

The Reality of the Golden Age of West African Civilization
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Overview

This curriculum unit is to enhance the knowledge of the students concerning the development and achievements of the early African civilizations of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay. Also, it is to dispel the myths, distortions, and stereotypes of people representing African ancestry. The time period for the unit will cover between the fifth and sixteenth centuries. The students will examine the political, economic, and social institutions of all three empires. The unit will also be a comparative study by analyzing the rise and fall of the three empires and identifying their similarities, as well as their differences observing the rise.

The academic approach will be interdisciplinary by incorporating the humanities. The emphasis on cultural development, which occurred in the three empires, will include the disciplines of art, poetry, philosophy, religion, etc. It is important for the students to discern that these disciplines existed in an early time period in Africa. An observation of humanity, the early West African empires, will engender respect for their African culture.

The curriculum structure and approach of the unit can be used in any cultural study, especially as it pertains to other developing nations in Africa, Asia, and South America. The fall of the western African empires and their cultural development will provide the students with a more global perspective of the similarities and differences of the territorial entities. Following this approach will also help to dispel many of the myths and distortions representing the cultures of non-Europeans.

This curriculum unit is especially relevant to the ninth grade African American history course. The course also begins with the study of the early African kingdoms, such as Ancient Egypt, Nubia and Meroe. This curriculum unit will incorporate some very important cultural themes. The cultural themes to be focused are spirituality, resilience, humanism, oral and verbal expressiveness. These themes will further illuminate the commonality of human cultural traits.

Objectives

Students will be able to synthesize the information learned to create themes for cultural development in the three empires. The students will be able to assess the rise and fall of the empires and use these as indicators to determine similar patterns in other societies. Furthermore, The students will be able to identify the superlative achievements and to dispel the myths and distortions by European scholars. The objective is for them to see an early civilization capable of achieving and maintaining political and social structures for a long time period and balance and harmony with nature. The students will be able to analyze the African philosophic worldview and relate it to their early success in achieving balance and harmony. In the academic pursuit of analyzing and identifying the cultural commonality between African and other cultural groups, the students will appreciate that humankind is more alike than different.

Also, students will be able to take part in worthwhile discussions by using critical thinking techniques to differentiate myths from the facts. By utilizing critical thinking skills, the students will be able to identify falsehoods leading to stereotypes and prejudicial information. Similarly, the students will write in narrative form to reflect upon their analysis of the facts as opposed to the myths. For many of the students, this will be their first encountering of studying the outstanding contributions of non-Europeans. This will give the students the opportunity to reflect and express their amazement or change of their attitude. These attitudes will reflect upon the new cultural information concerning people who have been in constant change and development, not stagnation.

Strategy

Initially, it will be beneficial to identify and purge the negative terms presently and historically used in referring to the African culture and people. The incorporation of word lists and proper terminology will also help to dispel some of the misconceptions. Also, the students will be given background information in notetaking form. Therefore, it will be imperative for the students to create

portfolios and write journal entries. Due to the nature of the topics, the students should be given time to reflect and interject orally and in writing.

The Communication and Citizenship content standards of the Pittsburgh Public Schools will be mostly utilized. These standards will be significant in helping students reach the goals of the unit. The goals of the unit will be reflected in the content standard in which all students are to demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating, and cooperating with others. The collaborative work of this unit will require the students to work in cooperative learning groups. In learning groups, they will be required to analyze primary documents, as evidence of their newly acquired information. Furthermore, they will conduct research to document the evidence. The researching and documenting of evidence will be in correlation with the content standard, which states that all students develop and defend a position on current and historical issues by conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations. The oral presentations will allow the students to share their information and widen their knowledge and understanding.

The students will be engaged in map work activities, to identify the prominent trade routes of the west African empires, and to discern the proximity of the nations. The map study will also allow for exhibiting the evidence of cultural infusion and diffusion exchange. The cartographic activities will display the mobility of these early empires and their global interconnections. The students should gain an appreciation for the peaceful cultural intermixing of these empires.

The students will also analyze charts in a more comparative nature. The charts will be useful in allowing the students to observe similarities and differences in analyzing cultures. The charts will be a good visual method for understanding the rise and fall of these empires. In dealing with stereotypes and falsehoods, charts will be incorporated to display the European justification for the enslavement of Africans as opposed to the splendor of the early African past. Charts may also be incorporated to display the differences between the European slave trade and the African system of domestic servitude in the Diaspora.

