf>) and Adul Rahman Ibrahima Sori (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/ibrahima.html>). While students are reading, have them complete the Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the lives of both men in America (attached). Students should also annotate the readings, and look for evidence of the two men practicing the various Pillars of Islam while being enslaved. (If pressed for time, divide the class and have half the class reading about Mr. Said and the other about Mr. Sori. Have students partner together to compare and contrast/fill in the Venn diagram.)

Letter from Mr. Said or Mr. Sori

11. Either in class or as homework, instruct students to compose a two-paragraph letter from the perspective of either Mr. Said or Mr. Sori to a family member. The first paragraph should discuss their journey to the Americas, and the second paragraph should detail their experience practicing their Islamic faith in the Americas. Students should cite specific textual evidence from the primary and secondary sources. You may ask students to age the letter in some way to give it an authentic look (i.e. brush tea or coffee on the paper, burn edges, make small tears, etc.)
12. As an extension activity, the teacher may ask students to make a connection to a different group in history who have had to adapt and survive to practice aspects of their belief system.

Practicing the Five Pillars of Islam in Colonial and Antebellum America

13. Tell students that like Mr. Said and Mr. Sori, many enslaved Muslims in America found creative and heroic ways to practice the Five Pillars of Islam. Have students read the attached excerpts from “Servants of Allah” written by Sylviane Diouf. This is a long reading; you may want to assign half of the reading the night before for homework. Students should annotate the text to ensure understanding. The reading will help students find evidence of how enslaved people practiced the Five Pillars of Islam in the Americas.
14. Upon finishing the article, either in small groups or as a class, have students discuss the following:
 - Describe the ways in which Muslims in Colonial America practiced the first pillar of Islam, the profession of faith. The article mentions three of them.
 - What role did faith play in the lives of African Muslims?
 - In what ways did African Muslims practice the second pillar of faith, prayer?
 - Muslims are to give charity as the third pillar of Islam. How were enslaved Muslims, who were barely given enough resources to survive, able to be charitable?
 - What evidence has been uncovered that demonstrates that African Muslims practiced the fourth pillar of Islam, fasting?
 - Describe the ring-shout dance. Compare and contrast this dance with the fifth pillar of Islam, pilgrimage to Mecca.

The impact of Islam on Slave Rebellions in the Americas

15. Students will explore, engage, and analyze the role of Islam on slave rebellions in the Americas. Tell students that enslaved groups of people from Africa were not passive towards slavery. Rather, there are many examples of enslaved groups in the Americas rising up and pushing back against this unjust system. The practice of Islam and Arabic provided a unifying language, religion and cultural identity that aided revolts in the Americas.
16. Using either printed handouts or computers, instruct students will to read the article on the Bahia Muslim Slave Revolt (<http://lostislamichistory.com/the-bahia-muslim-slave-revolt/>).

17. As a class, analyze and identify the impact of Islam in the Bahia Muslim slave revolt of the early 19th century Brazil. Discuss:
- How did the Muslim slaves maintain an Islamic community in Bahia, Brazil?
 - What inspired the Muslims of Bahia to revolt against the Portuguese in 1814 and 1816?
 - How did Islam unify the diverse African Muslim slaves?
 - What role did mosques play in the revolt of 1835? What happened in mosques?
 - Were the Muslim slaves successful in their revolt? Why or why not? Were there mixed outcomes?
 - Do you think that a revolt like this would have been possible without Islam? Why or why not? Did the slaves have potential unifying factors other than religion?

Culminating Summary Activity

17. As a class, discuss the following questions. The teacher may choose to have students write an essay on one or more of the following prompts as homework.
- Explain and detail how Islam influenced the region of Western Africa prior to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Speculate why this religion spread through the area of Africa quickly.
 - How did the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade impact Western African kingdoms and educational institutions?
 - Compare and contrast the experiences of Omar ibn Said and Adul Rahman Ibrahim Sori in America. In what ways and did each person practice their faith, specially the Five Pillars of Islam in America?
 - Explain and detail how enslaved groups in the Americas continued to practice the Five Pillars of Islam in Colonial and Antebellum America:
 - Initially, how was Islam first received in Colonial America and why was it significant that enslaved individuals openly practiced speaking the Shahada?
 - What creative ways did enslaved groups accomplish the impossible feat of making the spiritual journey to Mecca?
 - How did Islam influence the slave revolt in Bahia? Did this religious movement achieve its main goal? Please use textual evidence from the reading.

