

## Chapter 1 “Death’s Gwineter Lay His Cold Icy Hands on Me”: Enslavement

In 1441, a Portuguese sailor named Antam Concalvez sailed south to what is now Morocco, carrying a cargo of sea-lion skins and oil. During the voyage, Concalvez reportedly expressed a desire to please Prince Henry of Portugal by bringing him African captives. While ashore, his crew wounded an African with a javelin and took him prisoner; and subsequently they captured an African woman. Then the crew staged a raid, in which four Africans were killed and ten others were captured. The capture of these 12 African prisoners marked the beginning of the European slave trade with sub-Saharan Africa.

The exact number of Africans caught up in the Atlantic slave trade over the next four centuries remains unknown. The best estimates suggest that over nine and a half million Africans survived the transatlantic crossing and another two million died during the Middle Passage. But no one knows how many people died in Africa during wars in which slaves were seized, in the forced march to the coast, or in the coastal dungeons, pens, or barracoons where slaves were herded. The figure may well have been more than seven million, bringing the total number of Africans entrapped in the slave trade to more than 18 million people.

As early as the mid-1450s, Europeans began to acquire west African slaves through trade rather than raids. By the seventeenth century, the English, French, Dutch, Danes, and Swedes had joined the Portuguese and Spanish in the African slave trade. Along the west African coast, European

merchants established forts and trading posts – known as “factories” or “castles” – to serve as centers for collecting slaves.

Within west Africa, war, crop failure, drought, famine, political instability, small-scale raiding, taxation, and judicial or religious punishment produced large numbers of slaves. War captives, condemned criminals, debtors, aliens, famine victims, and political dissidents – all might find themselves sold into slavery.

The slave trade was greatly encouraged by the low cost of slaves. Even though the price of slaves rose three- or four-fold during the eighteenth century, many Europeans were convinced that it was “cheaper to buy than to breed.” Between the sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, it was cheaper to import a slave from Africa than to raise a child to the age of 14. During the late seventeenth century, merchants in the Senegambia region of west Africa paid as little as one pound sterling each for young males, whom they sold to European traders for the equivalent of three pounds ten shillings sterling, or 11 muskets, 31 gallons of brandy, or 93 pounds of wrought iron. Initially, many slaves were acquired from regions within 50 or 100 miles of the west African coast. During the eighteenth century, however, rising prices led slavers to search for captives in interior regions, 500 to 1,000 miles inland.

The impact of the slave trade on west African society is almost impossible to calculate. The demographic consequences are the most obvious. While the slave trade probably did not drastically depopulate west Africa, it may well have caused sharp population declines in particular regions and it certainly kept the overall population growth rate low.

But the slave trade had other high social costs. Throughout west Africa, the slave trade fostered warfare, skewed local economies, expanded servitude within the region, and distorted class and political structures. While the slave trade enhanced the power, prestige, and wealth of particular west African rulers, merchants, and states, it contributed to economic stagnation and long-term political instability. The introduction of European guns and gunpowder reinforced political fragmentation, allowing particular states to grow at the expense of others. Meanwhile, the influx of European textiles and manufactured goods undermined local west African industries.

Of course, the greatest cost of the slave trade was its human toll. The selections that follow document the African side of the Atlantic slave trade: capture, transit to the coast, and sale to Europeans. They disclose the human meaning of enslavement – as told by its victims.

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## 1 A European Slave Trader, John Barbot, Describes the African Slave Trade (1682)

“prepossessed with the opinion ... that Europeans are fond of their flesh”

*John Barbot, an agent for the French Royal African Company, made at least two voyages to the West Coast of Africa, in 1678 and 1682. In the following document, he describes how people came to be enslaved; how they were treated after enslavement; and how the captives responded to enslavement. He also reveals how apologists for slavery defended their involvement in the slave trade.*

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Those sold by the Blacks are for the most part prisoners of war, taken either in fight, or pursuit, or in the incursions they make into their enemies territories; others stolen away by their own countrymen; and some there are, who will sell their own children, kindred, or neighbours. This has been often seen, and to compass it, they desire the person they intend to sell, to help them in carrying something to the factory by way of trade, and when there, the person so deluded, not understanding the language, is sold and deliver'd up as a slave, notwithstanding all his resistance, and exclaiming against the treachery. . . .