The students will be expected to comparatively discuss African cosmology by analyzing traditional African proverbs. This will give them a perspective as to the African worldview concerning their existence and what is important in their society. In return, the African American students will get to identify themselves in respect to the African cultural traditional beliefs. The students will be able to make comparisons with the western cultural beliefs and attempt to analyze the differences.

The overall strategy is to actively engage the students and to prevent passive learning. The classroom lessons and activities should create a participatory classroom setting. Accordingly, visual literacy may also be implemented by studying the illuminating illustrations in Molefi Asante's textbook, The African American Experience: A Journey of Liberation. The study of these illustrations should incite much discussion and interest on the part of the students. These photos are illustrative of the fine art and history of these early African civilizations.

The initial strategy will also be for students to observe proper terminology and its origin. The students will also answer, "What's in a name?" by completing lesson activities. For example, the students will analyze the title African and identify its origin and meaning. The recognition of the various ceremonies, initiations, and rituals within the African society will further enhance the student's understanding of the importance of name-calling. The following represent introductory vocabulary to understand the initial development of all 3 empires:

1. Middlemen-the geographic location of all the empires allowed them to control the trade routes
2. Hajj-Holy pilgrimage
3. Cosmology-African worldview
4. Civilization-Advance society consisting of government, language, religion, art, etc.
5. Oral Tradition-Transmitting the culture and history by word of mouth from generation to generation.
6. African Traditional Religion-The fundamental belief in one Supreme Being and lesser spirits in the forces of nature.
7. Proverbs-African words of wisdom and morals
8. Cowrie shells-Early African currency
9. African kings-Political and religious leaders whose purpose was to protect and provide for their kingdoms.
10. Sub-saharan-Below the Sahara desert.

The following are words to avoid because of their negative connotation:

1. Tribe
2. Bride-price
3. Ancestral worship
4. Warlords
5. Nature deities
6. Slaves(should refer to the enslaved)

Rationale

The framework of this curriculum is to inculcate a value for multicultural education in a pluralistic society. The present system is still too monocultural. This is reflected by the lack of cultural knowledge and toleration on the part of our students, as they matriculate through the American educational system. The content standards set by the Pittsburgh Public school system attempt to eliminate these problems, as stated in the citizenship standards; “All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States, and other nations and describe the patterns of historical development.”

This unit is

To fulfill these standards by extrapolating and synthesizing from the early African history,

The achievements and cultural developments of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay.

My teaching assignment for over the last thirty years has been at one of the largest high schools in the city of Pittsburgh. Taylor Allderdice High School certainly displays pluralism with approximately 1400 students representing different cultural ethnicities. Over the last few years, I have been receiving students in my African American history class with some of the following ethnic names: Amir, Rasheed, Amina, Jameel, Jamal, Nadya, Kenya, Nubia, Jihada, Aisha, etc. The interesting aspect of this is that the African American students with these names have no background or conception of the African cultural link. They see it as just a name. This is also where the lessons on “What’s in a name?” will be helpful in establishing cultural identity and its importance within the African culture. Also, I have grandchildren of Yoruba ancestry and I also understand that it is important for them to understand their roots. It is within the African culture that the elders are to pass on the knowledge of their culture and history and I want to be able to accomplish this task.

A few years ago, pseudo-historians wrote about world history and stated that Africans had no history, culture or civilization. Therefore, there was the misconception that Africans had made no contributions to civilization. In reference to John Jackson, The Golden Ages of Africa, Professor Arnold J. Toynbee’s, A Study of History is considered a classic in the field of universal history. In the first volume of that work, the author tells us that the world up to now has produced twenty-one civilizations, and that all branches of humanity, except the Black race have been creators of culture. In the words of Toynbee, “The Black race has not helped to create any civilization, while the Polynesian white race has helped create one civilization, the brown race, two, the

yellow race, three, the red race and the Nordic white race four apiece, the Alpine white race, nine, and the Mediterranean white race, ten.”(Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. 1, p.234. London: Oxford University Press, 1946)

Subsequently, my question is, what about the Black achievements of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay? Their elaborate trade systems, ironworking, developed government systems, advance universities, etc. should not be undermined or simply ignored. The purpose for answering this question is for those students, as previously stated, whose names have cultural links and therefore cultural identify with these great African empires. The objective is for them to develop respect for themselves and their African ancestry. For the students who may not have a direct cultural link, but may sit in classes next to those who do, the benefit may be in developing respect and not just toleration for those students whose cultural ties are to Africa. The students together will be expected to develop a unified America by authenticating, “E. Pluribus Unum,” out of many one. How can this be done when one doesn’t know, who the many are? According to Molefi Asante, the author of the Pittsburgh public school’s textbook, The African American Experience: A Journey of Liberation,

“As a heterogeneous society, we need to demand an education system that reflects the political reality. Americans do not all have the same experiences, but we do have general and common principles that make this society one. One of those principles is that we work toward mutual respect for all cultures, not for a hierarchy of one culture over another. Real pluralism is different cultures alongside one another: You respect and understand my culture, and I respect and understand yours. Mutual respect comes from providing factual information and an orientation to the information that makes people feel, -I’m a part of this experience.”