Africans before Captivity

Name: _____

Location/physical features	Culture	Impact of Slavery	Influence of of Islam
Ancient Ghanna			
Mai			
Songhai Empire			
Volga and Asante Empires			
Yoruba and Fon Peoples			
Bakongo (Kongo)			

1. What obstacles would enslavement present concerning Salat, the requirement of praying five times a day?

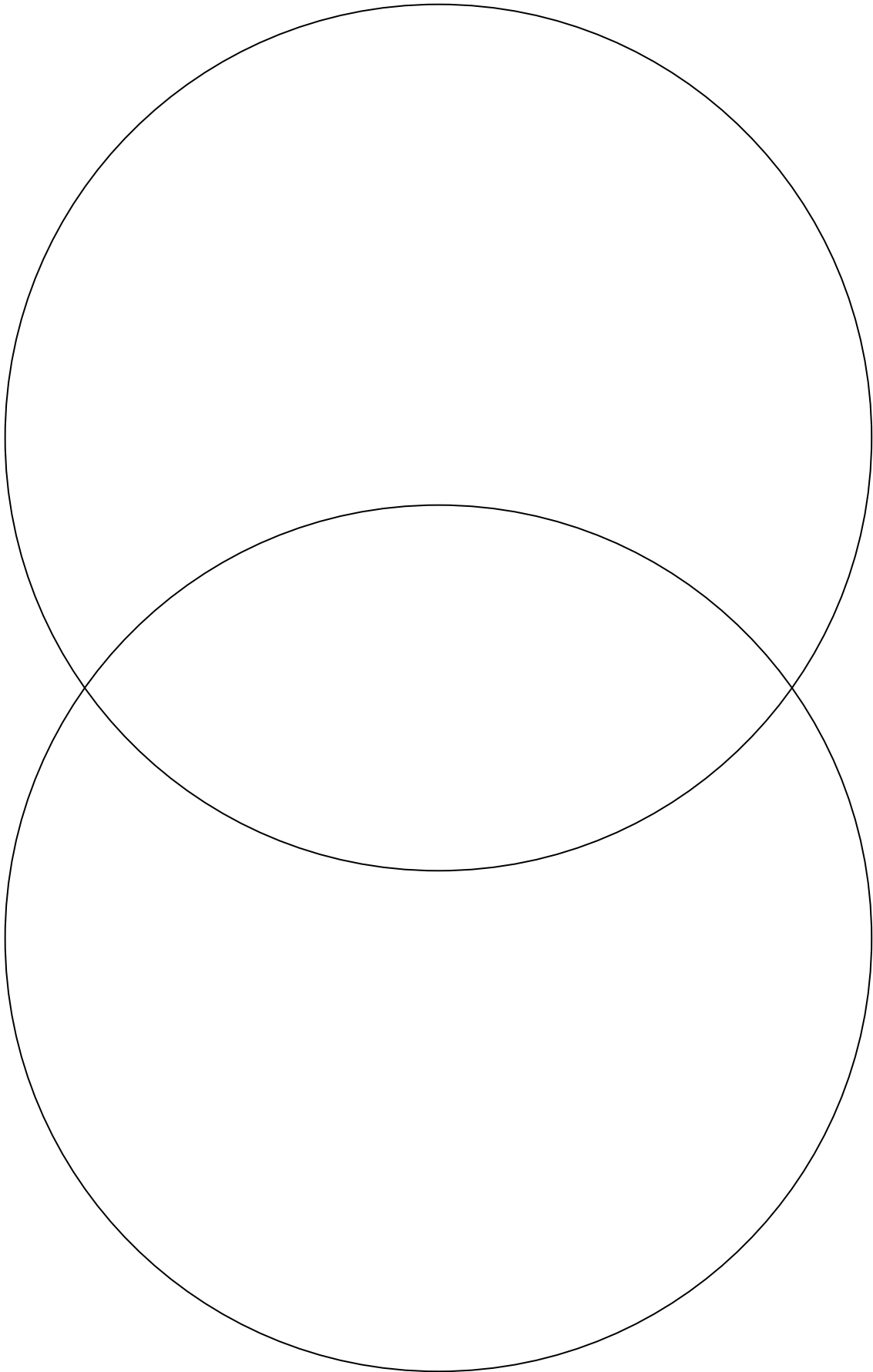
2. Why might have been the reaction of people living in the Americas to a person speaking the Shahada?