The kings are so absolute, that upon any slight pretense of offences committed by their subjects, they order them to be sold for slaves, without regard to rank, or possession. . . .

Abundance of little Blacks of both sexes are also stolen away by their neighbours, when found abroad on the roads, or in the woods; or else in the Cougans, or corn-fields, at the time of the year, when their parents keep them there all day, to scare away the devouring small birds, that come to feed on the millet, in swarms, as has been said above.

In times of dearth and famine, abundance of those people will sell themselves, for a maintenance, and to prevent starving. When I first arriv'd at Goerree, in December, 1681, I could have bought a great number, at very easy rates, if I could have found provisions to subsist them; so great was the dearth then, in that part of Nigritia.

To conclude, some slaves are also brought to these Blacks, from very remote inland countries, by way of trade, and sold for things of very inconsiderable value; but these slaves are generally poor and weak, by reason of the barbarous usage they have had in traveling so far, being

continually beaten, and almost famish'd; so inhuman are the Blacks to one another. . . .

The trade of slaves is in a more peculiar manner the business of kings, rich men, and prime merchants, exclusive of the inferior sort of Blacks.

These slaves are severely and barbarously treated by their masters, who subsist them poorly, and beat them inhumanly, as may be seen by the scabs and wounds on the bodies of many of them when sold to us. They scarce allow them the least rag to cover their nakedness, which they also take off from them when sold to Europeans; and they always go bare-headed. The wives and children of slaves, are also slaves to the master under whom they are married; and when dead, they never bury them, but cast out the bodies into some by place, to be devoured by birds, or beasts of prey.

This barbarous usage of those unfortunate wretches, makes it appear, that the fate of such as are bought and transported from the coast to America, or other parts of the world, by Europeans, is less deplorable, than that of those who end their days in their native country; for aboard ships all possible care is taken to preserve and subsist them for the interest of the owners, and when sold in America, the same motive ought to prevail with their masters to use them well, that they may live the longer, and do them more service. Not to mention the inestimable advantage they may reap, of becoming christians, and saving their souls, if they make a true use of their condition. . . .

Many of those slaves we transport from Guinea to America are prepossessed with the opinion, that they are carried like sheep to the slaughter, and that the Europeans are fond of their flesh; which notion so far prevails with some, as to make them fall into a deep melancholy and despair, and to refuse all sustenance, tho' never so much compelled and even beaten to oblige them to take some nourishment: notwithstanding all which, they will starve to death; whereof I have had several instances in my own slaves both aboard and at Guadalupe. And tho' I must say I am naturally compassionate, yet have I been necessitated sometimes to cause the teeth of those wretches to be broken, because they would not open their mouths, or be prevailed upon by any entreaties to feed themselves; and thus have forced some sustenance into their throats. . . .

As the slaves come down to Fida from the inland country, they are put into a booth, or prison, built for that purpose, near the beach, all of them together; and when the Europeans are to receive them, every part of every one of them, to the smallest member, men and women being all stark naked. Such as are allowed good and sound, are set on one side, and the others by themselves; which slaves so rejected are there called Mackrons, being above

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thirty five years of age, or defective in their limbs, eyes or teeth; or grown grey, or that have the venereal disease, or any other imperfection. These being set aside, each of the others, which have passed as good, is marked on the breast, with a red-hot iron, imprinting the mark of the French, English, or Dutch companies, that so each nation may distinguish their own, and to prevent their being chang'd by the natives for worse, as they are apt enough to do. In this particular, care is taken that the women, as tenderest, be not burnt too hard.

The branded slaves, after this, are returned to their former booth, where the factor is to subsist them at his own charge, which amounts to about two-pence a day for each of them, with bread and water, which is all their allowance. There they continue sometimes ten or fifteen days, till the sea is still enough to send them aboard; for very often it continues too boisterous for so long a time, unless in January, February and March, which is commonly the calmest season: and when it is so, the slaves are carried off by parcels, in bar-canoes, and put aboard the ships in the road. Before they enter the canoes, or come out of the booth, their former Black masters strip them of every rag they have, without distinction of men or women; to supply which, in orderly ships, each of them as they come aboard is allowed a piece of canvas, to wrap around their waist, which is very acceptable to those poor wretches. . . .

