

The Historian's Craft: Islam in the Global African Diaspora

History 201, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Fall 2022

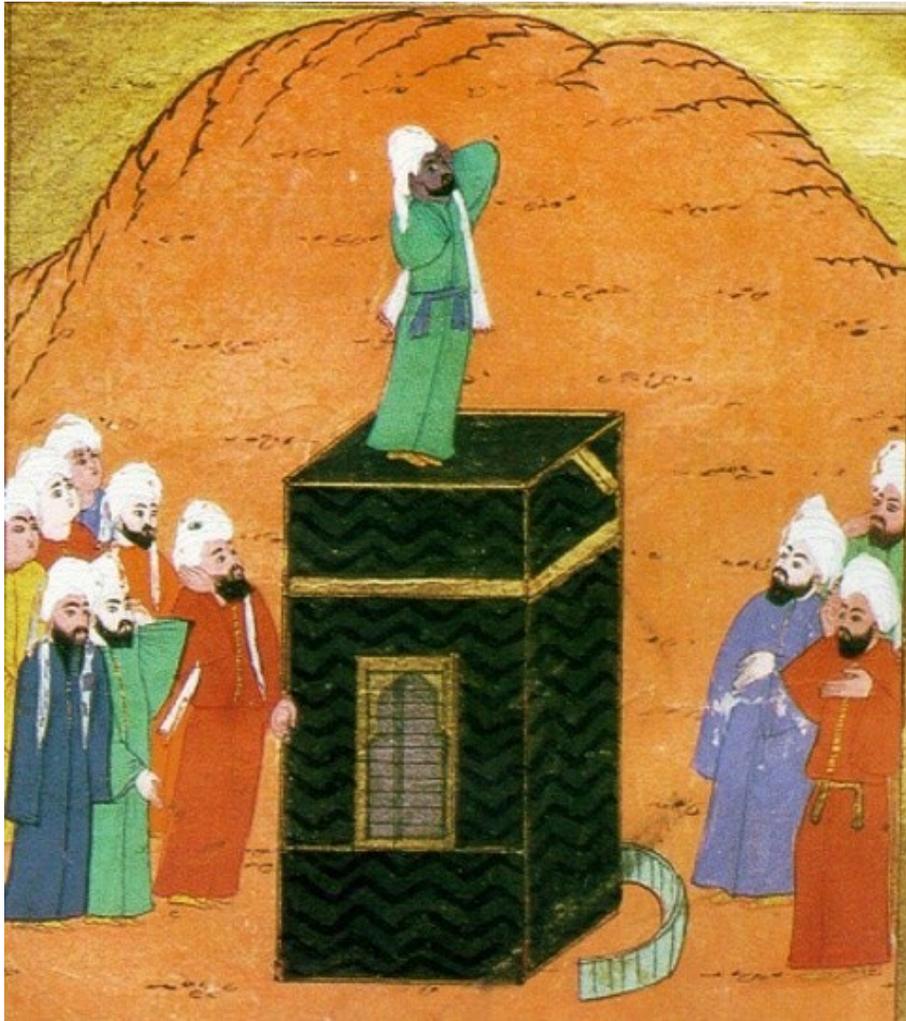


Image: "An Islamic miniature from 16th century, Ottoman Empire, portraying Bilal Ibn Rabbah giving the call to prayer."

Professor: Khaled Esseissah

E-mail: esseissah@wisc.edu

Course Time: M&W, 2:30pm-3:45pm

Class Location: VAN VLECK B 215

Office Hours: Thursdays, 11:00am-1:00pm and by appointment

Office: 4110 Mosse Humanities Building

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Islam has long been one of the religions professed by African-descended Muslims globally. Currently, Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions among African Americans, while it is also becoming a majority religion in many regions of contemporary Africa. How did this happen and how have Africans and diasporic Africans influenced Islam in the process of adopting it? Using regional and thematic approaches, this seminar explores Black presence within Islam. It examines how Black people in Africa, Arabia, Europe, and the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds have lived and expressed Islam in historical and contemporary contexts. Through in-class readings and discussions of primary and secondary sources, this course will provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to better understand the role Africa and Black people have played in the larger story of Islam.