--Do you think that an enslaved person practicing Islam have any reservations about saying the Shahada to strangers? Why or why not?

--What was the early impression of Americans about Islam?

3. How could any enslaved person or community make a journey to Mecca for the Hajj?

--Could there be an alternative to these practices in the Americas? Please describe.



Omar ibn Said

Abdul Rahman

The First Pillar: *Shahada*

The First Pillar, the profession of faith, or *shahada*, is expressed by the formula *La-ilaha ill’l-Lah Muhammadan rasul-ul-lah*—“There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.” According to Islam, when uttered with sincerity, the *shahada* makes anyone a Muslim. In America the *shahada* manifested itself in three ways: affirmation of the Africans’ faith in Allah and his prophet, Muhammad; rejection of conversion to Catholicism or Protestantism; and, when necessary, pseudo- conversion.

“Allah. Muhammad.” It was with these words that a slave found wandering in Kent County, Pennsylvania, introduced himself to the men who interrogated him one day in June 1731. He was a fugitive and could not speak English. He could not say where he came from or to whom he belonged. As a slave he was called Simon; later he was known as Job ben Solomon. But as Ayuba Suleyman Diallo he had placed his faith in Allah. When confronted with an unknown, potentially dangerous situation over which he had no control, he simply affirmed his Islamic faith. He made the *shahada* the definition of his own existence, of his person. He did so rightly, because in the end, his Islamic faith and education saved him, freeing him from bondage. Islam appears to have been a central force in other enslaved Africans’ lives as well. Omar ibn Said, from Senegal and North Carolina, has left testimonies of his faith in numerous manuscripts in Arabic. Most start with an invocation to Allah and Muhammad. His last known manuscript is a copy of *surah* 110—*An-Nasr*, or “Help”—which refers to the conversion to Islam. Another testimony of the resilience of the Muslim faith appears in Ben-Ali, or Bilali Mohamed, a Guinean Pulo who became something of a celebrity in the Sea Islands of Georgia. He remained a devout Muslim all his life and died uttering the *shahada*.

Clearly, some Muslims continued strongly affirming their religious convictions. They had come from areas where Christianity had not—and still has not—been accepted or from areas where it was the religion of a few traders, mostly mulattos. What the Africans knew about Christianity they had learned in the Koran or the New Testament, not through any contact with the Europeans. They were not aware of the antipathy that their religion inspired on the other side of the ocean; furthermore, they were strong believers.

On the Africans’ part, it is worth noting that, as was—and still is—the case in Africa, the peoples who followed traditional religions were more willing than the Muslims to convert. This does not mean that they renounced their previous faith; rather, they incorporated whatever seemed useful in the new religion into their original beliefs. For that reason, they did not exhibit the defiance of the Muslims, whose creed could not accommodate Christianity.

The African Muslims clearly remained attached to their faith, and their enslavement was itself a good reason to be even more devout. Faith meant hope, moral comfort, and mental escape. It was also a link to the past, to a time when they were free, respected, and, for many, engaged in intellectual pursuits, not menial labor. Kélédor expresses well the emotional support that religion could give to the slave:

I had resolved to be faithful to the religion in which I had been carefully raised. I was attached to it by conviction; I was attached to it so much more that it was the only thing left to me from my family and my country; so much more that I attached to it the memories of the causes of my captivity, and the hope of release which was promised to me.

