



Fig. 226. Sklaventransport in Afrika.

Slavery....

The American Revolution

Even if you believe with some historians and literary experts that Alex Haley fabricated his history in *Roots*, he did not exaggerate the facts when he portrayed slavery.

Beginning with the brutal captures by slave traders or their sale by their own countrymen, conditions did not improve for the enslaved men and women.

Africans much like Kunta Kinte were snatched from their homelands, family, and friends to spend lives in bondage and most never saw their families again.

Slaves made their voyages to the New World in brutal, crowded conditions like the ones shown on the Lord Ligioner in Roots.

Alex Haley's characterizations in Roots also closely parallel real life sea captains and slave traders.

John Newton was a particularly interesting sea captain and slave trader of his time.

- Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean. When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

- Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused. Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

- Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions. However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his “great deliverance.” He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

For the rest of his life he observed the anniversary of May 10, 1748 as the day of his conversion, a day of humiliation in which he subjected his will to a higher power. He put his feelings into words and wrote a hymn called Amazing Grace.“ Some of the words to his hymn are:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

- .“Thro’ many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; ’tis grace has bro’t me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.” He continued in the slave trade for a time after his conversion; however, he saw to it that the slaves under his care were treated humanely.

- In 1750 he married Mary Catlett, with whom he had been in love for many years. By 1755, after a serious illness, he had given up seafaring forever. During his days as a sailor he had begun to educate himself, teaching himself Latin, among other subjects. From 1755 to 1760 Newton was surveyor of tides at Liverpool, where he came to know George Whitefield, deacon in the Church of England, evangelistic preacher, and leader of the Calvinistic Methodist Church. Newton became Whitefield's enthusiastic disciple. During this period Newton also met and came to admire John Wesley, founder of Methodism. Newton's self-education continued, and he learned Greek and Hebrew.

- He decided to become a minister and applied to the Archbishop of York for ordination. The Archbishop refused his request, but Newton persisted in his goal, and he was subsequently ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln and accepted the curacy of Olney, Buckinghamshire. Newton's church became so crowded during services that it had to be enlarged. He preached not only in Olney but in other parts of the country. In 1767 the poet William Cowper settled at Olney, and he and Newton became friends.

- Cowper helped Newton with his religious services and on his tours to other places. They held not only a regular weekly church service but also began a series of weekly prayer meetings, for which their goal was to write a new hymn for each one. They collaborated on several editions of Olney Hymns, which achieved lasting popularity. The first edition, published in 1779, contained 68 pieces by Cowper and 280 by Newton.

- Among Newton's contributions which are still loved and sung today are "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," as well as "Amazing Grace." Composed probably between 1760 and 1770 in Olney, "Amazing Grace" was possibly one of the hymns written for a weekly service. Through the years other writers have composed additional verses to the hymn which came to be known as "Amazing Grace" (it was not thus entitled in Olney Hymns), and possibly verses from other Newton hymns have been added. However, these are the six stanzas that appeared, with minor spelling variations, in both the first edition in 1779 and the 1808 edition, the one nearest the date of Newton's

- At the end of the Colonial period as wealth increased and transatlantic communication improved, the culture of the colonial elite began to move closer to that of Britain.

- The European majority deliberately inhibited the contributions of Blacks and Native Americans.
- In many ways, by the eve of the Revolution religion, the professions, the arts, and political life resembled Britain. In 1775 American society had become an auxiliary of Britain, but the differences remained
- By the mid-eighteenth century the interests of the American and British people begin to diverge and produced a crisis that would result in an independent America.
- On the eve of the American Revolution, 80 percent of the colonial working population was employed in agriculture.

- Some colonists made a living from fishing and whaling.
- About five percent of the colonial work force were full time craftsmen, mechanics or artisans in the cities, towns, and villages. Thousands of rural colonists produced finished or semi-finished goods at home for sale on a part time basis.
- Milling was an important colonial industry-sawmills and gristmills.
- Shipbuilding was a large scale industry in colonial America. Shipbuilding was an important industry in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania.

- Next to agriculture, commerce or trade was the most important part of the colonial economy. Foreign markets drove the colonial economy.
- Colonies were supposed to enrich England by supplying it with exotic commodities and hard to get raw materials, by consuming its surplus manufactures, and by providing jobs to people involved in colonial trade.
- The English Parliament firmly believed it had the right to regulate and restrict colonial trade and attempted to do so by a series of acts and decrees.
- America received many economic benefits as part of the British Empire, but from the 1650s on, colonists were forced to accept restrictions on their trade with other parts of the world.

