The Ultimate AP® African American Studies Unit 1 Cheat Sheet

1.1 What Is African American Studies?

The Field

African American Studies: interdisciplinary study of the history, culture & contributions of people of African descent in the U.S. + across the global **diaspora**.

Roots before academia: grew out of Black artistic, intellectual & political work long before colleges took it up.

Africa's place: studies how ideas about Africa's past formed + Africa's shifting ties to diaspora communities.

How It Entered Colleges (1960s–70s)

Context: late Civil Rights + **Black Power** era → 1st large wave of Black students at mostly white colleges.

Black Campus Movement (1965–72): 100,000s of students (Black, Latino, Asian, white allies) protest at 1,000+ colleges → demand Black studies, faculty, support.

Required source	Shows
SF State strike (1968)	Student protest → dept.
Hunter College (1972)	Black + Puerto Rican st.
NCBS conf. (1975)	Field goes national

Why Start w/ Africa?

Africa = birthplace of humanity + ancestral home of African Americans; its arts, tech, politics, religion & music still inform Black identity across the diaspora today.

Key claim: early Africa was diverse, complex & globally linked *long before* the transatlantic slave trade.

Course Frame

4 themes: Migration & Diaspora · Intersections of Identity · Creativity & Arts · Resistance & Resilience.

⚠ Don't open the story at enslavement. Unit 1 exists to show African societies on their own terms first.

✓ MCQ on 1.1 sources: link the image or document to a demand (Black studies, faculty, support) + its era (Black Power, late 1960s to the early 1970s).

1.2–1.3 Landscape & Bantu Expansion

Geography

Africa: 2nd-largest continent. Red Sea, Mediterranean, Indian Ocean → early ties beyond Africa; Atlantic on W.
5 rivers link interior: **Niger**, **Congo**, **Zambezi**, **Orange**, **Nile**.

Climate zone	e.g.	Trade/econ.
Desert	Sahara	Nomads, salt
Semiarid	Sahel	Livestock
Savannah	Grasslands	Grain crops
Rainforest	Tropics	Kola, yams, gold
Mediterranean	N. coast	Sea links

Settlement & Trade

Sahel + savannah = population centers b/c: (1) rivers move people/goods, (2) fertile land → farming + herding, (3) they link Saharan trade (N) w/ the tropics (S).
Climate variety → each zone makes different goods (salt, grain, kola, gold) → trade between zones.
Rivers as highways: Niger + Congo carry people, goods & ideas between the interior and the coasts.
Salt ↔ gold: desert salt + forest gold/kola = core N–S exchange that feeds Sahel trading cities.

Bantu Expansion (1500 BCE–500 CE)

Cause: new tools + crops (bananas, yams, grains) → population growth in W. & Central Africa → migration S. & E.
Effect: Bantu = family of 100s of languages across W., Central & S. Africa (**Xhosa**, **Swahili**, **Kikongo**, **Zulu**).
Diaspora link: large share of African Americans' genetic ancestry → W. & Central African Bantu-speaking peoples.
Spread: migrants carry farming + ironworking south & east; mix w/ local peoples rather than replacing all of them.

⚠ Bantu = a language family spread by migration, not one ethnic group, one empire or one religion.

✓ Map stimulus: trace arrows from W./Central Africa → name cause (ag + tech) and effect (language spread).

1.4 Africa's Ancient Societies

Nile: Egypt & Nubia

Egypt + Nubia (Kush) emerge on the Nile ~3000 BCE, among the world's earliest complex societies.
Rivalry: Nubia supplied Egypt's gold + luxury goods → conflict. ~750 BCE Nubia conquers Egypt → **25th Dynasty** ("Black Pharaohs") rules both lands for ~100 yrs.

Aksum & Nok

Society	Region	Date	Known for
Nubia/Kush	Nile	~3000 BCE	Gold
Aksum	Ethiopia	~100 BCE	Coins, Ge'ez
Nok	Nigeria	~500 BCE	Terracotta

Aksum: Red Sea hub → Mediterranean, Roman & Indian trade. Own currency + script (**Ge'ez**).
King Ezana → Aksum 1st African society to adopt **Christianity** (4th c.), on its own terms, w/o colonialism. Ge'ez is still the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's liturgy.
Nok: early W. African ironworkers; naturalistic terracotta heads w/ detailed hair + jewelry → oldest evidence of complex settled society in sub-Saharan Africa.

Why It Matters to Black Communities

Late 1700s+: African American writers cite ancient Africa (religious + secular texts) to refute racist claims Africa lacked govt or culture → part of the early AAS canon.
Mid-1900s: research on ancient Africa backs African claims to **self-rule** vs. European colonialism.
Exam link: ancient achievements → later arguments for Black dignity, Pan-Africanism & independence.