In this year of 2004, we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. The Board of Education*. This case cannot be considered completely won by just celebrating integrating the students, there must also be an integrating of the curriculum. The curriculum must be more inclusive of other cultures, especially, those cultures that have been depicted as stagnant and void of development.

Consequently, the reality is that over 50% of the students in major urban areas represent minority students. If a negative self-image continues to be projected, this will lead to more urban crime, strife, disunity, unemployment, and deterioration of our urban communities. The political slogan, “No child left behind” cannot be a reality until the curriculum issue is addressed. The pluralism in our society must include diversity in the educational curriculum for all students, so no child will be left behind. In reference to Molefi Asante, “ At the

least, education ought to bring you a deeper knowledge of your history. Instead of dislocating, disorienting, or displacing you, education ought to center you. That centering process then enables you to open up to the rest of the world.”

Ghana

In today’s world, as students are hearing about wars and rumors of wars, this study of Ghana will be quite refreshing for Ghana, represented a rich and powerful empire. Not only was Ghana rich and powerful, but maintained a high level of peace. Ghana’s empire was marveled at by many other nations, far and near. In fact, Ghana represented the first great western empire of the Sudan region. In reference to the title of the empire, it represented the title of the name for their first king. Again, it will be important for the students to consider, What’s in a name? For this is one of the many examples of the meaning behind the names of countries, individuals and even the continent itself.

In reference to the empire of Ghana, the title referred to their war king or the “king of Gold”. Originally, the ancient empire was Wagadu founded by the Soninke people of West Africa. According to Lester Brook, the author of Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa,” over the centuries, as the wealth of Wagadu became famous, the term for its powerful king-Ghana became synonymous with the Republic of Ghana. Today, the present country carries the title of its first king.

In further observing the greatness of Ghana, it can also be illustrated by the location of the empire. According to the Arabs, the original Ghana was in the western part of the Sudan, known as the land of the Blacks. This area could be traced from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. It is bordered on the north by the Sahara and on the south by the tropical rainforest. The geographical importance of its being nestled between the Senegal and Niger river must not be over-looked. These rivers were pivotal in Ghana’s economic development and growth.

Accordingly, Ghana was able to take advantage of its geographical location by controlling the trade routes. Because of its geographical location, Ghana strategized as a”middleman” and controlled the slaves, ivory, and gold coming from the south and the salt, dried fruit, and kola nuts from the north. This economic strategy may be presented to the students as being analogous to the establishment of monopolies in today’s global economy. Ghana increased its prosperity by heavily taxing the countries, as they exchanged their wares. The students should be informed that they did have currency consisting of cowrie shells. These cowrie shells today are used for personal adornment and jewelry. It is apparent that this trade enriched not only the merchants but the king and his

government. Al Bekri explains: (Description de l'Afrique Septentrionale, Paris:Imperial, 1859)

The king extracts a tax of one dinar of gold on each donkey-load of salt that enters his Country and two dinars of gold on each load of salt that goes out. A load of copper. Copper carries a duty of five mitqals and a load of merchandise, ten mitqals. The best gold in the country comes from Ghiaru, a town situated eighteen days journey from the capital in a country that is densely populated by Negroes and covered with villages. All pieces of native gold found in the mines of the empire belong to the Sovereign, although he lets the public have the gold dust that everybody knows about. Without this precaution, gold would become so abundant as practically to lose its value.

By examining the salt and gold trade, the students should be informed that salt was equivalent in value to gold, further assessing that salt was used a preservative, seasoning and to prevent dehydration. The inland people didn't have access to the salt mines. This will represent a lesson for the students about the costly reality of scarcities. The capitalistic theory of supply and demand may be demonstrated from this economic example of the western Sudan's trading pattern.

