

The perils and hardships in which slaves had to endure



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The perils and hardships in which slaves had to endure, while being transported from Africa to America and lands in between, where dehumanizing and vile. The degree of wickedness and violence was so extreme that many aboard slave ships could not stand to witness or bare the treatment bestowed upon them and their shipmates. These hardships are often overlooked and undervalued when discussing the topic of slavery. Overlooking the conditions that slaves had to endure while being transported is a tragic and repetitive mistake made by many. These conditions should often be discussed and remembered in order to commemorate the efforts and willpower of the people who overcame such treacherous treatment.

The capture of slaves in West Africa.

The main source of slaves, in West Africa, were provided by the Kongo kingdom and the Mbundu lands, which were south of the Kongo. Civil war flourished in these areas between 1500 and 1700, and the product of these wars were captives that were sold by war-lords. The slaves were gathered and transported to the coast for the purpose of sale to the Europeans. On the way to the coast, slaves that resisted would be brutally killed. Some war-lords requested support and favor from oracles. It is said that slaves would be eaten by these oracles. Also, along the path heading to the coast, there was a void filled with the skulls of slaves, constructed as a warning for disobedient slaves. 1 Slaves were beaten and forced upon slave ships and once again those who resisted were killed.

Treatment of slaves aboard ships.

The treatment of slaves aboard the ships was so brutal and demeaning that it was not uncommon for some to rather pursue death than to be subjected

to the terrifying occurrences. They were chained in pairs by ankles and wrists, and the quarters in which they were confined was so small that most could not stand erect. Conditions of the quarters were unbearable to say the least; feces of the collected slaves flooded the small suffocating confined area, bodies of the deceased polluted the air with stench and disease, and in cases of stormy weather, the slaves would suffer serious injuries with no hope of medical treatment. Those who sought death by starvation would be beaten and force fed using a device called a speculum orum, therefore, some chose to leap overboard. There were often attempts to overtake the ship in order to regain freedom and in most cases shipmates would open fire on the slaves to restore order. 2 The combination of violence, suicide, and sickness claimed the lives of many slaves while in transport.

Experiences after the voyage.

After a long and spirit breaking journey, slaves would be put through more dehumanization and humiliation. They would be herded like cattle to be prepare for buyers; this included being rubbed down with lard and in some cases licked by potential buyers in order to tell if they were healthy or not.

If by chance a slave was fortunate enough to have a family member survive the hardships of the voyage, by this time they would most likely be stripped away from each other by buyers. That would be the least of their worries as they approached the encounter of slavery in America.

Labor, Torture, and Sadness

The agony and anguish in which slaves would succumb to in America was beyond any suffering imaginable. Not only did they have to endure vigorous

hours of labor in high volume, the labor would be accompanied by cruel and heartless beatings, malicious maimings, and vicious torture. There were a few kind slaveowners, but “ few masters doubted the necessity of brute force”.³ Most slaveowners administered regular beatings and enforced their authority with countless acts of inhumanity. Although some laws were created to prevent the use of extreme punishment on slaves, this rarely kept slaveowners from torturing and killing them. “ An Act of Legislature of 1740 read: In case any person shall willfully cut out the tongue, cut out an eye, or cruelly scald, burn, or deprive any slave of any limb or member, or shall inflict any cruel punishment other than by whipping, or beating with a horse-whip, cowskin, switch, or small stick, or by putting irons on, or confining or imprisoning such slave, every such person shall for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money.”⁴ Regardless of such laws slaves were still maimed and dismembered on a regular basis and slaveowners were rarely prosecuted.

Slavery in itself is a dreadful thing that should never be exercised. It is a violation of freedom and damaging to a society and a person. It is morally and lawfully wrong. These and all related happenings were disgusting and disheartening and will forever be a blemish on, not only American history, but ultimately the history of mankind.

Bibliography

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