

Mali Handout

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DID YOU KNOW THAT TRADE along the Niger River was the basis of Mali's wealth and power? And that the river served a similar function for the Ghana Empire earlier and the Sonrai Empire later?

DID YOU KNOW THAT TIMBUKTU began to decline after 1492 when European ships started sailing along the coast of West Africa? It was easier to carry coastal trade goods over the ocean than across the desert.

DID YOU KNOW THAT MALI was always run by decentralized democratic governance, until the European conquest brought centralization?

DID YOU KNOW THAT LAND is communally owned? It cannot be sold because it belongs to God, and is given by God to the community: to those who are here, to those who went before, and to those who have not yet been born.

DID YOU KNOW THAT POLYGAMY came about because widows and their children are vulnerable? A widow married one of her husband's brothers, because they owed her and her children board and lodging.

DID YOU KNOW THAT the Southern Porch Culture comes from West Africa? Malians always sit on their porch or under their shadiest tree, or rock gently in a hammock, because it is too hot and airless inside the house.

DID YOU KNOW THAT MOST AMERICAN MUSIC came from Mali? The people of West Africa brought the blues (Ali Farka TOURE plays the music of Timbuktu and it is what we call 'blues' music), and their descendants created jazz, reggae, rock 'n roll, hiphop, rap, and other music from their African roots.

DID YOU KNOW THAT Blue Grass and Appalachian music is a fusion of West African rhythms and Scots-Irish rhythms?

DID YOU KNOW THAT *okra* is the name in Ghana and *gombo* is the word in Gambia for the same vegetable that the Hindus call *bindhi*? This vegetable reached the USA from the Malian Empire.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ISLAM has been the main religion of Timbuktu for more than 1,000 years? Islam crossed the desert from Morocco with the camel caravans. Islam is the only religion that emphasizes the value of commerce (the Prophet Mohammed was a merchant) because commerce carries not only goods, but information and ideas.

DID YOU KNOW THAT nearly all Africans believed in ONE GOD thousands of years before Jesus Christ was born? Abraham found God in Africa, and that is how he took monotheism to the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims.

DID YOU KNOW THAT Jews, Christians and Muslims are all part of the same monotheistic religion? The name for God varies according to language: in Arabic people call Him 'Allah', in French they call Him 'Dieu', and Malians who speak Bambara call Him 'Nga'.

DID YOU KNOW THAT MALIAN MOTHERS ARE DIVINE? It is true in Africa's ancestral religion and it is true in Islam, that after God the next person you are supposed to love and revere most is your mother. In Mali children show huge reverence to their mothers.

DID YOU KNOW THAT CHILDREN live with their mother? Some fathers have more than one wife, and families do not all sleep in the same place. The father has his own room, and each mother has hers, which she shares with her small children. When kids reach their teens, the father builds a different house for them to sleep in.

DID YOU KNOW THAT that village houses are mostly round with a single room? In Mali the word for house = the word for room. A compound will typically be surrounded by individual one-room houses.