If there happens to be no stock of slaves at Fida, the factor must trust the Blacks with his goods, to the value of a hundred and fifty, or two hundred slaves; which goods they carry up into the inland, to buy slaves, at all the markets, for above two hundred leagues up the country, where they are kept like cattle in Europe; the slaves sold there being generally prisoners of war, taken from their enemies, like other booty, and perhaps some few sold by their own countrymen, in extreme want, or upon a famine; as also some as a punishment of heinous crimes: tho' many Europeans believe that parents sell their own children, men their wives and relations, which, if it ever happens, is so seldom, that it cannot justly be charged upon a whole nation, as a custom and common practice. . . .

One thing is to be taken notice of by sea-faring men, that this Fida and Ardra slaves are of all the others, the most apt to revolt aboard ships, by a conspiracy carried on amongst themselves; especially such as are brought down to Fida, from very remote inland countries, who easily draw others into their plot: for being used to see mens flesh eaten in their own country, and publick markets held for the purpose, they are very full of the notion, that we buy and transport them to the same purpose; and will therefore watch all opportunities to deliver themselves, by assaulting a ship's crew, and murdering them all, if possible: whereof,

we have almost every year some instances, in one European ship or other, that is filled with slaves.

Source: John Barbot, "A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea," in Thomas Astley and John Churchill, eds., *Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1732).

## 2 A Muslim Merchant, Ayubah Suleiman Diallo, Recalls His Capture and Enslavement (1733)

"he was no common slave"

*Any west African, regardless of status, might be enslaved. Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, who was born around 1701 to a family of Muslim clerics, was a well-educated merchant in the Senegambian region of west Africa, which had supplied Europe with beeswax, gold, gum, ivory, and small numbers of slaves since the fifteenth century. In 1730, he was kidnapped and transported to Maryland. In Maryland, he wrote a letter to his father, which came to the attention of James Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia, who helped purchase his freedom and bring him to England, where he was known as Job ben Solomon.*

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In February, 1730, Job's father hearing of an English ship at Gambia River, sent him, with two servants to attend him, to sell two Negroes, and to buy paper, and other necessities; but desired him not to venture over the river, because the country of the Mandingoes, who are enemies . . . lies on the other side. Job not agreeing with Captain Pike . . . sent back the two servants to acquaint his father with it, and to let him know that he intended to go farther. Accordingly having agreed with another man, named Loumein Yoas, who understood the Mandingoe language, to go with him as his interpreter, he crossed the River Gambia, and disposed of his Negroes for some cows. As he was returning home, he stopped for some refreshment at the house of an old acquaintance; and the weather being hot, he hung up his arms in the house, while he refreshed himself. Those arms were very valuable; consisting of a gold-hilted sword, a gold knife, which they wear by their side, and a rich quiver of arrows, which King Sambo had made him a present of. It happened that a company of the Mandingoes, who live upon plunder, passing by at that time, and observing him unarmed, rushed in, to the number of seven or eight at once, at a back door, and pinioned Job,

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before he could get to his arms, together with his interpreter, who is a slave in Maryland still. They then shaved their heads and beards, which Job and his man resented as the highest indignity; tho' the Mandingoes meant no more by it, than to make them appear like Slaves taken in war. On the 27th of February, 1730, they carried them to Captain Pike at Gambia, who purchased them; and on the first of March they were put on board. Soon after Job found means to acquaint Captain Pike that he was the same person that came to trade with him a few days before, and after what manner he had been taken. Upon this Captain Pike gave him leave to redeem himself and his man; and Job sent to an acquaintance of his father's, near Gambia, who promised to send to Job's father, to inform him of what had happened, that he might take some course to have him set at liberty. But it being a fortnight's journey between that friend's house and his father's, and the ship sailing in about a week after, Job was brought with the rest of the slaves to Annapolis and Maryland, and delivered to Mr. Vachell Denton, factor to Mr. Hunt, before mentioned. Job heard since, by vessels that came from Gambia, that his father sent down several slaves, a little after Captain Pike sailed, in order to procure his redemption; and that Sambo, King of Futa, had made war upon the Mandingoes, and cut off great numbers of them, upon of the account of the injury they had done to his schoolfellow.