In addition to developing a more nuanced understanding of Islam in the African Diaspora in its scope and variety, this course will help you hone your analytical skills and learn about what historians do and how they do it. Therefore, you will learn about how historians think, ask questions, find sources, make effective arguments, and support those arguments with a variety of historical evidence.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course fulfills the General Education COMM B requirement. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Develop the skills to articulate your analyses and interpretations.
2. Communicate historical arguments by deploying evidence in an effective manner.
3. Apply historical analysis to specific cases; and hone your reading and writing skills.
4. Narrate the historical development Islam in Africa and African Diaspora.
5. Read & analyze primary texts written by Black Muslims.
6. Foster your ability to think deeply about, and be critical of, the production and reception of scholarship and popular representations of by African-descended Muslims worldwide.
7. Articulate (in writing and oral presentation) an empathetic and critical understanding the diversity of Islamic beliefs and practices among the people of African descent around the globe.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

You are required to obtain copies of the following texts:

Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *The Spirits of Black Folk: Sages Through the Ages*, translated by Adeyinka Mendes

Storey, William Kelleher. *Writing History: A Guide for Students*: 6th ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Edward E. Curtis IV, *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora* [**e-copy is available through UW-Madison library**].

All other course readings are available on the Canvas website.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

- 1. Class participation: 20%**
- 2. Oral Presentation: 10%**
- 3. Analysis of a Primary Source (2 pages) 10 %**
- 4. Analysis of a Secondary (2 pages) 10%**
- 5. Research proposal (4 pages) 20%**
- 6. Final project (10 pages) 30 %**

Attendance is mandatory and will be noted. Please do not deprive us of your critical insights. This class requires your attendance and active participation during class sessions.

Participation: 20 % (200pts)

Participation means more than attending class. You can only participate fully if you attend, if you have completed the readings, and if you are ready to engage with your fellow students.

I will grade your participation on the basis of the contribution you make to the overall class discussion. I will note your efforts to engage critically not only the assigned materials but also the questions and observations of others in the class. You are expected to contribute to—but not dominate—class discussions, so please be sure that everyone has the opportunity to share thoughts, opinions, and questions.

An “A” grade for participation is earned by a student who enthusiastically attends all classes, gives evidence of having completed the assigned readings, and consistently

engages the class in thoughtful and sophisticated critical analysis of the assigned readings, thus enhancing the level and depth of class discussions.

A “B” grade for participation is earned by a student who missed a class, whose contributions to class are inconsistent in terms of critical analysis and engagement of issues raised during the class.

Grades below “B” (i.e., “C”, “D”, “F”) for participation are given to students who remain passive and unwilling to contribute to class discussions, have clearly not read the assigned materials, and who fail to attend class regularly.

Oral Presentation (10%): One 10-12-minute oral class presentation due on a date specific to you: In pairs, you will deliver a short 10-12-minute oral presentation about a reading of the syllabus *or* on a reading is NOT on the syllabus but which both you and Prof. Esseissah find important. I will ask you to pick a date and reading by way of a google doc; if you want to make your own choice, propose this to Prof. Esseissah early on so that we can decide where to fit it into the syllabus. Before you present, you must meet with Prof. Esseissah to discuss/brainstorm about the chosen reading. You must also run your outline or PowerPoint by Prof. Esseissah before you present to the class. More details on this assignment will be...

Two-page analysis of a primary source (10 %): is due on October 3, 2022 on Canvas by 11:00pm. More details to follow on this assignment.

Two-page analysis of a secondary source (10%): is due on November 5, 2022 on Canvas by 11:00pm. More details to follow on this assignment.

Final project 30 %: Each of you will write a **10-research paper, typed and double-spaced that examines a topic of your choice related to Jihad movements in Africa.** You may want to explore in more depth a subject we have covered in class, or you may choose to investigate a topic not on the syllabus. Your topic of choice must be submitted to me via email for **approval no later than September 19th, 2022.**

Final Research Paper’s Deadlines:

1. **Preliminary research proposal is due on September 19th, 2022 on Canvas by 11:00pm:** Please make sure to email me a **tentative title of your research paper and a short description, at least two paragraphs, that would give me a sense of what** you would like to work on. This assignment asks you to brainstorm two different potential ideas for your final research paper. You will write a paragraph for each idea, explaining what the idea is, what kinds of primary sources you might

potentially use to write about them (you will need at least 4 for the final paper), and what advantages and disadvantages there may be to pursuing this project.

