

Roots

FROM THE BOOK

An American family's story
of survival and triumph

Fort Jameson
James Island,
Gambia. The fort
was used as a
trading base for
gold and ivory,
then slaves.

E

arly in the spring of 1750, in the village of Juffure, four days upriver from the coast of Gambia, West Africa, a man-child was born to Omoro Kinte and Binta Kebba. Forcing forth from Binta's strong young body, he was as black as she was, flecked and slippery with her blood, and he was bawling. The two wrinkled midwives, old Nyo Boto and the baby's paternal grandmother, Yaisa, saw that it was a boy and cackled with joy. According to the forefathers, who had followed Muhammad's teachings through hundreds of annual rains, a boy firstborn presaged the special blessings of Allah.

It was the hour before the first crowing of the cocks. The thin blue smoke of cooking fires went curling up, pungent and pleasant, over the small dusty village of round mud huts. The men filed briskly to the praying place where the *alimamo*, the village's holy man, led the first of the five daily Muslim prayers: "*Allahu akbar! Ashadu an lawilahala!*" ("Allah is great! I bear witness that there is only one Allah!") And afterward Omoro rushed among them, beaming and excited, to tell them of his firstborn son.

By ancient custom, for the next seven days Omoro occupied himself with selecting a name for his son. It would have to be a name rich with history and promise, for the people of his tribe—the Mandinkas—believed that a child would develop seven of the characteristics of his namesake.

When the eighth day arrived, the villagers gathered in the early evening before Omoro's hut. As Binta proudly held her infant, a small patch of his first hair was shaved off, as was always done, and the women exclaimed at how well-formed the baby was. Then the village drummer began to beat his small *tan-tang* drums.

The *alimamo* said a prayer over the calabashes of boiled grain and *munko* cakes of pounded rice and honey brought as gifts by the

villagers. Next he prayed over the infant, entreating Allah to grant him long life and the strength and spirit to bring honor to the name he was about to receive.

Omoro then walked to his wife's side, leaned over the infant and, as all watched, whispered into his son's ear the name he had chosen for him. Omoro's people felt that each human being should be the first to know who he was.

The drum resounded again, and now Omoro whispered the name into Binta's ear, and Binta smiled with pride. Then he whispered the name to the village schoolmaster, who announced: "The first child of Omoro Kinte and Binta Kebba is named Kunta!"

It was the name of the child's late paternal grandfather, Kairaba Kunta Kinte, who had come from his native Mauretania into Gambia, where his unending prayers for five days had saved the people of Juffure from a famine. He had married Yaisa, and had served Juffure honorably as the *alimamo* until his death. All the people proclaimed their admiration and respect for such distinguished lineage.

That night, out under the moon and stars, Omoro completed the naming ritual. By the small mosque of mud and thatch, he lifted his baby to the heavens and said: "Behold—the only thing greater than yourself."

In her hut each evening, Binta would soften her baby's skin by greasing him from head to toe with shea-tree butter, then carry him proudly across the village to the hut of Grandma Yaisa. The two of them would set little Kunta to whimpering with their repeated pinchings and pressings of his little head, nose, ears and lips to shape them correctly.

Sometimes Omoro would take his son away from the women to his own hut—husbands always resided separately from their wives—where he let the child's eyes and fingers explore his huntsman's bag, covered with cowrie shells, and the dark, slender spear whose shaft was polished from much use. Omoro talked to Kunta of the fine and brave deeds he would perform when he grew up.

When he was 13 moons, Kunta tried his first unsteady steps. Before long, he was able to toddle about without an assisting hand. Three annual rains passed. Little Kunta spent his days romping under the watchful eyes of the old grandmothers who took care of what was called the first *kafo*, which included all the children under five rains in age. The boys and girls scampered about as naked as animals. Laughing and squealing, they played hide-and-seek and

scattered the dogs and chickens, chasing them along the inside wall of the tall bamboo fence that enclosed the village.

But all the children would scramble to sit still and quiet when the telling of a story was promised by one of the grandmothers, especially the beloved Nyo Boto. Baldheaded, deeply wrinkled, as black as the bottom of an old cooking pot, her few remaining teeth a deep orange from the countless kola nuts she had gnawed on, Nyo Boto would settle herself with much grunting on her low stool and begin a story in the same way that all Mandinka storytellers began: "At this certain time, in this certain village, lived this certain person. ..."