Mr. Vachell Denton sold Job to one Mr. Tolsey in Kent Island in Maryland, who put him to work in making tobacco; but he was soon convinced that Job had never been used to such labour. He every day showed more and more uneasiness under this exercise, and at last grew sick, being no way able to bear it; so that his master was obliged to find easier work for him, and therefore put him to tend the cattle. Job would often leave the cattle, and withdraw into the woods to pray; but a white boy frequently watched him, and whilst he was at his devotion would mock him, and throw dirt in his face. This very much disturbed Job, and added considerably to his other misfortunes; all which were increased by his ignorance of the English language, which prevented him from complaining, or telling his case to any person about him. Grown in some measure desperate, by reason of his present hardship, he resolved to travel at a venture; thinking he might possibly be taken up by some master, who would use him better or otherwise meet with some lucky accident, to divert or abate his grief. Accordingly, he travelled thro' the woods, till he came to the County of Kent, upon Delaware Bay, now esteemed part of Pensilvania; altho' it is properly a part of Maryland, and belongs to my Lord Baltimore. There is a law in force, throughout the colonies of Virginia, Maryland, Pensilvania, etc. as far as Boston in New England, viz. that any Negroe, or white servant who is not known in the county, or has no pass, may be secured by any person, and

kept in the common gaol, till the master of such servant shall fetch him. Therefore Job being able to give no account of himself, was put in prison there.

This happened about the beginning of June, 1731 when I, who was attending the courts there, and had heard of Job, went with several gentlemen to the gaoler's house, being a tavern, and desired to see him. He was brought into the tavern to us, but could not speak one word of English. Upon our taking and making signs to him, he wrote a line or two before us, and when he read it, pronounced the words Allah and Mahommed; by which, and his refusing a glass of wine we offered him, we perceived he was a Mahomedtan, but could not imagine of what country he was, or how he got thither; for by his affable carriage, and the easy composure of his countenance, we could perceive he was no common slave.

When Job had been some time confined, an old Negroe man, who lived in that neighbourhood, and could speak the Jalloff language, which Job also understood, went to him, and conversed with him. By this Negroe the keeper was informed to whom Job belonged, and what was the cause of his leaving his master. The keeper thereupon wrote to his master, who soon after fetched him home, and was much kinder to him than before; allowing him a place to pray in, and some other conveniences, in order to make his slavery as easy as possible. Yet slavery and confinement was by no means agreeable to Job, who had never been used to it; he therefore wrote a letter in Arabick to his father, acquainting him with his misfortunes, hoping he might yet find means to redeem him. This letter he sent to Mr. Vachell Denton, desiring it might be sent to Africa by Captain Pike; but he being gone to England, Mr. Denton sent the letter inclosed to Mr. Hunt, in order to be sent to Africa by Captain Pike from England; but Captain Pike had sailed for Africa before the letter came to Mr. Hunt, who therefore kept it in his own hands, till he should have a proper opportunity of sending it. It happened that this letter was seen by James Oglethorpe, Esq. [an English philanthropist who founded the colony of Georgia as a haven for debtors], who, according to his usual goodness and generosity, took compassion on Job, and gave his bond to Mr. Hunt for the payment of a certain sum, upon the delivery of Job here in England. Mr. Hunt upon this sent to Mr. Denton, who purchased him again of his master for the same money which Mr. Denton had formerly received for him; his master being very willing to part with him, as finding him no ways fit for his business.

Source: Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon* (London, 1734).



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### 3 An Employee of Britain's Royal African Company Describes the Workings of the Slave Trade (1738)

“they strain hard for crimes, in order to obtain the benefit of selling the criminal”

*Writing in the 1730s, Francis Moore, an employee at a Royal African Company trading post along the Gambia River, describes the workings of the slave trade. He offers vivid descriptions of how people came to be enslaved, and of the individuals who, he believes, lay behind the trade.*

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The trade of the natives consists in gold, slaves, elephants teeth, and bees-wax . . .