- 2. Research proposal (4 pages) 20%: No class on Monday, November 21th, 2022.** Individual consultation on your research paper (proposal). Students will meet with me during class time to present a four-page proposal of their final paper in which they state the topic they want to research, identify a preliminary set of sources, and discuss arguments. Submit your proposal and preliminary bibliography on Canvas **on Friday, 19th, 2022 by 11:00pm.**
- 3. Final Research Paper (10 pages) 30% is due Friday, December 16th, 2022 by 11:00pm on Canvas.**

GENERAL INFORMATION & CLASSROOM CONDUCT

Technology in the Classroom:

Studies show that students who take notes by hand learn material more effectively than those who take notes on a laptop. Studies also show that using a laptop in class not only has negative learning outcomes for the individual laptop user, but for other members of the class as well. For these reasons, my policy is that there will be no laptops allowed in this class. If you need specific accommodations regarding technology in the classroom, please get in touch ASAP.

Writing Resources: The History Lab is a resource center where expert PhD students will assist you with your history papers. No matter your stage in the writing process — choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts — the History Lab can help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Go to: <https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/>

Academic Integrity: I expect you to know and abide by the university's policies on academic integrity. This course includes instruction on the basic principles of academic integrity. However, as in every course, you are responsible for potential violations throughout your enrollment. I follow the university's policies for suspected violations. For more information, see: <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html

Disability: Disability guidelines for course accommodations may be found at the UW McBurney Disability Resource Center site: <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>

Extension Policy: I will normally accommodate lateness due to illness, serious family events, or other exceptional circumstances. I will not accept a late paper unless you have asked prior permission. **For late work or make-up work, you have to produce a documentation of your excuse (e.g., doctor's note) prior to missing the assignment. An extension for a final assignment requires requesting an incomplete grade.**

Special Learning needs: If you have special learning needs, please let me know as soon as you possibly can, so that I can make the necessary arrangements.

Syllabus revision: While it is unlikely, this syllabus is subject to revision at any time by the instructor.

Some Nuts and Bolts

- Do not be late to class. Turn off or silence cell phones.
- Please learn each other's names.
- Respect the speaker, even when you do not agree with or respect the point the speaker is making.
- Listen carefully; do not interrupt—even when you are excited to respond.
- Try not to generalize about groups (even groups with which you identify) and do not ask another person to speak as a representative of a group.
- Keep an open mind—enter the classroom dialogue with the expectation of learning something new.

Look forward to learning about—and being challenged by—ideas, questions, and points of view that are different than your own.

- Do not “monopolize” the conversation; give others a chance to contribute to the discussion.
- Support an atmosphere of learning and growth. Approach discussion as a means to “think

out loud.” Allow others (as well as yourself) to revise and clarify ideas and positions in response to new information and insights.

- Bring out ideas, perspectives, or solutions that you think are not yet represented or haven’t yet been adequately discussed.
- Support your arguments with evidence. Be honest when you are not sure if you have enough evidence to make a strong argument or when your thoughts about a topic are still speculative or exploratory.
- Try not to make assumptions; ask questions to learn more about other perspectives, especially those that are different from your own.
- Talk with me about patterns in the discussion that are troubling or that may be
- I will use Canvas to send email updates to the class. Please ensure that your settings allow you to receive emails from me as they come in so that you don’t miss vital information.

Communication with Professor

Please feel free to email me with your questions, concerns, and/or to schedule a time to meet in person. When sending emails please remember to follow the guidelines outlined below:

- *Check the syllabus.* Before sending your email or message, be sure that your question has not already been addressed in the syllabus or announcements.
- *Be patient.* If you have a concern and send me a message, you can expect a response **within 2 business days maximum**. Please allow **2 business days** for assessment submission feedback.
- *Specify subject.* Subject line should include the topic of the message and class title.
- *Greet & Close.* E-mails should begin with a formal greeting and end with you signing your name in all messages/emails. So, if you send an **email to me**, please use proper format, including a salutation, complete sentences, a closing, and your name. Here’s an example:

Dear Professor Esseisah,

I have the plague and I will not be able to attend class tomorrow. I will make sure to keep up with the reading and assignments.