The Second Pillar: *Salat*

This faith, preserved openly or secretly, manifested itself in the various acts that mark the life of a Muslim believer throughout the year. First was *salat*, prayer, **the Second Pillar of Islam**. Constraining so as to promote self-discipline, it is done five times a day, at precise times, and is preceded by ablutions (the washing of the feet, forearms, hands, and face). It also requires a mat, prayer beads, and a veil for women. In a situation of servitude in a non-Muslim environment, the discipline of *salat* seems a particularly difficult endeavor. Though it considers prayer a pillar, the Koran is flexible, and a believer is allowed to abstain from praying if circumstances are not favorable. Understandably, then, the Muslims who prayed did so by choice, not by obligation.

Some, such as Job ben Solomon, prayed secretly. The erudite Job had been sent to the tobacco fields, but after he got sick, his master, seeing his lack of physical resistance, made him tend his cattle. Unbeknownst to the slaveholder, this was probably a real pleasure—within the limits of slavery—for the young man, because stockbreeding is the traditional occupation of the Fulani. Job had more freedom than in the fields, for he was far from the overseer's eyes, so he regularly left his cattle and hid in the woods to pray. But a young white boy had been watching him and amused himself by throwing dirt in his face. This experience, coupled with other problems, prompted Solomon to flee. He was soon captured, however, and taken into custody until his owner reclaimed him. While in jail, the young Senegalese man acquired some notoriety because he could write Arabic and was thought to be of high lineage. This new fame may have contributed to his owner's good disposition, for he gave him a place to pray and lightened his workload. This major accommodation to a non-Christian slave's spiritual welfare was far from being the norm, but it was not completely exceptional, as other examples of slaveholders who tolerated their Muslim slaves' habits attest.

In the absence of a vast corpus of references to Muslim prayer in the Americas, and because of the policy of forced conversion, it seems natural to assume that secret prayer was the most common. Yet a few cases of public prayers have been recorded. Yarrow [Yoro] Mamout, for instance, used to pray publicly. He had been deported to Maryland at the beginning of the eighteenth century and lived there for the rest of his long life. The painter Charles Wilson Peale, who made his portrait, wrote in 1819, "he professes to be a Mahometan, and is often seen & heard in the streets singing Praises to God—and conversing with him." Peale described Mamout as an honest, courageous, serious man, well-liked by everyone. His age, his Islamic dress, and his economic success for a former slave had made him a celebrity. In Maryland—the very Catholic land of Mary—he had been able to retain his Muslim African name and to have others respect his faith and his right to express it publicly. That was no small feat. Yarrow Mamout must have possessed a strong determination and a very deep faith.

"An old native African named Philip, who was a very intelligent man, . . . not a pagan but a Mohammedan," used to pray in public too. Scientific writer Joseph Le Conte mentioned in his autobiography that "he greatly interested us by going through all the prayers and prostrations of his native country." Another example of public prayer has been pre-served through the literary genre so particular to the United States: the slave narrative. Charles Ball, a non-Muslim native-born slave who published his autobiography in 1837, related in great detail the story of a Muslim enslaved in South Carolina. He noted his peculiar habits: "In the evening, as we returned home, we were joined by the man who prayed five times a day; and at the going down of the sun, he stopped and prayed aloud in our hearing, in a language I did not understand." Though the slaves' schedules were extremely rigorous, the man still managed to do his five daily prayers. Just as he would have done in any Muslim country, he did not hesitate to pray publicly, wherever he was.

Ed Thorpe, an eighty-three-year-old former slave, recalled his grandmother Patience Spalding, who came from Africa, in these terms: “Wen muh gran pray, she knell down on duh flo. She bow uh head down tree time an she say ‘Ameen, Ameen, Ameen.’” *Ameen* is the Muslim equivalent to *amen*. Rachel Anderson, seventy-three years old, remembered her great-grandmother: “Muh great gran—she name Peggy—I membuh she pray ebry day, at sunrise, at noon, an at sunset. She kneel down wen she pray an at duh en she bow low tree times, facin duh sun.” Rosa Grant, sixty-five, had more detailed memories: “Muh gran come frum Africa too. Huh name wuz Ryna. I mem- buh wen I wuz a chile seein muh gran Ryna pray. Ebry mawnin at sun- up she kneel on duh flo in uh ruhm an bow obuh an tech uh head tuh duh flo tree time. Den she say a prayuh. I dohn membuh jis wut she say, but one wud she say use tuh make us chillun laugh. I membuh it wuz ‘asham- negad’. Wen she finish prayin she say ‘Ameen, ameen, ameen’.” *Ashamnegad* could have been *Ashhadu anna*, which would be followed by the formula *Muhammadan rasul-ul-lah*. The complete sentence means “I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” *Ashamnegad* could also have been *Ashhadu alla*, which would be followed by *allah ilaha ill-Allah*, meaning “I bear witness that there is no God but God.” Both formulas express the Muslim’s profession of faith, the *shahada*.