In emphasizing the wealth of Ghana, the students should realize their knowledge of ironworking and the creation of iron tipped weapons. This skill was developed around 200 A.D. Therefore, Kush and Axum were not the only empires with this knowledge for such an early time period. The Soninke people with their skill in ironworking were able to develop a prosperous and extensive Ghanaian empire. The gold and other precious metals were not just lying on the ground but the Ghanians had the iron tools and the skill of mining to excavate.

Ghana's skill in governance must not be overlooked. Ghana existed as an orderly society as previously mentioned. The indigenous people of Ghana before the Islamic invasions were followers of the traditional African religion. The traditional African religion established a society consisting of peace, order and harmony. It is important to convey that Ghana had efficient governance and wealth, even before Islamic invasions. Consequently, the rulers were responsible for stability and order within their lands and for defense against invasions. Contrary to western views, the African king was not despotic and rarely acted as an autocrat. The West African kings ruled with a council of elders. They were elders because of their wisdom and position in society. The king could be removed, if he didn't rule in the best interest of his people. This is an area in which similarities could be presented, representing the American system of

checks and balances and even impeachment. Again in reference to the structure of government, Al Bekri stated, (Description de l’Afrique Septentrional, p.117

One of the major achievements of the Ghanians was their organization of the empire. The king ruled a functional hierarchy. He had a group of executive officers, his viziers; he had a governor to manage his capital city; and had as part of his court the sons and heirs apparent of the kings and princes who were loyal to him. No doubt these princes were present not only to enjoy the court life but also as hostages to insure that their fathers remained loyal to the “kings of kings.”

Emphatically, the king was pivotal in the West African society. This was depicted by the king’s religious position as an intermediary between his people and the ancestors. Because of the king’s significant position, the king’s court was one of grandeur and elegance. In reference to a primary source in Dr. Molefi Asantes’ book, (African American History, A Journey of Liberation, p. 32.)

THE ROYAL COURT OF GHANA

According to one source, possible Al Bakri, “The King of Ghana had no rival in West Africa. He could put two hundred thousand soldiers in the field, forty thousands of those with bow and arrows. He sits in state surrounded by ten pages holding shields and gold mounted swords. To the right of the king are the sons of the princes of the land colorfully dressed with gold plaited in their hair. The governor of the city sits in front of the king and around him his prime ministers in the same position. The gate of the assembly hall is guarded by dogs who wear around their necks collars of gold and silver. The people announce the beginning of the meeting with the beating of a drum called the deba (DEH-bah). Everyone gathers when this drum is played.”

Furthermore, assessing the decline of Ghana includes the invasion by the Almoravids in 1054. The Almoravids were Moslems who invaded Ghana from the north. Their intention was not only for political and economic control but to convert the inhabitants to Islam. The students may be able to use current events to understand the war against infidels in the Middle East today. The instructor should be prepared to present differences as well as similarities. The invasion by the Almoravids was brief but also destructive. Basil Davidson in using a primary source gives a clear depiction of Ghana’s destruction, (The Lost Cities of Africa, p. 88.)

The Almoravids “spread their dominion over the Negroes (of Ghana), devastated their territory and plundered their property. Having submitted them to poll tax they imposed on them a tribute, and compelled a great number of them to become Moslems. The authority of the kings of Ghana being destroyed, their neighbors, the Sosso, took their country and reduced its inhabitants to slavery.” By the thirteenth century the state and cities of Ghana, or such as survived, were far gone in decay. But the pattern of trade and tribute which had made Ghana strong over many centuries was not destroyed.

Mali

The establishment of Mali resulted from the pattern of trade and tribute, which had made Ghana strong over the many centuries, even though by the 13th century the state and cities of Ghana had gone into decay. The Mandingo people were able to dominate and revive the trading and tribute systems of former Ghana. The great Mandingo leader, Sundiata was able to protect the Mande people from the formidable military forces of Sumanguru. Sumanguru was responsible for the downfall of the cities of Ghana, but Sundiata prevented the complete collapse of its trade and wealth. The story of the success of Sundiata is very important in having the students observe the overcoming of obstacles and physical disabilities. A people’s strong desire for freedom and independence may also be assessed at this point. Again, parallels may be found in what is currently going on in the Middle East. In reference to Sundiata, Lester Brooks recounts his story in (The Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa, p. 125.)

The legend of Sundiata tells how the young prince fought against his physical disability. Through sheer determination, after months of effort and untold suffering, he forced himself to stand with a cane. After that he managed to walk. After still further agonized effort, he was able to abandon the cane. His strength grew with his age and he overcame his earlier lameness completely. In fact, he earned fame as a hunter and horseman, and for his courage and knowledge of military life.

