Sundiata Keita

* The Mali Empire may have been created because a sickly child was too sickly to be worth killing.
* The child was Sundiata Keita (c. 1210 – 1260).
* His father, Nare Maghan, was the king of a small Malinke state called Kangaba.
* The king of the nearby Soso Empire, Sumanguru Kante, conquered Kangaba and killed Nare.
* He also killed eleven of Nare’s 12 sons.
* The only one he did not kill was Sundiata.
* He may have thought the boy was no threat because f his health problems. Sundiata left his homeland in 1230, but he did not forget it.
* Sundiata became a powerful man.
* He recruited other Malinke chiefs to help him take back his homeland.
* They overran the Sosos in 1235, and Sundiata regained his family throne.
* He made the City of Niana his capital and then began building his empire.
* During the next 25 years, he exploited the gold mines in the area and controlled the region’s trade routes and increased his empire’s wealth.
* Sundiata encouraged religious freedom.
* He became a Muslim to show goodwill toward Islamic traders but he allowed the people of his empire to worship whatever religion they wished.
* After Sundiata died, his son, Uli, took his place.
* The Mali Empire continued to thrive because of the trade in gold and salt.

Askia Muhammad

* In 1493 Askia Muhammad became king of one of the greatest empires in Africa and made it better.
* Askia took over the Songhai Empire after Sunnis Ali died.
* Sunni Ali had conquered the cities of Timbuktu and Djenne during his reign.
* Songhai now had control of the trading routes through the Sahara, which made the empire rich and powerful
* Sunni Ali’s time had been dominated by conflict, but Askia Muhammad’s reign concentrated on stability.
* The Songhai Empire stretched over a vast amount of land, and Askia established an elaborate bureaucracy to govern it.
* Askia also changed the way that people were chosen from important government positions.
* Traditionally, people had been chosen for important jobs based on their social standing of their family.
* Askia hired people based on their intelligence ability, and belief in Islam.
* The Songhai Empire included 1,000’s of different cultures, so Askia tried to install common laws and standards across the empire.
* He established standards for measurements and money.
* He also established a state religion.
* Askia was a Muslim, and he only appointed fellow Muslims to positions of importance and power.
* He also made local courts honor Islamic law.
* Askia ruled until his sons overthrew him in 1528.
* The Songhai Empire did not last much longer.
* In 1591, Moroccan invaders brought an end to the empire.

Mansa Musa

* Ruled from 1312-1337.
* Mansa Musa ruled the West African empire of Mali with great skill and organization.
* Under Mansa Musa’s guidance, Mali became a great center of education, commerce, and the arts.
* Mali was one of the largest empires in the world at the time. In fact, the kingdom was so vast that Mansa Musa once bragged it would take a year to travel from the northern border to the southern border.
* Despite Mali’s enormous size and wealth, the kingdom was not well-known outside the continent of Africa.
* Mansa Musa’s pilgrimage to Makkah in 1324, however, announced Mali’s riches and achievements to the world.
* Traveling on horseback, Mansa Musa was joined by many people, including 8,000 enslaved people, 100 camels to carry baggage, and 24,000 pounds of gold.
* Each person carried a staff of gold.
* According to Egyptian historians and the accounts of observers, Mansa Musa spent so much gold in Cairo, Egypt, that the value of gold dropped in Cairo and did not recover for more than 12 years.
* Mansa Musa’s famous pilgrimage to Makkah brought attention to his kingdom.
* Mali was included on world maps as early as 1339.
* Many European nations and kingdoms in North Africa and the Middle East wished to establish trade connections with Mali and gain some of its wealth.

Queen Nzinga

* Ruled from c. 1582 – 1663.
* Angolan Warrior – Leader.
* It was rare in the 1600’s for women to take active roles in politics and war, but one African woman – Queen Nzinga of Matamba was known for her military leadership and political skills.
* Nzinga was the daughter of the King of the Ndonga people.
* The Ndonga lived in Southwest Africa in what is today called Angola.
* Nzinga quickly learned Archery and Hunting.
* She was Intelligent and a natural athlete.
* Nzinga’s father failed to notice his daughter.
* He was too busy defending the kingdom from the Portuguese, who wanted to buy enslaved Africans and ship them overseas.
* Even though she was a female, Nzinga knew she could be a strong leader.
* She did not want to learn the enemy’s language, but she soon realized that it could benefit her.
* She asked a captured priest to teach her Portuguese.
* In 1623, Nzinga became Queen.
* She declared all of her territory to be free territory and promised that all enslaved Africans who made it to the kingdom would be free.
* For nearly 30 years, she led her people in battles against the Portuguese.
* She allied with other African kingdoms to seal the trade routes used to ship enslaved Africans out of the country.
* In 1662 she negotiated a peace agreement with the Portuguese.
* She died in the next year at age 81