

*In August 1619, a Dutch ship dropped anchor at Jamestown, Virginia. On board were twenty Africans—the first blacks brought to America.*

*Unlike most other immigrants, blacks did not come to the United States willingly. They were taken from their homeland by force and transported across the Atlantic in chains. They were then sold at auction.*

*Most of the slaves came from the west coast of Africa. They were brought here by European and American slave traders. Yet few slaves were actually captured by whites. Many were sold into slavery by other Africans. Tribes waged war on each other to capture prisoners to be sold as slaves. In exchange they got rum, cloth, guns, and other manufactured products.*

*For the blacks sold into slavery, it was a terrifying and brutal experience. Here is the story of the capture of one such African as he told it to Charles Ball, an American-born slave.*

We were alarmed early one morning by a horrible uproar. The village was surrounded by enemies. After fighting for more than an hour, those who were not fortunate enough to run away were made prisoners. It was not the object of our enemies to kill. They wished to take us alive and sell us as slaves. I was knocked down by the blow of a club, and when I recovered I found myself tied fast with rope.

We were immediately led away from the village. We traveled three weeks in the woods, arriving finally at a large river. Here we were forced to help our conquerors roll dead trees into the water. When several were fastened together to form a raft, we placed ourselves upon it and descended the river. After three days we came in sight of what appeared to me the most wonderful object in the world. It was a large ship at anchor in the river. When our raft neared the ship, the white people took us

on deck. I had never seen white people before. They appeared to me the ugliest creatures in the world. Our captors received payment for us from the people on the ship.

At the time I was seized about twenty others were taken from our village. Among these were three children. They were so young that they were not able to walk or eat any solid food. When they put us in irons, the men took the children from their mothers and threw them over the side of the ship into the water. When this was done, two of the women leaped overboard after the children. The third was already in chains and could not get into the water. In struggling to disengage herself she broke her arm. She died a few days after of a fever. One of the two women who were in the river was carried down by her chains and drowned. The other was taken up and brought back on board. She threw herself overboard one night when we were at sea.

The weather was very hot while we lay in the river and many of us died every day. But the number brought on board greatly exceeded those who died. After two weeks the place in which we were confined was so full that no one could lie down. We could not stand upright either, so we sat. When our prison would hold no more, the ship sailed down the river. On the night of the second day I heard the roaring of the ocean as it dashed her sides.

We had nothing to eat but yams, and scarcely enough of those. More than one-third of us died on the passage. When we arrived at Charleston (South Carolina), I was not able to stand. It was a week after I left the ship before I could straighten my limbs. I was bought by a trader and sold to my present master. I have been here five years.

## CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The first slaves were brought to America in the year**
  - A 1619
  - B 1492
  - C 1825
2. **Most immigrants other than blacks came to America to**
  - A avoid going to prison
  - B look for gold
  - C make a new and better life
3. **Most African slaves brought to America were captured by**
  - A white slave traders
  - B other Africans
  - C Englishmen
4. **The village where the captured slave who tells this story lived was**
  - A on the coast of Africa
  - B in an African desert
  - C deep in the forests of Africa
5. **The captured slave thought white people were**
  - A the ugliest creatures on earth
  - B strange, warlike monsters
  - C some kind of gods
6. **Three young African children taken on board ship were**
  - A given special care
  - B thrown into the ocean
  - C left with their mothers
7. **While the ship was anchored in the river, many slaves**
  - A escaped in the night
  - B died from the heat
  - C learned the white men's ways
8. **The ship set sail when**
  - A the tide turned
  - B natives on shore threatened it
  - C it could hold no more captives
9. **During the ocean crossing the slaves had nothing to eat except**
  - A yams
  - B fish caught in the ocean
  - C rice and moldy bread
10. **The last paragraph of the story leaves the reader feeling that this slave is**
  - A angry with white people
  - B quite happy at his work
  - C resigned to his life