It was old Nyo Boto who told of the terrible time she remembered when there was not enough rain. Although the people prayed hard to Allah and the women danced the ancestral rain dance and sacrificed two goats and a bullock every day, still everything growing began to parch. Even the forest water holes dried up, and wild animals appeared at the village well. More and more people grew ill, and the old and weak began to die.

It was then, said Nyo Boto, that Allah guided the steps of Kairaba Kunta Kinte to the village. Seeing the people's plight, he knelt down and prayed to Allah—almost without sleep, and taking only a few sips of water as nourishment—for the next five days. And on the evening of the fifth day came a great rain, which fell like a flood and saved Juffure.

When she had finished her story, the other children looked with new respect at Kunta, who bore that honored name.

"Tastier Than Goat!"

The seasons came and went. First, the planting season, when Binta and the other wives hurried to the dugout canoes on the banks of the village *bolong*, one of the many tributary canals that twisted inland from the Gambia River, and paddled to the fields where generations of Juffure women had grown their rice. In other fields the men had piled tall stacks of dry weeds and set them afire to nourish the soil; and now, as the first light rains began to fall, they put out their groundnuts and other seeds. And then the big rains came. And after that the harvest, and the long, scorching dry spell.

Kunta and his *kafo* mates began to feel older than their rains of age, which now ranged from five to nine. They envied the older boys of the third *kafo* their goatherding jobs and their *dundikos*—long cotton robes—and thought themselves too grown up to be made to

go naked any longer. They avoided babies like Kunta's new brother Lamin as if they were diseased, and began hanging around adults in hopes of being sent off on an errand.

It was on the morning of the second day of the harvest, just as Kunta began to walk out the door of his mother's hut, that Binta said to him gruffly, "Why don't you put on your clothes?" Kunta turned around abruptly. There, hanging from a peg, he saw a brand-new *dundiko*. Struggling to conceal his excitement, he put it on and sauntered out the door. Others of his *kafo* were already outside—several, like him, dressed for the first time in their lives, leaping, shouting and laughing because their nakedness was covered at last. They were now officially of the second *kafo*. They were becoming men.

The next day, when Omoro handed Kunta a new slingshot, his breath all but choked off. He stood looking up in awe at his father, not knowing what to say, and Omoro spoke: "As you are now second *kafo*, it means you will go to school and tend goats. You go today with Toumani Touray."

Kunta dashed away and joined his *kafo* mates. They clustered about the goat pens where the older boys were opening the gates for the day's grazing. With the help of *wuolo* dogs, they soon had the blatting goats hurrying down the dusty path. Kunta's *kafo* ran uncertainly behind.

Toumani Touray acted as if Kunta were some kind of insect. "Do you know the value of a goat?" he asked, and before Kunta could admit he wasn't sure, "Well, if you lose one, your father will let you know." And Toumani Touray launched into a lecture on goatherding. If a goat was allowed to stray into the forest, he said, there were lions and panthers which with a single spring from the grass could tear a goat apart. "And if a boy is close enough, he is tastier than a goat!"

The next morning, Kunta and his mates began their religious education. The schoolmaster, Brima Cesay, told them, "You are no longer children, but are of the second *kafo*, meaning you have responsibilities." With that evening's class he would begin to read to them certain verses of the Koran, which they must memorize. Now, between the goats all day, the schoolmaster after breakfast and late in the afternoon, and what slingshot practice Kunta could manage before darkness, there was little time for play. With the annual seven-day harvest festival less than a moon away, Kunta was also

forced to tend his pesky little brother Lamin for several evenings, while his mother spun cotton which the men would weave for new clothes for the family.

The morning after the new moon, the big ceremonial *tobalo* drum sounded at dawn. The harvest festival began with dancing, and Kunta's eyes widened as he saw his father join a throng of whirling, leaping bodies, some wearing horrifying costumes and masks, some not. Omoro's knees were churning high, his feet stomping up dust. With ripping cries he reared backward, muscles trembling, then lunged forward, hammering at his chest, and went leaping and twisting into the air, landing with heavy grunts.

Kunta had seen such ceremonies for many harvests, plantings, men leaving to hunt, and for weddings, births and deaths, but the dancing had never moved him as it did now. The beat of the *tan-tang* drums seemed to throb in his limbs. As if it were a dream, he felt his body begin to quiver and his arms to flail, and soon he was springing and shouting along with the others. From the very young to the very old, everyone danced on through the entire day.