In making parallels, it is also important to recognize the year of Sundiata’s victory of 1235. Most students of history and civics will recognize 1215, as the year in which King John of England signed the historical document, known as the Magna Carta. By analyzing the time periods, the students will gain a sense of reference. It should be apparent to the students that at this early date, Africa was not void of history and great leaders.

The empire of Mali was not without struggle or strife, and another extraordinary ruler ascended to power. The magnificent Mansa Musa helped to restore peace and stability throughout the land. Mansa Musa is responsible for building Mali into one of the greatest empires of the world at that time. In Lester Brook's book, he refers to Mansa Musa as the "Black Moses". (*The Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa*, p. 129.)

In his reign of twenty-five years this extraordinary man stamped his personality indelibly on African history. He was, says an Egyptian contemporary, Al Omari, "the most important of the Moslem Negro kings; his land is the largest, his army the most numerous; he is the king who is the most powerful, the richest, the most fortunate, the most feared by his enemies and the most able to do good to those around him."

As the students discuss leadership and governance, Mansa Musa portrays a prime model for Mali represented a mammoth in land area and people. The task of governing involved wisdom, keen judgment and administrative skills. In reference to (*The Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa*, p. 130.)

At the close of his reign, there were twenty-four semi-independent kingdoms within the empire of Mali. Most of these had tribal chiefs whom Musa had left in power so long as they demonstrated their loyalty to him; the others had governors whom the emperor had placed in power. Some of these governors were generals who had conquered the territories. Mansa Musa made other men governors in recognition of outstanding services to him and the empire.

The type of control and supervision displayed by Mansa Musa required a capable and well equipped army. Mansa Musa's efficient tax system and financial management allowed for the upkeep of a vast standing army. The wise and practical statesmanship of Mansa Musa can be seen in the following description by Al Omari in (*Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa*, p. 131.)

The sultan of this country (Mali) has sway over the land of the "desert of native gold," whence they bring him gold every year. The inhabitants of that land are savage pagans whom the sultan would subject to him if he wished. But the sovereigns of this kingdom have learned by experience that whenever one of them has conquered one of these gold towns, established Islam there and sounded the call to prayer, the production of gold dwindles and falls to nothing; meanwhile it grows and expands in neighboring

pagan countries. When experience had confirmed them in this observation, they left the gold country in the hands of its pagan inhabitants and contented themselves with assuring their obedience and paying tribute.

The famous pilgrimage of Mansa Musa in 1324 clearly portrays the wealth, power and size of Mali. The magnitude of Mali in these areas was even greater than Egypt. Much attention has been given to the outstanding empire of Egypt but very few scholars and students have given proper tribute to the political economic and social success of Mali. Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca helps to substantiate and properly assess the greatness of this empire. In reference to (Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa, p. 133.)

The Fabulous Journey

We also see Mansa Musa as a devout, practicing Moslem. This is clear from his pilgrimage to Mecca—a journey of some three thousand miles via Cairo over some of the most infernal territory on the face of the globe. But, as might be expected of so unusual a man, when Mansa Musa made the pilgrimage it became an event of international importance, one of the most famous trips in history. It spread his name far and wide and was a topic of conversation for a century.

Musa's *hajj* was the stuff of legend and fable from the outset. It was spectacular in size because the emperor brought along friends, family, doctors, savants, princes, tribal chiefs and governors of the empire. Some of the latter made the journey at Musa's insistence, in part as hostages to prevent attempts to take over the kingdom, in part to allow his son to rule without hindrance during his absence. There are varying reports on the number of people who went with Mansa Musa: One report put the figure at eight thousand; another estimated sixty thousand!

Outfitting thousands of people and animals for a journey of about nine thousand miles for upwards of a year was a monumental task. For months food and supplies were gathered from all over the empire. Gold dust from the royal treasury was divided into three hundred-pound loads—a typical camel burden—and there were one hundred of these! Musa had five hundred slaves with him and each of them carried a staff in which there was gold weighing five hundred *mitqals*.

Following Mansa Musa's return from Mecca, he sought to build Timbuktu and to establish centers of learning and excellence. Again, the students will gain

insight into the African value system for education and their historical cultural pursuits. At this point, students should be able to identify education as one of the characteristics of civilization. In reference to (Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa, p.137.)

Certainly the emperor's trip was the sensation of the Moslem world. It literally put Mali on the map. Maps of Africa after this time almost always show Mali and many have drawings of Mansa Musa. They usually show him as a black emperor with robe, crown, scepter and orb of gold. Mali became fixed in people's minds as the Eldorado—country with limitless gold, and a result there was an even greater flow of traders, merchants, religious leaders and scholars to the empire.

