

African American Muslim Experience

[February marks](#) Black History Month in the United States. It's a time dedicated to honoring the [African Americans](#) who fought tirelessly for their dream of equality.

To celebrate this month, we wanted to highlight Black Muslims who contributed greatly to the history of Islam, starting with a [Companion of the Prophet Muhammad](#) (may the blessings and peace of God be upon him) named Bilal ibn Rabah.

Bilal was the son of an Arab man, Rabah, and a Black princess, Hamamah. They were important members of their community before being taken as slaves to Makkah. Bilal grew up as a slave. He was tortured by Umayyah bin Khalaf, a staunch enemy of Islam. He was freed by Abu Bakr RA.

Upon his freedom, the Muslims called him *sayyiduna*, our master. This shows the honor and immediate acceptance the Muslims had for one of the faith's adherents, even though moments prior he was mistreated in the most horrible ways.

Bilal holds the status of being the [first person to make the adhan](#), the call to prayer. The Prophet (may the blessings and peace of God be upon him) appointed Bilal himself to this position. Bilal did this first in Madinah, then on top of the Ka'bah in Makkah after the Muslims were able to reenter the land.

About this esteemed Companion, the Prophet (may the blessings and peace of God be upon him) said:

I heard the sound of the steps of your shoes in front of me in Jannah [Heaven] (Bukhari).

Islam is Race Neutral from the beginning

Many other examples of people of color in early Islamic History.

Umm Ayman (RA) was Abyssinian and a servant of Abdullah bin Abdul Muttalib, the father of the Prophet (SAWS). When Aminah, the mother of the Prophet (SAWS) died, Umm Ayman (RA) took over as primary caregiver of the Prophet (SAWS).

Usamah bin Zayd was one of the beloved companions of the Prophet .He was the son of Zayd bin Haritha. He was appointed to be General of Muslim Army in his teen years.

Other Companions

Sa'ad Al-Aswad As-Sulami , an Ansari

Julaybib Another Ansari

'Ammar bin Yasir was one of the earliest Muslims to accept Islam and was regularly tortured along with his family.

One of the famed companions of the Prophet is Mihja' bin Salih .

Abu Dhar Ghaffari

One of the faithful companions of the Prophet was Ayman bin 'Ubayd .

Earliest Muslims

When was first Muslim arrival in what is now the United States is not certain. There are claims of first arrivals from West Africa in the early 14th century. Columbus is supposed to have taken a book by Portuguese Muslims who had travelled to the New World in the 12th century.

What we know for sure is that the first real wave to the United States was African slaves many of whom were of whom Muslims. It is estimated that upwards to 20 percent of the Africans enslaved in the Americas were Muslim. Keeping the faith was rather difficult and many were forced to convert to Christianity. Any practice was done in secret.

Yet some brave souls maintained their faith until early twentieth century. Then rose the Nation of Islam.

Tribute to African American Islam

African American Muslims are the cornerstone of Islam in America. Their drive, desire, commitment and selflessness built the foundation for generations to come. Let's not forget that behind every famous face (Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali) there are countless unknowns who sacrificed for the sake of Allah. Shermain Jackson, Usama Canon, and so many others. Some of these people were brought to this country in subhuman conditions as slaves.

I assume most of you know about the Nation of Islam (however misguided) re-invigorated Islam in America. When Islam had almost disappeared from this land.

We owe it to our African American brothers who paved the way for Islam to flourish in America.

Just like we say, Young people should be thankful of the immigrant generation, the immigrants should be thankful to the African American Muslims.

Zaid Shakir

“At this critical time in the history of our country, it is important for Muslims, whose legitimate existence in this country is being challenged in some quarters, to connect to our American Muslim roots. As Muslims, our story in this country did not begin with the coming of Syrians, Lebanese, Albanians, or Yemenis at the turn of the 20th Century and later. It began with the lives of those courageous African Muslim slaves whose blood, sweat, and tears were instrumental in building this country. Their struggle is our struggle, and our struggle should be viewed as a continuation of theirs.”