The festival continued for six more days with parades, feasting, wrestling, trading, and storytelling by traveling *griots* who sang endless verses of ancient kings and family clans, of great battles and legends of the past. Every day brought traveling musicians, experts on the 24-stringed *cora* and the *balafon*, a melodious instrument made of gourds that were struck with mallets.

On the final day, Kunta was awakened by the sound of screams. Pulling on his *dundiko*, he went dashing out. Before several of the huts were half a dozen men in fierce masks, tall head-dresses and costumes of leaf and bark. Kunta watched in terror as one man entered each hut and emerged pulling a trembling boy of the third *kafo*, a heavy white cotton hood placed over his head. When all of the older boys had been collected, the men, yelling and shoving, carried them out through the village gate.

Kunta knew that every five years the older boys were taken away from Juffure for their manhood training, but he had no idea it was like this. In the days that followed, he and his *kafo* mates could think of nothing but the frightening things they had learned of the training.

They all had heard that many full moons would pass before the boys returned. It was also said that they got beatings daily, and that they were sent out alone at night into the deep forest. But the worst

thing—a knowledge that made Kunta nervous every time he had to urinate—was that during manhood training a part of his *foto* would be cut off.

The Unknown Toubob

Two rains passed, and Binta's belly was big again. Her temper was shorter than usual, and Kunta was grateful each morning when goatherding and other tasks let him escape for a few hours. He couldn't help feeling sorry for Lamin, who was not old enough to go out of the house alone. So, one day he asked Binta if Lamin could join him on an errand.

After that, Kunta took his brother out nearly every day. He taught Lamin how to wrestle, how to whistle through his fingers, and showed him the kind of berry leaves from which his mother made tea. He cautioned him to take the big, shiny dung beetles they always saw crawling in the hut and set them gently on the ground, for it was very bad luck to harm them. To touch a rooster's spur was even worse luck.

Walking alongside, Lamin would ply Kunta with a steady stream of questions.

"Why does no one harm owls?"

"Because all our dead ancestors' spirits are in owls."

Now and then, Lamin asked something about which Kunta knew nothing at all: "Is the sun on fire?" Or, "Why doesn't our father sleep with us?" At such times, Kunta grunted and fell silent as Omoro did when he tired of Kunta's questions. But, later, he would ask his father for the answers.

"What are slaves?" Lamin asked one day. Kunta did not know. And so, the next day, he questioned his father. Omoro was silent for a long while. Finally, "Slaves are not always easy to tell from those who are not slaves," he replied. He told Kunta that people became slaves in different ways. Some were born of slave mothers—and he named several who lived in Juffure. Others, facing starvation in their own villages during the hungry season, had come to Juffure and begged to become the slaves of someone who would provide for them. Still others had been enemies and had been captured.

"Even so," Omoro said, "their rights are guaranteed by the laws of our forefathers," and he explained that all masters had to provide their slaves with food, clothing, a house, a farm plot to work on half-shares, and a wife or a husband. Also, slaves could buy their freedom

with what they saved by farming. If they married into the family that owned them, they were assured that they would never be sold or given away.

But Kunta wanted to know more. Toumani Touray had told him about the hairy white men—the *toubob*—who sometimes burned villages and took people away. His father said nothing until, a few days later, he invited both Kunta and Lamin to go with him beyond the village to collect some roots.

Then he told them of a trip that he and his two brothers had taken many rains ago. They had trekked along the banks of the Gambia Bolongo, keeping carefully concealed.

At last they had come to a place where 20 great *toubob* canoes were moored in the river, each big enough to hold all the people of Juffure, each with a huge white cloth tied by ropes to a tree-like pole as tall as ten men. Many *toubob* were moving about, and *slatees*—black helpers—were with them. Small canoes were taking such things as dried indigo, cotton, beeswax and hides to the big canoes. More terrible than he could describe, however, said Omoro, were the beatings and other cruelties they saw being dealt out to those who had been captured for the *toubob* to take away.

Omoro looked at Kunta carefully. "Some Mandinkas sell their slaves to *toubob*," he said. "Such men are traitors. A Kinte must never do this."

Kunta and Lamin sat frozen with fear. "Papa," asked Lamin, "where do the big canoes take the stolen people?"

"The elders say to *toubabo doo*," said Omoro, "a land where slaves are sold to huge cannibals called *toubabo koomi*, who eat us. No man knows any more about it."