The Sea Islands Muslims did not hide to pray; they did so very publicly in front of the other slaves, and some prayed in front of their masters. Thomas Spalding’s grandson, for example, mentioned that his grandfather had slaves, “devout Mussulmans, who prayed to Allah . . . morning, noon and evening,” and that Bilali faced east to “call upon Allah.”

In addition to both secret and public prayers, some Muslims managed to hold prayers in groups, in specially designated areas. On Fridays, the Muslim Sabbath, Brazilian Muslims in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries prayed in a group as recommended by the Koran, because the *jama’ah*, or prayer in congregation, is thought to be more effective. After completing their ablutions, they put on white garments, covered their heads, each took a rosary made of one hundred big beads, and prayed on a skin mat, men in the front and women in the back. In Brazil, enslaved and emancipated Africans had succeeded in secretly maintaining a Muslim community large enough and sufficiently organized that the common prayer could be held in a consecrated place. The house of a free Muslim, a hut that the Africans had been allowed to build on their master’s property, a room that others rented with their pooled resources—all these makeshift mosques enabled the Muslims to accomplish their devotions together, in the best way they could afford. African religions were forbidden at the time, and these slave meetings could not have gone unnoticed—even in Bahia, where city life was more flexible than anywhere else in the slave colonies. The Africans were watched. They probably knew it but were willing to take risks to maintain the rites of their religion.

All the references to prayers in the Sea Islands mention three daily prayers, and there are examples of Africans saying two daily prayers in Bahia. As Islam requires five, the incidences of fewer prayers indicate that the Muslims had to adapt to the limits imposed on their time.

The Third Pillar: Zakat

The Third Pillar of Islam is the *zakah*, or legal alms, an annual tax, paid according to the believer’s revenues and assets, that is given to the poor and needy, the slaves who want to buy their freedom, and the debtors. It is intended to instill in the believers a sense of collective identity as well as responsibility, by making it a duty to participate actively in the welfare of the community. The *zakah* is mandatory when conditions are favorable, whereas charity is not but is strongly recommended. For slaves to pay a tax or even give alms seems

incongruous; nevertheless, Islamic almsgiving did take place between slaves, as has been recorded in Brazil, the West Indies, and the United States.

In Brazil, Ramadan, a month-long fast, ended with a feast during which Muslims exchanged gifts called *saka*—at least, that is what their observers understood. In actuality, the Brazilian Muslims were involved in two kinds of almsgiving. One was the *zakatul-Fitr*, a special charity that must be paid during Ramadan. It consists of whatever is necessary for an adult person to eat for one day. In addition, the faithful are required to pay the *zakah* on their property, between 2 and 3 percent of their earnings or possessions, and they often chose to do so during this particular month. Even enslaved or nominally free, Muslims who were devoid of even the bare minimum found ways to be charitable in order to respect a fundamental tenet of their religion.

Other Muslim communities in other parts of the Americas were also faithful to the commandment. Among the Sea Islands Muslims, Katie Brown on Sapelo Island remembered that her grandmother Margaret— one of Bilali’s daughters—used to make funny cakes she called *saraka*. She made them on the same day every year, and it was an important day. Hester, another daughter of Bilali, made these cakes every month. On Saint Simons Island it was Bilali, Salih Bilali’s son, who made the *saraka*. According to Shadwick Rudolph of Saint Marys, his grandmother Sally made the best. In some parts of Trinidad the offering of food to the ancestors is called *sakara*; in Grenada and Carriacou, *saraka*. Popular memory has associated the word *saraka* to rice cakes in the Sea Islands and *sakara* and *saraka* to ritual offerings in the West Indies, but there is little doubt that these words are slight corruption of the Arabic word *sadakha*. *Sadakha* are voluntary alms that the believer offers to acquire merit with Allah. Freewill offerings are given during the holy days, on Fridays, during funerals or baptisms, or whenever the believer wants to do good.