The same merchants bring down elephants teeth, and in some years slaves to the amount of 2000, most of whom they say are prisoners of war; and bought of the different princes by whom they are taken. The way of bringing them is, by tying them by the neck with leather thongs, at about a yard distance from each other, 30 or 40 in a string, having generally a bundle of corn, or an elephant's tooth upon each of their heads. In their way from the mountains they travel through extensive woods, where they cannot for some days get water; they therefore carry in skin bags enough to support them for that time. I cannot be certain of the number of merchants who carry on this trade; but there may perhaps be about 100 who go up into the inland country with the goods, which they buy from the white men, and with them purchase, in various countries, gold, slaves, and elephants teeth. They use asses, as well as slaves, in carrying their goods, but no camels or horses.

Beside the slaves brought down by the negro merchants, there are many bought along the river, who are either taken in war like the former, or condemned for crimes, or stolen by the people: but the company's servants never buy any which they suspect to be of the last sort, till they have sent for the alcalde, and consulted with him. Since this slave trade has been used, all punishments are changed into slavery; and the natives reaping advantage from such condemnations, they strain hard for crimes, in order to obtain the benefit of selling the criminal: hence not only murder, adultery, and theft, are here punished by selling the malefactor; but every trifling crime is also punished in the same manner. Thus at Cantore, a man seeing a tyger eating a deer, which he himself had killed and hung up near his house, fired at the tyger, but unhappily shot a man: when the king had not only the cruelty to

condemn him for this accident; but had the injustice and inhumanity to order also his mother, his three brothers, and his three sisters, to be sold. They were brought down to me at Yamyamacunda, when it made my heart ache to see them; but on my refusing to make this cruel purchase, they were sent farther down the river, and sold to some separate traders at Joar, and the vile avaricious king had the benefit of the goods for which they were sold.

Indeed the cruelty and villainy of some of these princes can scarcely be conceived. Thus, whenever the king of Barsally, some of whose villainies I have already mentioned, wants goods or brandy, he sends to the governor of James's Fort, to desire him to send a sloop there with a proper cargo; which is readily complied with. Mean while, the king goes and ransacks some of his enemies towns, and seizing the innocent people, sells them to the factors in the sloop for such commodities as he wants, as brandy, rum, guns, gunpowder, ball, pistols, and cutlasses, for his attendants and soldiers with coral and silver for his wives and concubines: but in case he is not at war with any neighbouring king, he then falls upon one of his own towns, which are very numerous, and uses them in the same manner, selling those for slaves, whom he is bound by every obligation to protect.

Source: Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1738).

#### 4 Olaudah Equiano, an 11-Year-Old Ibo from Nigeria, Remembers His Kidnapping into Slavery (1789)

“they . . . carry off as many as they could seize”

*A former slave, Gustavus Vassa or Olaudah Equiano traveled across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean on British merchant ships, served in the British navy, and became a leading figure in the eighteenth-century British antislavery movement. His autobiography, which went through nine editions between 1789 and 1797 and was translated into Dutch, German, and Russian, awakened thousands of readers to the horrors of the Atlantic slave trade. In this excerpt, Equiano describes his kidnapping into slavery at the age of 11. Held captive in West Africa for seven months, he was subsequently sold to British slavers, who shipped him to Barbados and then took him to Virginia. After serving a British naval officer, he was sold to a Quaker merchant from Philadelphia, who allowed him to purchase his freedom in 1766.*

*Recently, a debate has erupted over whether Equiano was actually born in Africa. Two surviving documents – Equiano's baptismal records and the Royal*

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*Navy's muster rolls – indicate that he was born in “Carolina,” leading Equiano’s leading biographer, Vincent Carretta, to conclude that his “account of Africa may be based on oral history and reading, rather than personal experience.”*