- By the early eighteenth century the colonists had achieved a large measure of political autonomy. From 1721-1748 the English government gave higher priority to colonial economic growth than to tight and tidy English rule. The era of “neglect” under crown chief advisers Sir Robert Walpole and the Duke of Newcastle, encouraged the colonists to believe that they were self governing in all internal matters

- The conflicts between the British North American colonies and Great Britain remained muted during the first century and one half of British rule, until 1763. Then in 1763 with the advent of the French and Indian War, many of the colonial leaders and influential people began to question the actions of the British government.

- Many Englishmen from King George III, his Tory ministers and ordinary people considered the British North American colonists as disobedient children. Only a few realized that the American colonies had matured and were quickly matching England in wealth and numbers

- Britain imposed measures like the Stamp Act, the Tea Act, and the Intolerable Acts that threatened many occupational and economical groups.
- These actions deeply disturbed the elite merchants, lawyers, and planters and made ordinary people fear that the British were going to enslave them

- Irwin Unger says that, “a fierce colonial attachment to self determination in all spheres was the ultimate source of the American Revolution

- The Revolutionary War somewhat aristocratic in nature. Throughout the war John Adams and other moderate Americans worried that the less respectable people of the colonies would gain power.
- Most patriots hoped that the British would see the light, abandon their punitive policies and renegotiate the American/British relationship.
- Americans felt that armed resistance against the mighty British Empire was a risky policy.

- On the other hand the British faced enormous strategic problems in fighting a war in the colonies. Britain was 3,000 miles from the front and it would take two to three months for troops to arrive at the battlefield.
- When the troops did arrive, they had to fight on unfamiliar terrain, often surrounded by a hostile populace.
- Americans had the advantage of home ground and they were close to supplies and manpower.

- The Americans had the additional disadvantage of disunity as well. Several hundred thousand Americans called Loyalists were opposed to the Patriot cause and were willing to risk their lives and fortunes to defeat it.
- The Loyalists would be a great source of strength to the British and would fight ferociously against their own countrymen.

- At the beginning of the Revolution the Second Continental Congress was the only central political authority of America, but it was weak and sovereignty rested in individual state governments.
- Despite its limitations, the Second Continental Congress acted as the government for the American people. It created the Continental Army with George Washington as commander in chief.
- In the fall of 1775 it authorized a navy for the United Colonies, and shortly after appointed a five man Committee of Secret Correspondence to approach Britain's European enemies for aid.

- On July 4, 1776, Congress voted unanimously for the Declaration of Independence and on July 4th formally approved the revised Declaration of Independence.
- The Revolutionary War did not go well for the Americans in the first few years. The turning point battle of the war was the Battle of Saratoga on October 17, 1777.
- The victory of Saratoga convinced the French that the Americans a good chance to win independence.
- In May 1778 Congress ratified the French treaties and France entered the war as America's ally.

- Soon French, Spanish, and later Dutch money entered America and helped Congress pay for arms, food and equipment.
- The War in the West ended in a draw between the United States and Britain, but by the time the Revolutionary War ended in 1783 Britain controlled the Northwest.
- The Americans won the Battle of Yorktown in September 1781. On October 19, 1781, 7000 British and Hessian troops laid down their arms. Yorktown was the last important battle of the war and the end of the old British Empire.

- By the end of 1778, Congress had established the Articles of the Confederation to establish a stable government for the Americans and send the proposal to the states for ratification.
- The Articles of the Confederation formalized the union of the American states, and gave full legal standing to several powers that the Continental Congress had earlier exercised. Congress could conduct war and foreign affairs, make commercial treaties, and negotiate with the Indians. It could borrow and coin money and issue bills of credit.

- The Articles also gave Congress the power to manage public lands in the West.
- The Treaty of Paris in 1783 ended the Revolutionary War.
- Unger says that the American Revolution was not a major social revolution, but it was a political one.
- Instead of 13 separate colonies, America became an independent nation.
- Unger says the Revolution was primarily a colonial war of independence.

- The Revolutionary War did not forge a cohesive union among the states.