⚠ Aksum's Christianity predates European contact in the region by 1,000+ yrs; don't credit missionaries.

Nubian pyramids at Meroë outnumber Egypt's; Kush also smelted iron & wrote in Meroitic script.

✓ Ezana coin / Nok head stimulus: what it shows (trade, faith, skill) → what it disproves ("no civilization").

1.5 Sudanic Empires: Ghana, Mali, Songhai

Gold, Trade & Islam

Empire	Peak	Key fact
Ghana	7th–13th c.	Gold; 1st of 3
Mali	13th–17th c.	Mansa Musa
Songhai	15th–16th c.	Largest + last

Sudanic (Sahelian) empires: gold mines + control of **trans-Saharan** routes linking the Sahara (→ N. Africa, Europe) w/ sub-Saharan Africa's forest zone & its gold.
Salt-for-gold: Saharan salt ↔ forest gold; Sudanic rulers tax the exchange → state wealth, armies & cities.
Islam spreads via N. African traders, scholars & administrators; Arabic literacy staffs royal courts. Rulers Muslim, many subjects keep local faiths (→ 1.7).
Songhai's decline: Portuguese sail W. African coast → trade shifts Saharan → **Atlantic** routes → less wealth.

Mali's Reach

Mansa Musa (14th c.) → Mali = a center of trade, learning & cultural exchange in the Islamic world.
Military edge: wealth + Saharan access → bred N. African horses, bought steel weapons → power over neighbors.
Hajj of 1324 (to Mecca) → Mediterranean merchants + mapmakers notice his gold → plans to trade European goods for Mali gold; Mali goes on world maps.

Sources & Diaspora Link

Catalan Atlas (1375, Cresques): Musa enthroned w/ a gold nugget → Europe's view of Mali's wealth. **Mali equestrian figure**: horse = military power + elite status.
Reach: Senegambia → Côte d'Ivoire + parts of Nigeria. Most enslaved Africans brought directly to N. America came from **W. & W. Central Africa**, these same regions.

⚠ Atlas made in Europe: it shows Europeans' view of Mali, not Mali's self-image. Ask who made it & why.

✓ Causation chain: gold + location → trade → Islam + wealth → expansion; Atlantic shift → decline.

1.6–1.7 Learning Traditions & Syncretism

Learning in West Africa

Timbuktu (Tombouctou, Mali): book trade, university & scholars: astronomers, mathematicians, architects, jurists.
Griots: historians, storytellers, musicians; preserve community history through oral performance.
Epic of Sundiata: griots' account of Mali's 13th-c. founder → political history + moral lessons in one.
Gender: women + men served as griots; they kept records of births, deaths, marriages & family lineages.
Timbuktu manuscripts: Arabic texts on law, astronomy, medicine → proof of written scholarship in W. Africa.

Model	Form	Keeps
Institutional	Timbuktu	Written texts
Community	Griots	Oral history

Syncretism (1.7)

Syncretism: blending a new faith w/ Indigenous beliefs. Rulers adopt Islam (Mali, Songhai) or Christianity (Kongo) → subjects blend it w/ local cosmologies.
Carried to Americas: ~¼ of enslaved Africans in N. America from Christian societies, ~¼ from Muslim societies.
Survivals: ancestor veneration, divination, healing, group song + dance → **Louisiana Voodoo**; also Vodun (Haiti), Regla de Ocha (Cuba), Candomblé (Brazil) today.
Resistance: syncretic ceremonies used to gain spiritual strength & unity before revolts (e.g., Haiti, 1791).
Sources: Yoruba **Oshe Shango** wand (orisha of thunder); Rosales, *Oya's Betrayal* (2020); Abbilona, "Osain del Monte."

⚠ Syncretism ≠ abandoning African belief. It is adaptation that keeps core practices alive under new names.

✓ Oral sources are evidence: say what griots preserve + why oral tradition is a reliable record (trained, public).

Exam link: written (Timbuktu) + oral (griot) traditions → both refute claims that Africa had no history.

1.8 Southern & East Africa

Great Zimbabwe (12th–15th c.)

Kingdom of Zimbabwe: capital Great Zimbabwe; **Shona** people grow rich from gold, ivory, cattle; tied to Swahili Coast trade via the Zambezi & Limpopo valleys.
Stone walls (no mortar): military defense + a long-distance trade hub; some walls stand 11 m high.
Great Enclosure: religious + admin. center. **Conical tower**: likely a granary (stored food = royal wealth).
Meaning: ruins = Shona kings' power, autonomy & farming skill; a lasting symbol of African achievement.
Who built it: colonial writers credited outsiders; the evidence shows Shona ancestors did → independent **Zimbabwe** (1980) takes its name from the ruins as a point of pride.