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My father, besides many slaves, had a numerous family, of which seven lived to grow up, including myself and a sister, who was the only daughter. As I was the youngest of the sons, I became, of course, the greatest favourite of my mother, and was always with her; and she used to take particular pains to form my mind. I was trained up from my earliest years in the arts of agriculture and war; and my mother adorned me with emblems, after the manner of our greatest warriors. In this way I grew up till I was turned the age of eleven, when an end was put to my happiness in the following manner: – Generally, when the grown people in the neighbourhood were gone far in the fields to labour, the children assembled together in some of the neighbourhood’s premises to play; and commonly some of us used to get up a tree to look out for any assailant, or kidnapper, that might come upon us; for they sometimes took those opportunities of our parents’ absence, to attack and carry off as many as they could seize. One day, as I was watching at the top of a tree in our yard, I saw one of those people come into the yard of our next neighbour but one, to kidnap, there being many stout young people in it. Immediately, on this, I gave the alarm of the rogue, and he was surrounded by the stoutest of them, who entangled him with cords, so that he could not escape till some of the grown people came and secured him. But alas! ere long, it was my fate to be thus attacked, and to be carried off, when none of the grown people were nigh. One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both; and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent the night. We were then unbound; but were unable to take any food; and, being quite overpowered by fatigue and grief, our only relief was some sleep, which allayed our misfortune for a short time.

Source: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* (London, 1789).

## 5 A Scottish Explorer, Mungo Park, Offers a Graphic Account of the African Slave Trade (1797)

“the poor wretches are kept constantly fettered”

*A Scottish-born surgeon and explorer, Mungo Park, between 1795 and 1797 led an expedition find the source of the Niger River. His account of his travels, which became a best-seller, includes a description of the workings of the slave trade in that region, including the price paid by European traders to acquire slaves.*

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The commodities exported to the Gambia from Europe consist chiefly of firearms and ammunition, iron-ware, spirituous liquors, tobacco, cotton caps, a small quantity of broadcloth, and a few articles of the manufacture of Manchester; a small assortment of India goods, with some glass beads, amber, and other trifles, for which are taken in exchange slaves, gold dust, ivory, beeswax, and hides. Slaves are the chief article, but the whole number which at this time are annually exported from the Gambia by all nations is supposed to be under one thousand.

Most of these unfortunate victims are brought to the coast in periodical caravans; many of them from very remote inland countries, for the language which they speak is not understood by the inhabitants of the maritime districts. . . .

On their arrival at the coast, if no immediate opportunity offers of selling them to advantage, they are distributed among the neighbouring villages, until a slave ship arrives, or until they can be sold to black traders, who sometimes purchase on speculation. In the meanwhile, the poor wretches are kept constantly fettered, two and two of them being chained together, and employed in the labours of the field, and, I am sorry to add, are very scantily fed, as well as harshly treated. The price of a slave varies according to the number of purchasers from Europe, and the arrival of caravans from the interior; but in general I reckon that a young and healthy male, from sixteen to twenty-five years of age, may be estimated on the spot from 18 pounds to 20 pounds sterling.

Source: Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, vol. 1 (London, 1799).

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## 6 Venture Smith Relates the Story of His Kidnapping at the Age of Six (1798)

“I then had a rope put about my neck”

*Kidnapped at the age of six, Venture Smith was sold to the steward on a slave ship and brought to Connecticut. At the age of 31, after several changes of ownership, he purchased his freedom with money that he earned by hiring out his labor and “cleaning musk-rats and minks, raising potatoes and carrots, and by fishing in the night, and at odd spells.” In order to purchase his wife and sons, he fished, sailed on a whaler, ferried wood from Long Island to Rhode Island, and raised watermelons. Later, he actually became a slaveholder, purchasing at least three slaves. At his death at the age of 77 in 1805 in East Haddam, Connecticut, he left a 100-acre farm and three houses.*

*In this excerpt from his autobiography, Smith describes his childhood and his family in Africa as well as his capture and enslavement.*

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I was born in Dukandarra, in Guinea, about the year 1729. My father's name was Saungm Furro, Prince of the tribe of Dukandara. My father had three wives. Polygamy was not uncommon in that country, especially among the rich, as every man was allowed to keep as many wives as he could maintain. . . .