The Fourth Pillar: Sawm

Muslim men and women further succeeded in respecting one of the most constraining Koranic commandments: the fast, or *sawm*. **The Fourth Pillar of Islam** is meant to remind the believer of the poor’s hard lot and of the compassion of God, who gives people their sustenance, as well as to enhance selfdiscipline. The Muslim fast lasts twenty-nine or thirty days, during which one may not eat or drink between sunup and sundown. It is a very demanding fast that provokes headaches and general fatigue and results in weight loss. To better appreciate the effort Ramadan could represent for a slave, it is necessary to remember that if the slave trade lasted so long and took away so many people, it was in part because the slaves’ mortality rate was very high. The average life of a slave was fifteen years, no more than six in harsh climates. Planters worked their slaves to death because it made better sense financially, they reasoned, to buy full-grown men and women to replace deceased slaves than to have to care for them, even in a limited way, for the rest of their lives. The French writer Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de Saint Mery, who visited the United States at the end of the eighteenth century, informed his readers that a slave brought about \$257 a year to his owner, whereas his upkeep was only \$13.48

The slaves were, as a rule, underfed and overworked. Despite these extremely brutal conditions, Muslims fasted. Salih Bilali of Saint Simons was one of them. James Hamilton Couper, his owner, described him as “a strict Mahometan; [he] abstains from spirituous liquors, and keeps the various fasts, particularly that of the Rhamadan.” Omar ibn Said was described as a “staunch Mohammedan, and the first year at least kept the fast of Rhamadan with great strictness.” In Bahia, Ramadan was strictly observed by the large Muslim community. Shortly before the Muslims’ uprising of 1835 in Bahia, the guards of the prison where the *imam* Licutan was held heard his visitors tell him that they would come to deliver him as soon as the fast was over. In the

aftermath of this revolt, as the police were searching a Koranic school, they found a calendar indicating the days of the Ramadan. Afro-Brazilian physician and historian Manoel Querino, who studied the Muslims of Rio at the beginning of the twentieth century, observed that during Ramadan, every morning at four and again at eight in the evening the Muslims ate a dish made of cornmeal, milk, and honey. In the meantime, he noted, they did not drink or eat, nor did they swallow their saliva.

African Muslims enslaved in the Americas were not obligated to fast; they chose to do so. The Koran is not strict on the matter and allows a believer to abstain from fasting if he or she is far from home or is involved in strenuous work, which was the Africans' case. The decision to fast indicates that they were well aware that their stay in America was definitive and that no circumstance, as bad as it might be, could justify, in their eyes, derogation to the demands of their religion.

The Fifth Pillar: Hajj

The Fifth Pillar of Islam, the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which develops the believers' sense of brotherhood and unity, was fundamentally out of the question. It is clear that some Muslims enslaved in America and the Caribbean had made the pilgrimage before their capture; West Africans, including teenage boys, had routinely accomplished it since the twelfth century. They walked to Arabia, crossing the African continent from west to east, on a journey that took some of them several years as they settled along the way, opening up schools and proselytizing. Some enslaved Muslims made references to their family and friends going on the pilgrimage. Omar ibn Said had made the pilgrimage himself, as had Mohammad Abdullah from Kano and Bahia.

In addition to such references to the pilgrimage as having been accomplished by the Muslims themselves or their relatives in Africa, one clear instance linking Mecca to the American slaves has been documented. Before the abolition of slavery, Brazilian scholar Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, who was visiting a house used as a mosque, saw pictures on the walls depicting the "temple of Mecca," with Arabic inscriptions. The presence of these images shows that the African Muslims had not renounced the pilgrimage, even if they were to make it only in their imagination.