Swahili Coast (11th–15th c.)

Name: Arabic *sawahil* = "coasts." Runs **Somalia → Mozambique**, ~3,000 km of East African shore.
City-states link African interior ↔ Arab, Persian, Indian & Chinese traders via Indian Ocean monsoon routes.
Unity w/o one ruler: shared language (**Swahili**, a Bantu lingua franca) + shared religion (**Islam**) + shared trade ties.
Key cities: Mogadishu, Mombasa, Zanzibar, **Kilwa**.
Goods: gold + ivory from interior ↔ cloth, beads, porcelain from Asia; **cowrie shells** used as currency.

Factor	Rise	Fall
Geography	Ocean ports	Exposed coast
Wealth	Gold, ivory	Lures Portugal
Politics	Indep. cities	Taken 1500s

Decline: Swahili wealth draws **Portuguese**, who invade major city-states + settle (16th c.) to control Indian Ocean trade.

⚠ Swahili is a Bantu language w/ Arabic loanwords, not an Arabic language; its grammar is Bantu.

✓ Trade-route map: name 2+ partners (Arab, Persian, Indian, Chinese) + goods (gold, ivory, cowries).

1.9 West Central Africa: Kingdom of Kongo

Conversion (1491)

Nzinga a Nkuwu (João I) + son **Nzinga Mbemba** (Afonso I) voluntarily adopt Roman Catholicism.
Economic effect: closer trade w/ Portugal → more wealth. Goods: ivory, salt, copper, textiles, raffia cloth.
Religious effect: nobles chose it + no colonial occupation → wide acceptance → a distinct **African Catholicism** blending local art, symbols + Kongo cosmology & culture.
Afonso I (r. 1509–42): sends nobles' sons to study in Portugal; builds churches + schools in Kongo.

Portugal & the Slave Trade

Price of alliance: Portugal's king demands access to the slave trade in exchange for military aid.
Afonso I's letter (1526, to João III): protests Portuguese traders seizing free people, even nobles; asks to limit trade. Kongo nobles join trade but can't cap captives sold.
Letter as source: African king writing in Portuguese → literacy, diplomacy & limits of Kongo's power.
Outcome: Kongo + W. Central Africa → largest source of enslaved people in the whole transatlantic trade.

Kongo choice	Short-term	Long-term
Convert	Trade, wealth	Afro-Catholicism
Ally w/ Portugal	Military aid	Slave demand
Join trade	Elite profit	Lost control

Legacy in North America

~¼ of Africans taken directly to future U.S. came from W. Central Africa; many already **Christian**.
Names: saints' names + **day names** → Juan/João/John in early Black America have African roots.

⚠ Afonso opposed abuses of the trade, not slavery itself. Read the letter's purpose + audience.

✓ Triple crucifix: African features on a Christian object = syncretism + local agency, not imitation.

1.10–1.11 Queens, Kinship & Global Africans

Kinship & Women's Roles

Kinship: extended family groups organize society; basis of political alliances, land rights & inheritance.
Women: spiritual leaders, political advisors, market traders, educators, farmers; some ruled as queens.

	Queen Idia	Queen Njinga
Realm	Benin (Nigeria)	Ndongo-Matamba
Era	Late 1400s	1600s (Angola)
Role	1st iyoba	Ruling queen
War	Spirit + medicine	30-yr guerrilla
Legacy	FESTAC '77 mask	~100 yrs women

Njinga: fought Portugal to keep sovereignty; traded captives for wealth; gave sanctuary to people fleeing Portuguese enslavement → a bigger army & alliances.
Ndongo link: Ndongo captives = 1st large group of enslaved Africans in English colonies (1619, Virginia).
Iyoba pendant mask: faces on head (Portuguese ties), iron scars (warrior), beads (Afro-textured hair).

Global Africans (1.11)

Late 1400s: Portugal ↔ W. Africa trade in gold, goods & captives bypasses Saharan routes; W. African kingdoms gain wealth via the slave trade as trading partners.
Africans in Iberia (Lisbon, Seville): elites as envoys, students; free + enslaved Africans as laborers, boatmen, guards, vendors & even knights by the mid-1500s.
Atlantic model: Portuguese plantations on **Cabo Verde** + **São Tomé** (cotton, indigo, sugar). ~50,000 enslaved by 1500 → the blueprint for the Americas' plantations.
Chafariz d'El-Rey (1570–80) painting: Black knights, guards & workers in Lisbon's daily street life, all visible.

⚠ Idia = queen mother to the oba (king); Njinga = ruling queen. Don't swap their titles or eras.

✓ Compare Q: both led armies; Idia advised, Njinga ruled.