On his return journey Mansa Musa brought a number of outstanding Moslem scholars to Mali. Among them was a famous poet and architect, Al Saheli of Cordoba, whom Musa engaged to build a palace and a great mosque at Timbuktu.

As with all great empires, there is a time of decline. In analyzing the fall of Mali, it is important for the students to remember the diversity within and magnitude of the territory for it took great wisdom and administrative skill to manage this colossal empire. The successors of Mansa Musa lacked vision and vigor which led to invasions from the northern Islamic people, and the various territories within began to rebel and demand their independence. The stability of Mali was so entrenched that these events didn't immediately lead to its collapse. According to Leo Africanus, as a primary source (IBN Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa, p. 140.)

This does not mean that Mali collapsed in a heap overnight. Its decline was slow and far from steady. By the time the Turks took Constantinople in 1453, Mali's power had been severely cut. Even so, the noted Leo Africanus described the capital of Mali in 1510 as a town of six thousand houses with several mosques and Koranic schools. The people of the town were merchants and artisans and Leo called them superior "to all other Negroes in wit, civility and industry."

Songhay

The ascendance of Songhay came with the shrinking of the Mali empire and the capture of the Gao, a thriving metropolis. The city of Gao was very

significant in the establishment of Songhay. The Songhays were resourceful and powerful people in the city of Gao and they also sought to keep their independence from being taken by Mali. The Songhay had kept their independence until Mansa Musa's army had overwhelmed their city. In the study of Gao and the livelihood of Songhay. The students should assess the importance of geographic location. As for the other empires, the Niger was the sustenance for the survivability of Songhay, (Lester Brooks, Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa, p. 146.)

Just as the Nile provided the necessities for people to live and develop in what otherwise would have been a desert, so the Niger provides for its area. It is a waterway that replenishes the land during flood season, waters the entire area all year, is full of fish and makes it possible to raise crops and feed animals.

Another legendary name in West African history is Sunni Ali Ber. Making this a unit of comparative study, the Western European name of Charlemagne could be mentioned at this time for most of the students' frame of reference is usually of Europe. The students should be able to identify the remarkable characteristics and similarities of each one of these men in the historical development of their empires. Sunni Ali was able to take advantage of the turmoil within the Malian empire. Within this turmoil, he was able to expand the Songhay frontier into Mali territory. Again, the students will be able to examine the city of Timbuktu for it will be Sunni Ali, who will take the city from the Islamic Tuaregs. The taking of Timbuktu was definitely a prize. Significantly, the city of Timbuktu housed the internationally renowned, University of Sankore which was known for its great scholarship and scholars from all over the world came here to study architecture, astronomy, surgery, mathematics, etc.

Sunni Also seized the city of Jenne, which was another highly cultured city. The taking of Jenne by Sunni Ali could be a lesson in respect and humility for Sunni Ali actually befriended the King of Jenne and allowed him to sit at his side. Jenne also represented African cultural achievements as described by Lester Brooks, (Great Civilizations of Ancient Africa, p.151.)

Jenne also had a famous university whose hundreds of teachers were known throughout the Moslem world, especially for their expertise in medicine and medical research. Surgery was a field in which they excelled and they were reported to have pioneered certain advanced surgical procedures. Architecture flourished at Jenne also and the

combination of beautiful buildings and waterways made it a handsome city.

The study of the military pursuit and territorial conquest of Sunni Ali could be compared to that of Napoleon Bonaparte. The students should be led to observe Sunni Ali Ber, as a military genius with precision and command. The students should be able to discuss similar strategies and war techniques. Lester Brooks gives an impressive description of Sunni Ali Ber, as quite a capable military commanding officer, (p. 153.)

From the record it may seem that Sunni Ali Ber spent all his time in the saddle on one campaign or another. To a great extent this was true. He kept four palaces in operation simultaneously. Yet he saw the importance of governing his territory efficiently and appointed governors to oversee his provinces. And he recognized the strategic value of the Niger River, of the major cities of his realm (Jenne, Timbuktu, Gao), and of fast, mobile striking forces manned by professional soldiers. In his conquests and establishment of an invincible military force he was an African Napoleon.

Sunni Ali Ber's death came in 1492. The significance of this year in American history should be discussed so that the students can appreciate the time frame. By this time all three west African empires had been established and Christopher Columbus had just reached America. The observance of the significance of this year will signify the antiquity of these west African empires and the early onset of American history. In reference to the death of Sunni Ali Ber Davidson gives an impressive account, (p. 155.)