*Thank you,
Serious Student*

- *Check writing.* Proofread (i.e. grammar and spelling) your message before sending.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Sep. 7: Course introduction, syllabus, expectations

Please complete day one questionnaire before class time!

Week 2:

Sep. 12: Studying Islam & Africa: The Basics

Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, chap. 6 (on Canvas)

Ziauddin Sardar, *What Do Muslims Believe? The Roots and Realities of Modern Islam* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007), 41-79.

Sep. 14: Islam and Blackness

Dawud Walid, *Blackness and Islam*, 1-15.

Ali, Abdullah Bin Hamid, *The 'Negro' in Arab-Muslim Consciousness*, 49-77.

Selections from Jonathan Brown, *Islam and Blackness*

Storey, *Writing History*, 9-26 (1C-1M, on choosing an appropriate topic of study)

Week 3

Sep. 19: Black Prophets and Luminaries in the Quran

Mustafa Briggs, *Beyond Bilal: Black History in Islam*, 17-31.

Selections from Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *The Spirits of Black Folk: Sages Through the Ages*, translated by Adeyinka Mendes, ix-48.

Storey, *Writing History*, 33-6 (2B-C, on reading primary and secondary sources)

Preliminary research proposal is due today on Canvas by 11:00pm

Sep. 21: Black *Sahaba*

Ahmad Mubarak and Dawud Walid, *Centering Black Narrative: Black Muslim Nobles Among the Early Pious Muslims*. 2017, 27-29.

Selections from Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *The Spirits of Black Folk: Sages Through the Ages*, translated by Adeyinka Mendes, 77-191.

Week 4

Sep. 26: The spread of Muslims in Africa

Selections from J.F.P. Hopkins and Nehemia Levtzion, eds, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (1982, 2000).

Selections from Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *The Spirits of Black Folk: Sages Through the Ages*, translated by Adeyinka Mendes, 49-76.

At home viewing of Islam in Africa - History of Africa with Zeinab Badawi [Episode 9] (44.49 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcF-e6RhLzU>

“In this episode Zeinab Badawi travels to several countries and looks at the early spread of Islam in Africa and how many Africans practice to this day a mystic, Sufi form of the religion. She shows how not only Islam but Arab culture came to influence a large part of the continent, particularly in the north. And she charts the rise of the powerful Islamic dynasties of North Africa, that built magnificent monuments, mosques and empires, including a part of southern Europe and who helped determine the path of this part of the continent.”

Sep. 28: Islamic Learning and Education

Diagne, Souleymane Bachir, "Toward an Intellectual History of West Africa: The Meaning of Timbuktu," in Shamil Jeppie & S. B. Diagne, eds, *The Meanings of Timbuktu*, Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2008, pp. 19-27.

The Lost Libraries of Timbuktu (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzBCl9kcdqc>), BBC, 2009.

Week 5

Oct. 3: Black Muslim Diaspora

Edward E. Curtis IV, *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora*, 1-20 & 167-175. [e-copy is available through UW-Madison library].

Storey, *Writing History*, 42-51 (3C-3I, on synthesizing secondary literature, drawing on primary sources, and citing appropriately)

Analysis of primary source is due today on Canvas by 11:00pm

Oct. 5: African Muslims in the Middle East

Edward E. Curtis IV, *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora*,

Week 6

Oct. 10: African Muslims in the Indian Ocean World

Edward E. Curtis IV, *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora*, 21-52

Selections from Omar Ali, *Islam in the Indian Ocean World: A Brief History with Documents*

Storey, *Writing History*, 5A-5E.

Oct. 12: An Enslaved Muslim explorer of the Americas

Richard A. Gordon, "Following Estevanico: The Influential Presence of an African Slave in Sixteenth-century New World Historiography." 15, no. 2 (2006): 183-206.

