



Speaker at Virginia Tech relates Islamic culture to development of black Americans

Article from: [University Wire](#) | Article date: [February 23, 2005](#) | Author: [Angela Kim](#)

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University Wire
02-23-2005

(The Collegiate Times) (U-WIRE) BLACKSBURG, Va. -- The Virginia Tech Muslim Student Association and Theta Nu Xi sorority sponsored a discussion with Dr. Sylviane Diouf, author of "Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas" on Wednesday night in Squires' Black Cultural Center.

Diouf spoke about ways African Americans have been affected by Islamic culture.

"A lot is unknown about African Muslim slaves. People don't usually think about Muslims when they think about slaves," Diouf said.

Diouf said African American slaves were directly connected to Islamic culture. Of the approximate 10 million African slaves that were traded into the Americas during the 16th century, 10 percent of them were Muslim, Diouf said.

Traditions of Muslim culture focus on the unity of their followers.

While African Americans were being enslaved in Western Africa, Muslim clerics had set up safe havens for Muslims, Diouf said. Thus, only 10 percent of the African slaves were Muslim. Diouf continued to emphasize the unity of Muslims by revealing that after the Rwandan genocides, the Muslim population in Rwanda had doubled, she said.

Diouf said many Rwandans saw the unity of the Muslims, and converted to Islam.

Diouf said some Islamic slaves documented their experiences. She said Arabic writing has been discovered on cell walls and in letters. She said these Arabic translations emphasize the unity of Muslims.

Diouf said that because Islamic culture promotes literacy and education, African slaves of Islamic descent would secretly promote their religion. Underground schools and the writing of religious manuscripts were two ways Muslim slaves would promote their culture, Diouf said.

"I think that the slaves being Muslim has a huge effect on black Muslims today," said Nassiba Adjerid, a biology graduate student and member of the Muslim Student Association. "Black culture today includes many Islamic names songs, and social aspects that came from Islam."

"I feel that Dr. Diouf's lecture showed the presence of Muslims in our culture; that even through slavery, things of Islam have still been passed down," said Candice Gibson, a senior civil engineering major.

"[The slave's] story is a human story, an African story and an American story. The contributions brought from the Muslim slaves is a contribution, and the contributions of other religions brought over is tremendous," Diouf said.

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