

## Weekly Reading # 6 Article # 1

# *Colonial Love & Marriage*

Scarcity breeds demand and women were scarce in early America. No women accompanied the settlers who established Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. And when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620, only 28 women numbered among the 100 or so passengers on the *Mayflower*. In a rich new world, marriageable white women remained rare — and eagerly sought.

Between 1620 and 1622, about 150 “pure and spotless” women arrived in Virginia and were auctioned for about 80 pounds of tobacco to future husbands. But, by 1625, men still comprised three-quarters of Virginia’s white population, and, by mid-century, the situation had worsened. Eligible ladies obviously remained hard to come by. On the other hand, the free women of 17th-century America found their position enviable. Regardless of looks, wit, or wealth, they had no trouble finding husbands.

Many other women came as indentured servants, especially to the Southern colonies. But even they quickly fared well, often marrying the men who bought their contracts. Later, the Southern colonies attracted men with wives and children by basing the size of family land grants on the number of household members.

A Southern wedding differed greatly from a New England wedding. In the South, family and neighbors received invitations to the event, which usually took place in the home of the bride. After the minister completed the ceremony, the festivities began. Dancing and card playing often preceded an elegant supper, complete with toasts and songs. In the late-17th-century, New Englanders forsook many of their old English customs. Congregationalists, for instance, held that nothing in the Bible designated marriage as a religious rite; so they made it a civil affair, officiating by a magistrate and lacking the festivities of a Southern wedding.

Whatever religious significance they attributed to marriage, all the colonies recognized it as a civil contract based on mutual consent of both parties. Husbands had to support and cohabit with their wives. Deserters were hounded and errant husbands hauled into court for adultery or for failing to provide. Early court records reveal many such cases. Especially in New England, where authorities kept a watchful eye, both husbands and wives often received reprimands for misconduct.

The colonies limited or outlawed physical abuse of wives. In 1641, for instance, Massachusetts prohibited wife beating “unless it be in his own defense upon her assault.” In the Southern colonies, laws prevented husband from inflicting death or permanent injury on their partners. So Colonial wives enjoyed legal protection (in principle, at least) that was denied to their counterparts in England. But laws obviously could not end desertion or domestic strife. (One only has to read abstracts from Colonial newspapers advertisements to learn this.)

Some 17th-century laws protected husbands — from wives who acquired debts, waged attacks, or committed adultery (a crime against both the husband and the community). The most common offense wives committed was verbal abuse. We often think of our early female ancestors as quiet souls, and they probably were meek in church. But they certainly were assertive outside of it — at least according to Colonial court records, which contain many verbal-abuse cases. In addition to gossiping (an offense in many areas), wives scolded their husbands, slandered their neighbors, and cursed their enemies. One woman ended up in court, in 1678, for calling her husband *opprobrious* names on a Sunday.

Colonial wives had to obey their husbands and they usually played the role of junior partner in the family. They had partial control over their children and servants, but children legally belonged to their fathers. In searching court records, you will often find guardianship papers for minor children that might at first make you assume the children were orphans. Often, however, the mother was still living, but legal guardianship (usually of the property and legal matters rather than day-to-day care of the children) had passed to another male.

In the early-17th century, women usually married between ages 20 and 23. (The aged dropped somewhat in succeeding generations and was younger in some locales than others.) They probably spent up to 20 years bearing children and most of their adult life raising them. There were some large families of 10 to 15 children, but the average family had six or seven. Many children died from disease in infancy or early childhood (only about half of Colonial infants reached adulthood). Most couples lost one or more children.

The death rate was high for husbands and wives, too. Newlyweds had only a one-in-three chance of living together 10 years. Women often died in childbirth. It is not uncommon to find an ancestor from Colonial period who married three or four times. A woman needed a husband to provide for her and her children, and a man required a wife to care for his children and home.

Widows found themselves managing lands they inherited, running small businesses, or working as shopkeepers, taverners, and, occasionally, as printers, butchers, or gunsmiths. Single women, whether widows or spinsters, had many rights under common law. They could make contracts, administer estates, hold power of attorney, sue and be sued, and own, buy, and sell property.

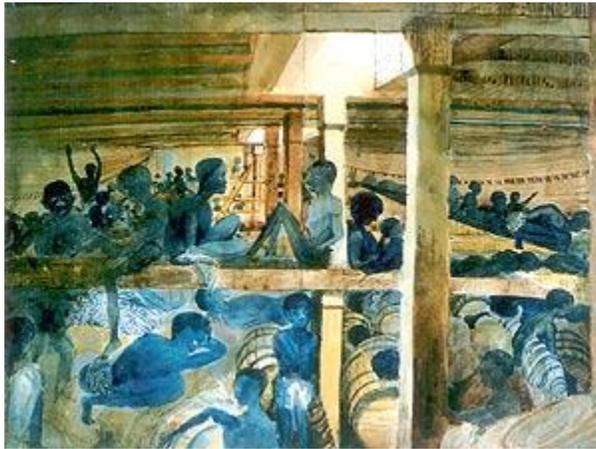
Throughout the colonies, however, the property of a woman brought to her marriage usually went under the husband's control or management, as did her personal property, earnings, and children. She could bequeath her personal property, such as her jewelry or clothing, to her heirs, but only with her husband's consent. Most colonies assured a widow of her dower right — if he died without a will.