Storey, *Writing History*, Chap. 6 (98-105)

Week 7

Oct. 17: African Muslims in the Caribbean

Afroz, Sultana, "The Unsung Slaves: Islam in Plantation Jamaica," *Caribbean quarterly* 41, no. 3-4 (1995): 30-44.

Selection from Aliyah Khan's *Far from Mecca: Globalizing the Muslim Caribbean*

Oct. 19: African Muslims in Latin America

Domingues da Silva, Daniel B., David Eltis, Nafees Khan, Philip Misevich, and Olatunji Ojo, "The transatlantic Muslim diaspora to Latin America in the nineteenth century," *Colonial Latin American Review* 26, no. 4 (2017): 528-545.

Curtis IV, *The Call of Bilal*, 111-133

João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, 73-129 (Read only the introduction).

Week 8

Oct. 24: African Muslims in North America

Selections from Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, 1-71.

Oct. 31: Narratives of Enslaved Muslims in the United States & Canada

Selections from A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said. Univ of Wisconsin

Chronic, March 2015, p.19, <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/re-membering-the-name-of-god/>

Selections from the biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*

Week 9

Nov. 5: Black Muslims' Contribution to Europe

Curtis IV, *The Call of Bilal*, 53-84.

Selection from Olivette Otele's *African Europeans: An Untold History*

Analysis of a secondary source is due on due today on Canvas by 11:00pm

Nov. 7: Ajami traditions in Africa and African Diaspora

Selections from *The Arabic script in Africa: studies in the use of a writing system*

Week 10

Nov. 9: Black Muslims in Contemporary America

The Autobiography of Malcolm

At home viewing the documentary Muhammad Ali: In Their Own Words

https://fod-infobase-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=114664

Nov. 14: Female Scholarship in the African Islamic Traditions: Nana Asma'u

Selections Jean Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u 1793-1865, Teacher, Poet, and Islamic Scholar*.

At home of viewing of interview with Ella Collins (Malcolm X's sister)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeR4snEsCgk>

Week 11

Nov. 16: Black Muslims & Immigrant Muslims in Contemporary America

Selections from Jamillah Karim's *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class and Gender Within the Ummah*.

Nov. 21: Research proposal (4 pages)

No class. Individual consultation on your research paper (proposal). Students will meet with me during class time to present a four-page proposal of their final paper in which they state the topic they want to research, identify a preliminary set of sources, and discuss arguments. Submit your proposal and preliminary bibliography on Canvas **on Friday, November 19th, 2022 by 11:00pm.**

Week 12

Nov. 24: Black Muslims' Struggles Beyond America

Selections from Black star, crescent moon: The Muslim international and black freedom beyond America

Thanksgiving Break. No Classes. Nov. 24-27

Week 13

Nov. 28: A Native *dīn* and the Limits of Solidarity

Selections from Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (NYU Press, 2016). 27-76

Nov. 30: Black Muslim fashion

Elisha P. Renne, "The Hijab as a Moral Space in Northern Nigeria" in Karen Tranberg Hansen and D. Soyini Madison (eds.), *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance* (2013), pp. 92-110

Abdoulaye Sounaye, "Go Find the Second Half of Your Faith with these Women!': Women Fashioning Islam in Contemporary Niger", *The Muslim World*, 101/3 (July 2011), pp. 539-554

Week 14

Dec. 5: Music and Identity

Helene Basu, "Music and the Formation of Sidi Identity in Western India", *History Workshop Journal*, 65/1(2008), pp. 161-178

Selections from Hisham Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire and the New Muslim Youth Culture* (2014)

Jonathan Curiel, "Muslim Roots of the Blues/The Music of Famous American Blues Singers Reaches back through the South to the Culture of West Africa", *SF Gate* (Aug. 15 2004)
<http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/Muslim-roots-of-the-blues-The-music-of-famous-2701489.php>

Dec. 7: Explanations & Directions: Black history, Islam, and the humanities

Edward E. Curtis IV, "Black History, Islam, and the Future of the Humanities Beyond White Supremacy,"
<https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/black-history-islam-future-humanities-beyond-white-supremacy/>

December 9: Research consultation & writing

December 14: Research consultation & writing

Week 15: Finals

Final Research Paper is due Friday, December 16th, 2022 by 11:00pm on Canvas.