Another American reference to the pilgrimage may lie in one of the religious traditions of the American South, Trinidad, and Jamaica: the shout or ring-shout, during which men and women turn in a circle while clapping their hands and shuffling their feet. The common explanation of the shout is that it was originally an African dance. But there is another, very intriguing explanation. In her book *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, published in 1942, Lydia Parrish was the first to report a linguistic scoop, given to her by Dr.

Lorenzo Dow Turner. The black linguist had been studying Africanisms in the language and culture of the Gullahs of Georgia and South Carolina and had come up with an interesting hypothesis concerning the origin of the shout:

There appears to be a difference of opinion regarding the use of the word "shout" in designating a religious ring-dance, which was enjoyed during plantation days after prayer meeting and church service. Formerly writers thought that the Negro used the word because dancing was so sinful that it was wise to avoid even the name. But Dr. L. D. Turner has discovered that the Arabic word Saut (pronounced like our word "shout"), in use among the Mohammedans of West Africa, meant to run and walk around the Kaaba. I believe he has provided the right explanation for the difference in the meaning of the word, as used by the whites and the blacks, for I have seen Negroes do the holy dance around the pulpit in their churches in such a manner.

In a linguistic book published in 1949, Turner explains, “Shout = a religious ring dance in which the participants continue to perform until they are exhausted.” The word would come from the Arabic *shaut*, which means, according to Turner, “to move around the Kaaba . . . until exhausted. Turner’s first interpretation seems to be the best. Actually, the circumambulation of the Kaaba is called *tawaf* and is made up of seven tours. To accomplish one tour is called *sha’wt*; it is pronounced in Arabic as *shout* is in English. Neither the *sha’wt* nor the *tawaf* imply exhaustion.

The linguistic hypothesis seems reinforced by the observation of the “dance” itself. Just as the pilgrims do in Mecca, the shouters turn counterclockwise. As in Mecca, they do so around a sacred object, such as the church itself (in the Sea Islands) or a second altar built especially in the middle of the church (in Jamaica and Trinidad). One can wonder if Muslims who knew that they would never go to Mecca recreated in a certain way the major event of the most important pilgrimage a Muslim can make. This hypothesis is fascinating and, if ever verified, would show an extremely puzzling phenomenon of retention and recreation. However, in the absence of other, more revealing clues, one can only conjecture.

Conclusion

Affirmation of the faith, prayers, alms, fasting, and dreams of Mecca: Islam did survive on the American continent. It adapted itself to the local realities when necessary, while retaining its force and specificity. It is not surprising that the enslaved Africans did not waver in their faith in God. A certain amount of fatalism, expressed in the word *mektoub*—“it is written”—is an integral part of Islam. Besides, it is in the most difficult situations that faith of whatever sort prospers best. In fact, far from making the Africans’ religious fervor disappear, slavery deepened it. This was true for both Muslims and non-Muslims. That African Muslims kept their faith is not exceptional. What is, is that they had the will to follow rites that were difficult to live by, and that they retained them in the most orthodox manner.

The bulk of the testimonies show that the Muslims did not content themselves with living their faith in silence, as recommended by the Koran when one is confined to a hostile environment. Fear of ridicule, the suspicion and incomprehension of others, not to mention the constraining aspect of some practices did not discourage them. The Muslims actively preserved their religion. They took difficult and sometimes astonishing steps to ensure its continuity in the New World. They were willing and able to organize themselves in a most efficient way with religious networks reaching into Africa and Europe, as is discussed in the following chapters. They showed realism; under certain conditions, they opted for a surface assimilation that guaranteed them physical survival and, beyond this, the survival of their creed. They were able to manipulate or gain the goodwill of some individuals or groups—not only abolitionists but slaveholders as well.

The African Muslims of America demonstrate that, contrary to what is sometimes asserted, Islam was not superficially implanted in West Africa. It was deeply rooted and for that reason could withstand deportation. During slavery, on both sides of the Atlantic, Africans were devout Muslims, sincere believers, strict practitioners, and active agents in the development and shaping of their religious and cultural world.

Servants of Allah
Diouf, Sylviane
Published by NYU Press