For most of our Colonial ancestors, marriage was a partnership in which both labored long and hard to carve out a new home and give their children far more than they ever had. Each couple on your family tree has a special story. But it takes diligent genealogical research to piece their stories together.

## Weekly Reading # 6 Article # 2

# THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

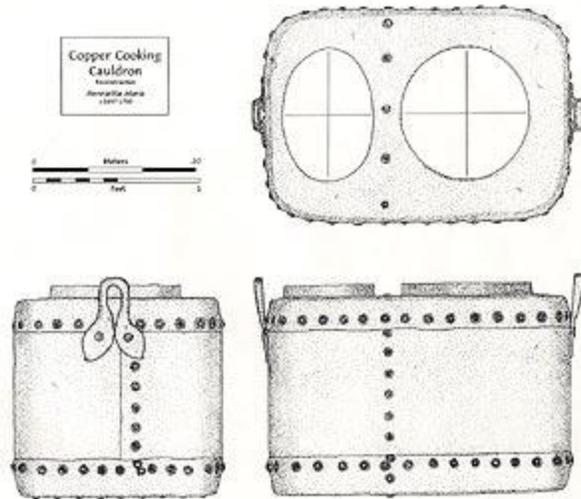
By 1654, some 8,000-10,000 Africans each year were undergoing the Middle Passage. During the next hundred years, this number grew steadily, reaching its peak sometime around 1750, when the annual number stabilized at 60,000-70,000. Estimates on the total number of Africans who were forced to undergo the Middle Passage generally range from 9 to 15 million. Out of this number, some 3 to 5 million perished before they even reached the Americas.



Slaves Below deck aboard the *Albanez*

This is a rare authentic view, done by an English sailor, of a slave cargo hold. The slaving vessel, the *Albanez*, had just been captured by a British anti-slavery vessel, *Albatross*, and the captives were soon to be set free.\*

By the end of January, 1700, the *Henrietta Marie* took some 200 enslaved Africans aboard the Middle Passage to the New World. The men, women and children were shackled and confined to the stifling cargo holds below deck. After securing her cargo, the *Henrietta Marie* would have brought food and water aboard for the long voyage to the West Indies known as the Middle Passage.

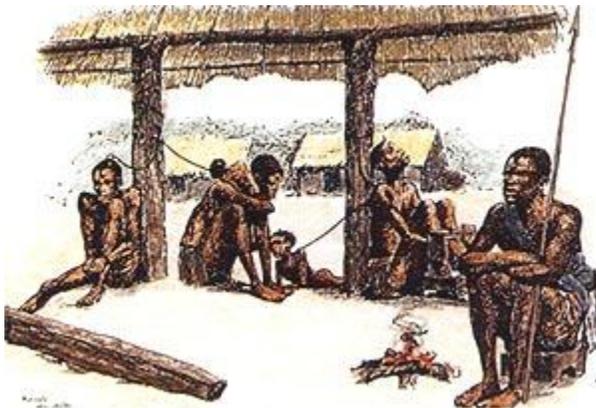


**Copper Cook Stove from the *Henrietta Marie*.**

Although some European foods were acceptable, experience taught slave traders that Africans did better when they were fed foods that they were accustomed to eating. The *Henrietta Marie* may have stopped for yams, as they were thought to be the most suitable food for people from the Calabar region. Some 50,000 yams would have been necessary to feed the 200 slaves aboard the *Henrietta Marie*, and it would have taken about one week to fully provision her for the voyage. Africans were usually fed twice daily. Two cook stoves were found aboard the *Henrietta Marie*, one large one which was probably used to feed sailors and slaves, and this smaller one, possibly used in the officer's quarters.\*\*

## Disease

Slaves captured or purchased in the African interior were often held in confinement for months before they finally arrived at the coast. Some of these people had been wounded in battles, and others were exposed to smallpox, yellow fever, and other deadly diseases.



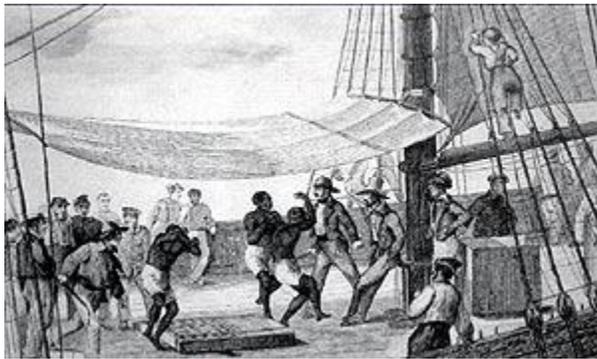
**Captives waiting to be traded as slaves to Europeans.\*\*\***

The European sailors often caught these ailments. John Taylor, the captain of the *Henrietta Marie*'s second voyage, was not spared the threat of disease and was ill or dying before the ship left Africa.