Prejudices Among Muslims

However, it is true that in today's day and age, Black Muslims face deep prejudices within our own Muslim communities. Countless examples from the experiences of Black Muslims have been recorded including the following specific, anonymous examples

- a) I was made to feel less Muslim because I was not Asian or Arab.
- b) Being rejected for marriage due to the colour of my skin.
- c) Whilst performing her Hajj pilgrimage, one young Black woman reported that she was asked to move by the woman standing in prayer next to her, and when she would not move fully, the woman pushed her whilst she was in salah (prayer).

Prophet's Last Sermon

“Oh mankind, you are the children of Adam and Adam is from the soil. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab or a non-Arab over an Arab, or a white over a black or a black over a white person except through righteousness and piety.”

We need to internalize this message and make it practical. Most Muslims are happy in their own ethnic communities and rarely venture out to seek others.

Brothers and Sisters, Islam has rich tradition of racial diversity, embrace it and enjoy it.

Get out of your comfort zone. It is essential for our survival.

Join Others

Make a practice to visit masjid run by other communities. There are many masjid run by African American brothers. Ibrahim Center in the 3rd ward is one of them. There are Indonesian, Turkish, Nigerian, Burmese, masjid. Go there, attend their events, and encourage them. Show our beautiful brotherhood.

Our Duties - Unity in Diversity

We need to celebrate our diversity. No group in America is more diverse than Muslims. We need to embrace and mingle with other groups

Al-Hujurat (The Dwellings) - 49:13

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ
(49:13)

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). - 49:13 (Y. Ali)

Allah's Promise

As-Saff (The Row) - 61:8

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ (61:8)

Their intention is to extinguish Allah's Light (by blowing) with their mouths: But Allah will complete (the revelation of) His Light, even though the Unbelievers may detest (it). - 61:8 (Y. Ali)

An-Naml (The Ants) - 27:50

وَمَكْرُوا مَكْرًا وَمَكْرَنَا مَكْرًا وَهُمْ لَا يَتَّعَرُونَ (27:50)

27:50 (Asad) And so they devised an evil scheme; but We devised a subtle scheme (of Our own), and they perceived it not.

Be United

Al-Imran (The Family of Imran) - 3:103

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءَ فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا
وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ (3:103)

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided. -

3:103 (Y. Ali)

History of Muslims

Muslims are well aware of our history. What do we learn from it? Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] united the tribes of Arabia, whom the Romans and Persians considered so wild, warlike and backward, that they were unworthy of conquest. He moulded them into a nation of super beings. When we Muslims served Alláh, when we tamed our egos and subdued our vanity, we became masters of the world. We swept over North Africa, across Spain and southern France, and eastwards to China. Then we became greedy and selfish. We began to love our wealth and power. When we forgot Allah, Allah abandoned us and we lost our power and authority. This happened over many centuries. Although our numbers increased, our influence on world affairs declined.

We Have a Choice

Today we are divided into dozens of nation-states, and within those divisions, we have further divisions of mutually hostile and exclusive groups. There are Sufis and Salafis, Deobandis and Barelvis, Sunni and Shia. We have a rather fragmented and disunited Ummah, an Ummah that often seems to be at odds with itself.

In America, We have a chance to reverse. To show this nation and world at large how Muslims can be diverse yet united.

Unity Messages in Quran

Ar-Ra'd (The Thunder) - 13:11

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ (13:11)

Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves
(with their own souls). - 13:11

Al-Anbiya (The Prophets) - 21:92

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُون (21:92)

Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher:
therefore serve Me (and no other). - 21:92

Al-Mu'minun (The Believers) - 23:52

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُون (23:52)

And verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood, and I am your Lord and
Cherisher: therefore fear Me (and no other). - 23:52

Muslim Unity

- One Ideology
- One Book
- One Prophet
- One Qibla
- One Goal

What' Happening in Town

Ibrahim Center Program. Ubaydullah Evan, from Chicago will be there. First African American to graduate from Al-Azhar.

Attend similar events.