Journey of the New Moon

On a hot, quiet afternoon a few days later, there suddenly came a sharp burst of drums from the village. Kunta dashed to the hut of Juffure's drummer: Others had already gathered there to hear the news. A messenger from the next village was speaking to Omoro. Five days of walking the way the sun rose, Kunta's uncles Janneh and Saloum Kinte were building a new village; their brother Omoro was expected for the ceremonial blessing of the village on the second next new moon.

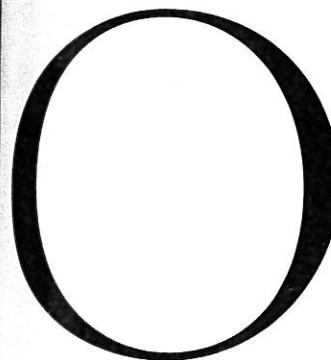
When the messenger had finished, Omoro gave his reply: Allah willing, he would be there.

Not many days before Omoro's departure, an idea almost too big to think about seized Kunta. Was it possible that Omoro might let *him* go, too? Now and then a boy was allowed to share a journey with his father, although never one so young as eight rains. Sensing that his mother would disapprove of his dream, Kunta knew that his only hope lay in asking his father directly.

As he tended his herd, three days before Omoro was to go, the almost despairing Kunta saw his father leave Binta's hut. Abandoning his goats, he ran like a hare and came to a breathless stop, looking up pleadingly at his father's startled face. Gulping, he couldn't remember a thing he had meant to say.

Omoro gazed at his son for a moment. Then, "I have just told your mother," he said—and walked on.

It took Kunta a few seconds to realize what his father meant. "Aiee!" he shouted. Dropping onto his belly, he sprang froglike into the air and bolted back to his goats. Then, suddenly, he grew quiet with the knowledge that ever since the message had come his father had been thinking about him.



On the morning of their departure, first Omoro, then Kunta, took two steps into the dust outside Omoro's hut. Turning and bending down, they scraped up the dust of their first footprints and put it into their hunters' bags, thus ensuring that their footprints would return to this place. Binta watched, weeping, from her doorway. As they walked through the village, Kunta started to turn for a last look. But, seeing that his father did not turn, he kept his eyes front and quickly strode along, nearly trotting to keep the proper two paces behind Omoro.

After about an hour, Kunta's excitement had waned almost as much as his pace. His head-bundle began to feel heavier and heavier, the muscles below his knees ached, and his face was sweating. When the sun had covered nearly half the sky, Kunta began to think he wasn't going to be able to keep up. A feeling of panic was rising in him when Omoro, who had neither spoken nor looked back, suddenly stopped and swung his head-load to the ground alongside a clear pool. There they sipped the cool spring water and roasted and ate four plump pigeons that Omoro had shot with his bow. Then they set out on the trail once more.



It seemed to Kunta as if he had barely laid his head down before his father was shaking him awake in the early dawn. Kunta's feet were blistered now, and his whole body ached, but he pushed on behind Omoro, pretending that his manhood training had already begun, determined that he would be the last boy in his *kafo* to betray his pain.

On the fourth day, they came to a village where there was no one at all to be seen, and not a sound to be heard except for the birds and monkeys. Kunta waited in vain for Omoro to explain the mystery. It was the chattering children of the next village who finally did so. Pointing back down the trail, they said that the village's chief had kept on doing things his people disliked, until one night not long ago, as he slept, every family of that village quietly went away with all its possessions to the homes of friends and families in

other places. They left behind an "empty chief," who was now going about begging his people to believe that, if they would only return, he would act better.

At this second village, Omoro arranged for the village drummer to send the announcement of their arrival to his brothers. They would understand that Omoro would soon be there, though they did not know that Kunta was with him. Kunta felt very proud that he had traveled so far with his father, and the sound of the drums telling of their visit would not leave his ears.

On the fifth day, just as the sun began to turn crimson at the western horizon, he spotted smoke rising from a village not far ahead. Soon he began to hear the distant thunder of a *tobalo* drum, the throb of smaller *tan-tang* drums and the loud clapping of dancers. Then the trail made a turn—and there was the village.

Kunta's feet scarcely felt the ground. The pounding of the drums grew louder and louder, and suddenly dancers appeared, grunting and shouting in their leaf-and-bark costumes, stamping out through the village gate to meet the distinguished visitors. Two figures came pushing through the crowd. Omoro's head-bundle dropped to the

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"*Toubob* brings his canoes one day of walking from here," said Omoro when they had gone a good distance. "Tonight we must sleep in a village." Omoro walked on even faster, his fingers touching his sheath knife.