The first thing worthy of notice which I remember was, a contention between my father and mother, on account of my father marrying his third wife without the consent of his first and eldest, which was contrary to the custom generally observed among my countrymen. In consequence of this rupture, my mother left her husband and country, and travelled away with her three children to the eastward. I was then five years old. . . . After five days travel . . . my mother was pleased to stop and seek a refuge for me. She left me at the house of a very rich farmer. I was then, as I should judge, not less than one hundred and forty miles from my native place, separated from all my relations and acquaintance. . . .

My father sent a man and horse after me. After settling with my guardian for keeping me, he took me away and went for home. It was then about one year since my mother brought me here. Nothing remarkable occurred to us on our journey until we arrived safe home.

I found then that the difference between my parents had been made up previous to their sending for me. On my return, I was received both by my father and mother with great joy and affection, and was once more restored to my paternal dwelling in peace and happiness. I was then about six years old.

Not more than six weeks had passed after my return before a message was brought by an inhabitant of the place where I lived the preceding year to my father, that that place had been invaded by a numerous army from a nation not far distant, furnished with musical instruments, and all kinds of arms then in use; that they were instigated by some white nation who equipped and sent them to subdue and possess the country; that his nation had made no preparation for war, having been for a long time in profound peace; that they could not defend themselves against such a formidable train of invaders, and must therefore necessarily evacuate their lands to the fierce enemy, and fly to the protection of some chief; and that if he would permit them they would come under his rule and protection when they had to retreat from their own possessions. He was a kind and merciful prince, and therefore consented to these proposals. . . .

He gave them every privilege and all the protection his government could afford. But they had not been there longer than four days before news came to them that the invaders had laid waste their country, and were coming speedily to destroy them in my father's territories. This affrighted them, and therefore they immediately pushed off to the southward, into the unknown countries there, and were never more heard of.

Two days after their retreat, the report turned out to be but too true. A detachment from the enemy came to my father and informed him, that the whole army was encamped not far out of his dominions, and would invade the territory and deprive his people of their liberties and rights, if he did not comply with the following terms. These were to pay them a large sum of money, three hundred fat cattle, and a great number of goats, sheep, asses, etc.

My father told the messenger he would comply rather than that his subjects should be deprived of their rights and privileges, which he was not then in circumstances to defend from so sudden an invasion. Upon turning out those articles, the enemy pledged their faith and honor that they would not attack him. On these he relied and therefore thought it unnecessary to be on his guard against the enemy. But their pledges of faith and honor proved no better than those of other unprincipled hostile nations; for a few days after a certain relation of the king came and informed him, that the enemy who sent terms of accommodation to him and received tribute to their satisfaction, yet meditated an attack upon his subjects by surprise and that probably they would commence their attack in less than one day, and concluded with advising him, as he was not prepared for war, to order a speedy retreat of his family and subjects. He complied with this advice.

The same night which was fixed upon to retreat, my father and his family set off about the break of day. The king and his two younger wives went in

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one company, and my mother and her children in another. We left our dwellings in succession, and my father's company went on first. We directed our course for a large shrub plain, some distance off, where we intended to conceal ourselves from the approaching enemy, until we could refresh ourselves a little. But we presently found that our retreat was not secure. For having struck up a little fire for the purpose of cooking victuals, the enemy who happened to be encamped a little distance off, had sent out a scouting party who discovered us by the smoke of the fire, just as we were extinguishing it, and about to eat. As soon as we had finished eating, my father discovered the party, and immediately began to discharge arrows at them. This was what I first saw, and it alarmed both me and the women, who being unable to make any resistance, immediately betook ourselves to the tall thick reeds not far off, and left the old king to fight alone. For some time I beheld him from the reeds defending himself with great courage and firmness, till at last he was obliged to surrender himself into their hands.