Slave baracoons, burial ground.\*\*\*\*

The mortality rate during the Middle Passage was high for slaves and crew alike, averaging between 13 and 33 percent. The likelihood of contagion, however, was strongest for the Africans.

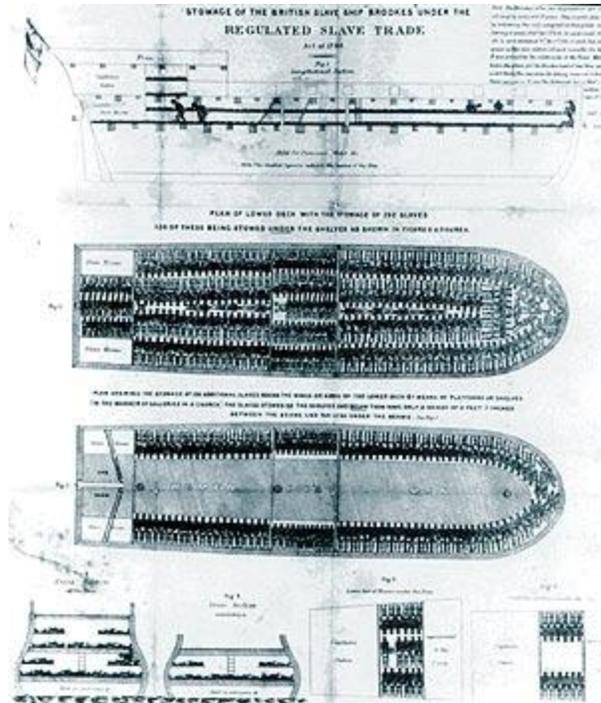


Africans forced to dance for exercise.

Often slaves were permitted on deck in small groups for brief periods, where crew would encourage and many time force captives to dance for exercise. On ships carrying larger loads of enslaved Africans, it was not likely that all individuals would be permitted on deck, and the physician would usually select those most in need of open-air exercise. The lack of exercise and continuous motion of the ship contributed greatly to gangrene, abrasions and sores that plagued the captives..\*\*\*\*\*

Common hazards of the voyage, stemming from no other source than poor diet and close confinement, included scurvy and gangrene. Dehydration, caused by lack of drinking water and high loss of bodily fluids from fevers or dysentery, was a primary killer aboard the slaving vessels.

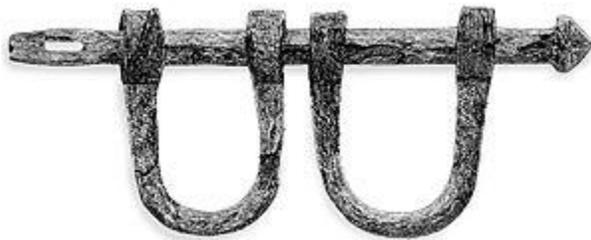
Symptoms included melancholy and a loss of appetite but were not understood by early ship's physicians, and often went untreated until too late. In Addition, contaminated water supplies produced a variety of gastrointestinal disorders which increased fatalities.



Stowage of British Slave ship *Brookes* under the Regulated Slave Trade.\*\*\*\*\*

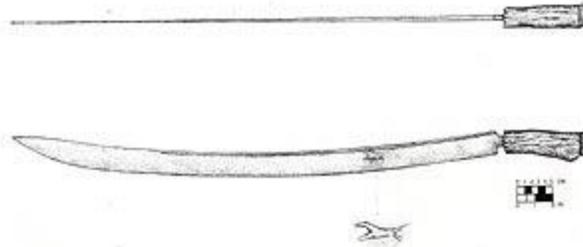
### Conditions Aboard the Ship

Africans were confined below deck in cargo holds where they were chained together on two tiers of shelves with little or no room for adults to stand in. Many cargo holds had less than 18" between the shelves. Male slaves were generally held captive with the right foot of one shackled to the left foot of another. Women were not normally chained and children were usually allowed to run free on the ship. On some ships, the captain might allow some of the men to be released from their chains if they did not appear to pose a threat to the crew keeping watch on them.



Iron Shackles from the *Henrietta Marie*.\*\*\*\*\*

In addition to the physical discomforts of the Middle Passage, the enslaved Africans were under great emotional distress from being torn from their homeland and families.



31" Cutlass from the *Henrietta Marie*. \*\*\*\*\*

## Rebellion at Sea!

Slave ships carried extra crew members for the purpose of containing slaves during the Middle Passage. The crew members were armed whenever slaves were on deck, and ready to subdue resistance by any means necessary. Nevertheless, mutinies occurred regularly, usually resulting in the severe punishment of the African slaves.



Joseph Cinque, Leader of the *Amistad* Revolt c 1840\*\*\*\*\*

Remarkably, there are notable examples of successful mutinies by Africans. The most famous of these took place in the Caribbean, when Joseph Cinque, an African of high rank led his countrymen to overthrow the crew of the *Amistad*. Cinque insisted that the crew take them back to Africa, but the sailors managed to steer north as well as east, finally landing on the shores of Long Island. There the Africans met abolitionists who helped them fight for freedom in a landmark case that went all the way to the supreme court.