Legend has it that Sunni Ali was returning from a punitive expedition against one of the tribes when he was swept from his horse while crossing a stream. He drowned. Thus, in 1492, ended the life of this seasoned campaigner whose relentless drive for nearly thirty years pushed the Songhay borders outward and established a solid base for further Songhay expansion.

The outward growth of Songhay did not stop with the death of Sunni Ali Ber. In years to follow, a very dynamic and remarkable man continued to lead Songhay in revolts. This man was Sunni Ali's top commander and also a devout Moslem named Mohammed Toure', also known as Askia Mohammed. Askia Mohammed restored the greatness of Timbuktu and Jenne. With this information the students can re-examine the intrinsic African cultural value of learning and the pursuit of knowledge. Askia Mohammed was known to bring about a golden age for the universities. He did this by surrounding himself with learned Moslems.

Ahmed Baba was one of the most distinguished scholars. He served as vice chancellor of the university. He also wrote at least 42 books covering numerous topics such as: astronomy, law, science, etc.

Most students measure how powerful a society is by its wealth. It should be emphasized that Songhay was a very wealthy empire. The wealth of this empire was displayed by Askia's famous pilgrimage to Mecca. This pilgrimage was actually more grand than Mansa Musa's, but because of its later time period it wasn't given as much recognition (p. 158).

As a devout Moslem, Askia Muhammed believed it necessary to make the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. Just two years after defeating Sunni Baru the new emperor set off on the *hajj*, leaving his brother in charge in his absence. We are told that the mighty ruler was accompanied by five hundred cavalymen, a thousand foot soldiers and 300,000 pieces of gold. Askia's "budget director" calculated that one-third of this amount would be needed for expenses, one-third for distribution as alms in Mecca and Medina and to help pilgrims from the Sudan by underwriting the expenses of a shelter for their benefit. The final 100,000 gold pieces were for miscellaneous purchases.

Askia Muhammed's death brought about a decline in Songhay. The invasion of the Moorish people destroyed the governing apparatus and the central authority of the line of Askia and it wasn't replaced. The lesson to be learned by the students is that it was the peace and safety of the Songhay empire that is what helped to make it a thriving center through which riches flowed. The students should also note that the pattern of defeat results from covetousness, rivalry and inhumanity.

In fact, the legacy of the golden age of these three empires rested upon their tolerance for diversity, tranquility within, economic endeavors and their skill in governance but, the struggle over leadership is what faltered and the legacy of struggle itself is also a part of human history.

Lessons

Lesson 1-Vocabulary and Concept Development

Background-Many of the terms associated with Africa today are offensive and derogatory. It is important for the students to learn the proper terminology and use it appropriately. Throughout the unit these terms will be used in discussion and reading assignments.

Objectives:

-To expand the students' vocabulary to adequately describe the African experience

-To familiarize the students with new vocabulary concepts and relationships

Activity 1

Present the students with the following word list and concepts:

1. ethnic group
2. oral tradition
3. tribute
4. cosmology
5. matrilineal
6. African traditional religion
7. Empire
8. Hajj
9. Domestic servitude
10. Extended family

Have the students use dictionaries, textbooks and other literature on the ancient West African empires to write definitions. Proceed to place students in cooperative learning groups to write sentences which would adequately describe the historical and cultural characteristics of the West African empires by using the terms and concepts. Standards: Communication # 4 & 8

Lesson 2-Geography

Background-The geography of Africa is just as varied as its people. There are many geographical features representing the climates, vegetation zones, waterways

and natural resources, etc. which must be recognized for these features have impacted Africa's growth and development.

Objectives:

- To examine the geography of Africa
- To identify the geographic factors that made these empires great
- To evaluate the geographic and political factors that made these empires of West Africa great centers of trade.
- To study the Niger river and the relationship of vegetation zones to trade in gold, salt, food, and slaves.

Activity 1

Students are to use the internet and various maps to conduct a comparative study of the physical land features of the seven continents of the world. In Small groups, students are to create large visuals of each continent and their major physical features. Using short descriptive statements, students will compare and contrast land sizes, waterways, forests, mountains, and other natural features.

Standards: Citizenship # 2&8

Activity 2

Students are to be presented with the Mercator and Peter projection maps. Students will be asked to assess their differences by answering the following Questions:

1. How are both maps alike?
2. How do they differ?
3. Why is the Peter's projection map an important tool for learning about Africa?