They then came to us in the reeds, and the very first salute I had from them was a violent blow on the back part of the head with the fore part of a gun, and at the same time a grasp round the neck. I then had a rope put about my neck, as had all the women in the thicket with me, and were immediately led to my father, who was likewise pinioned and haltered for leading. In this condition we were all led to the camp. The women and myself being pretty submissive, had tolerable treatment from the enemy, while my father was closely interrogated respecting his money which they knew he must have. But as he gave them no account of it, he was instantly cut and pounded on his body with great inhumanity, that he might be induced by the torture he suffered to make the discovery. All this availed not in the least to make him give up his money, but he despised all the tortures which they inflicted, until the continued exercise and increase of torment, obliged him to sink and expire. He thus died without informing his enemies where his money lay. I saw him while he was thus tortured to death. The shocking scene is to this day fresh in my mind, and I have often been overcome while thinking on it. . . .

The army of the enemy was large, I should suppose consisting of about six thousand men. Their leader was called Baukurre. After destroying the old prince, they decamped and immediately marched toward the sea, lying to the west, taking with them myself and the women prisoners. In the march a scouting party was detached from the main army. To the leader of this party I was made waiter, having to carry his gun, etc. As we were a scouting party we came across a herd of fat cattle, consisting of about thirty in number. These we set upon, and immediately wrested from their keepers, and afterwards converted them into food for the army. The enemy had remarkable success

in destroying the country wherever they went. For as far as they had penetrated, they laid the habitations waste and captured the people. The distance they had now brought me was about four hundred miles. All the march I had very hard tasks imposed on me, which I must perform on pain of punishment. I was obliged to carry on my head a large flat stone used for grinding our corn, weighing as I should suppose, as much as twenty-five pounds; besides victuals, mat and cooking utensils. Though I was pretty large and stout at my age, yet these burdens were very grievous to me, being only six years and a half old.

We were then come to a place called Malagasco. When we entered the place we could not see the least appearance of either houses or inhabitants, but upon stricter search found, that instead of houses above ground they had dens in the sides of hillocks, contiguous to ponds and streams of water. In these we perceived they had all hid themselves, as I supposed they usually did on such occasions. In order to compel them to surrender, the enemy contrived to smoke them out with faggots. These they put to the entrance of the caves and set them on fire. While they were engaged in this business, to their great surprise some of them were desperately wounded with arrows which fell from above on them. This mystery they soon found out. They perceived that the enemy discharged these arrows through holes on top of the dens, directly into the air. Their weight brought them back, point downwards on their enemies heads, whilst they were smoking the inhabitants out. The points of their arrows were poisoned, but their enemy had an antidote for it, which they instantly applied to the wounded part. The smoke at last obliged the people to give themselves up. They came out of their caves, first putting the palms of their hands together, and immediately after extended their arms, crossed at their wrists, ready to be bound and pinioned. . . .

The invaders then pinioned the prisoners of all ages and sexes indiscriminately, took their flocks and all their effects, and moved on their way towards the sea. On the march the prisoners were treated with clemency, on account of their being submissive and humble. Having come to the next tribe, the enemy laid siege and immediately took men, women, children, flocks, and all their valuable effects. They then went on to the next district which was contiguous to the sea, called in Africa, Anamaboo. The enemies provisions were then almost spent, as well as their strength. The inhabitants knowing what conduct they had pursued, and what were their present intentions, improved the favorable opportunity, attacked them, and took enemy, prisoners, flocks and all their effects. I was then taken a second time. All of us were then put into the castle [a European slave trading post], and kept for market. On a certain time I and other prisoners were put on board a



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canoe, under our master, and rowed away to a vessel belonging to Rhode Island, commanded by Captain Collingwood, and the mate Thomas Mumford. While we were going to the vessel, our master told us all to appear to the best possible advantage for sale. I was bought on board by one Robert Mumford, steward of said vessel, for four gallons of rum, and a piece of calico, and called Venture, on account of his having purchased me with his own private venture. Thus I came by my name. All the slaves that were bought for that vessel's cargo, were two hundred and sixty.

Source: Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa* (New London, Conn., 1798; expanded edn, Hamden, Conn., 1896).

### Discussion Questions

1. How were slaves acquired?
2. Why did Europeans rely on sub-Saharan Africans rather than other Europeans to provide labor for their New World colonies?
3. What was the impact of the slave trade on African societies?