Standards: Citizenship # 2

Activity 3

Provide the students with world desk maps and instruct them to illustrate the Pilgrimage(hajj) of Mansa Musa to Mecca. The students should also include a Written narrative describing the magnificence of his journey and the wealth displayed.

Standards: Citizenship # 1,2&4

Activity 4

Have the students locate the West African cities of Timbuktu, Gao and Jenne on a desk map of Africa. Students should include a written description of their economic and cultural importance in the development of the West African empires.

Standards: Citizenship # 2&3

Activity 5

- Students will locate the Niger and Nile rivers on a desk map.
- In class discussion have the students discuss the importance of both rivers in the development of East and West African Empires.
- As an assessment in a written essay, the students will describe the differences and similarities between the two rivers.

Standards: Citizenship # 2

Lesson 3-Ancient Rulers of the West African Empires

Background-Governance is an important topic in the study of these West African empires. It is to be emphasized to the students that the political sophistication which existed among these rulers made possible the peace, security and development which could only exist by having capable rulers.

Objectives:

- To analyze the political sophistication of the rulers of the West African Empires.
- To assess the political, economic and social policies of the rulers
- To identify how the policies of the rulers reflected the social values of their people

Activity 1

Instruct the students to create a small booklet about the accomplishments of Sundiata, Mansa Musa, Sunni Ali Ber, and Askia Mohammed. The students are to write and illustrate at least one page on each of the four rulers. They are to tell how their lives reflected the traditional African cultural principles as discussed in class and reading

Assignments. Standards: Citizenship # 1

Activity 2

Students are to identify the title Ghana and its origin. Have the students identify the titles of the kings in the empires of Mali and Songhay. Standards: Cit.#1

Lesson 4-Medieval African Empires

Background-One of the most tragic misconceptions of historical thought has been the belief that Black Africa had no history before European colonization. This misconception was encouraged by the pseudoscientific racist theories and Historians, who prevailed in the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This Is why it is important for the students to examine the greatness of these empires and to dispel the distortions.

Objectives:

- To create promotional tourist materials to encourage travel to these former empires.
- To analyze the time periods of development in these empires and to compare them with other major world events.
- To become familiar with the cultures of ancient Ghana, Mali and Songhay

Activity 1

The students are to be given a hypothetical situation to promote and encourage travel to the 3 former West African Empires.

Suggestions:

- travelogue for a prominent travel agency
- TV commercial promotion
- Magazine advertisement

Suggested promotional features to be included:

- University of Sankore
- Timbuktu
- Gao
- Jenne
- Ahmed Baba
- Niger river
- Libraries
- architecture,etc.

Suggested materials:

-Posters

Activity 2

Using a timeline as presented in Asante's African American History: A Journey Of Liberation, the students will arrange the following events in chronological order:

1. The Songhay empire is destroyed
2. Mansa Musa makes a pilgrimage to Mecca
3. Christopher Columbus comes to America
4. The ancient empire of Ghana flourishes
5. The university of Sankore was founded at Timbuktu
6. Sundiata becomes the ruler of Ghana
7. The Mali empire conquers and replaces the Ghana empire

Standards: Citizenship # 1

Activity 3

Inform the students that there are films, videos, books, pictorial materials, and other resources that tell the story of the ancient West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay. Using the internet and other reference tools, have the students compare the ancient empires with present-day Ghana. The students are to identify any Cultural connections that exist today between the ancient empires and modern Ghana.

Standards: Citizenship # 1

Content Standards

Citizenship

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, culture, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States, and other nations and describe the patterns of historical development.
2. All students demonstrate an understanding of themes and patterns of geography, know the locations of major bodies of water, land masses, and nations and describe the relationships between geography and historical, economic, and cultural development.
3. All students describe the development and operation of the economic, political, legal and governmental systems in the United States.
4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation, and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues confronting the United States and other nations by conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.
6. All students explain basic economic concepts and the development and operation of economic systems in the United States and other nations and make informed decisions about economic issues.
7. All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating, and cooperating with others.
8. All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.
9. All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing their communities, the United States, and other nations.
10. All students demonstrate the ability to resolve conflicts in peaceful ways, including but not limited to peer mediation, anger management, interpersonal skills, and problem solving.

Communication

4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, to inform, and to persuade.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations that are designed to persuade, inform, or describe.

Annotated Bibliography

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Student Readings

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Hamdun, Said. IBN Battuta in Black Africa. Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 1975. Excellent primary accounts.

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On Line Resources

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www.getp.freac.fsu.edu/fga/maps.html