The orange ball of the sun was nearing the earth when Omoro and Kunta sighted a thin trail of smoke from a village up ahead. As they approached, they could tell that something was not right. No children came running out to meet them. As they passed by the village baobab tree, Kunta saw that it was partly burned. More than half of the mud huts appeared to be empty, and the people of the village—most of them lying in the doorways of their huts—were all old or sick.

Several wrinkled old men weakly received the travelers. Interrupting each other in their haste, they began to explain what had happened. Slave traders had taken or killed all of their younger people. "From your rains to his!" one old man said, pointing at Omoro, then at Kunta. "We old ones they spared."

For the next three days, Omoro and Kunta walked steadily on, bypassing villages, sleeping near the trail on beds of soft branches.

ground, and he hurried toward them. Before he knew it, Kunta dropped his own head-bundle and was running, too.

The two men and his father were hugging and pounding one another. "And who is this? Our brother's son?" Both men lifted Kunta off his feet and embraced him amid exclamations of joy. His uncle Saloum thumped his fist on Kunta's head. "Not since he got his name have we been together. And now look at him. How many rains have you, brother's son Kunta?"

"Eight rains, father's brother," Kunta answered politely.

"Nearly ready for manhood training!" exclaimed his uncle.

Soon it was dark, and the village fires were lighted, and the people gathered around them. Then Janneh and Saloum walked inside the circle of listeners and told stories of their adventures. Before building this village, they had been travelers and traders, for which the Mandinka were noted. They spoke of strange, humpbacked animals. "They are called camels," said Saloum, "and they live in a place of endless sand."

Janneh was unrolling a large piece of tanned hide on which was a drawing. "This is Africa," he said, and his finger traced what he told them was a great sand desert, a place many times larger than their kingdom.

To the north coast of Africa, the *toubob* ships brought porcelain, spices, cloth, horses and countless things made by machines, said Saloum. Then men, camels and donkeys bore those goods inland to places like Sijilmasa, Ghadames and Marrakesh. The moving finger of Janneh showed where those cities were.

Now Saloum took the tanned-hide drawing and began to trace locations with his finger as Janneh spoke. "Our own African goods are brought to many great cities—gold, ivory, skins, olives, dates, cotton, copper and precious stones. As we sit here tonight, there are many men with heavy head-loads crossing deep forests taking these things to the *toubob*'s ships."

Looking as proud as his father beside him, Kunta listened with wonder, and then and there he vowed silently that someday he, too, would venture to such exciting places.

The White Hood

Kunta reached his 12th rain, and he and his *kafo* were about to complete the schooling they had received twice daily since they were five. When the day of graduation came, the parents of the boys

seated themselves, beaming with pride, in the teacher's yard. Then Brima Cesay stood and looked around at his pupils. He asked Kunta a question.

"What was the profession of your ancient forefathers, Kunta Kinte?"

"Hundreds of rains ago in the land of Mali," Kunta confidently replied, "the Kinte men were blacksmiths, and their women were makers of pots and spinners of cotton."

Next there were riddles, and then the students wrote their names on slates in Arabic as they had been taught. Finally, the teacher asked each graduate to stand, calling out his name. "Kairaba Kunta Kinte." With all eyes upon him, Kunta felt the great pride of his family, in the front row of spectators, even of his ancestors in the burying ground beyond the village. He read aloud a verse from the Koran. Finishing, he pressed it to his forehead and said, "Amen." When the readings were done, everyone broke into wild cheering.

The passing moons flowed into seasons until yet another rain had passed, and Kunta's *kafo* had taught Lamin's *kafo* how to be goatherds. A time long awaited now drew steadily nearer, for the next harvest festival would end with the taking away of the third *kafo*—those boys between 10 and 15 rains in age. Kunta did his best to hide the vivid memory of that morning, five rains before, when he and his mates had been scared nearly out of their wits as they watched boys under white hoods being taken from the village by a band of masked, shrieking *kankurang* dancers.

The great *tobalo* drum soon sounded out the beginning of the new harvest, and Kunta joined the rest of the villagers in the fields. He welcomed the long days of hard work, for they kept him too busy and too tired to give much thought to what lay ahead. When the festival began, he found himself unable to enjoy the music and the dancing and the feasting as the others did.

On the night before the last day of the festival, Kunta was in Omoro's hut, finishing his evening meal, when his mother's brother walked in and stood behind him. From the corner of his eye, Kunta glimpsed his kinsman raising something white, and before he had a chance to turn around, a long hood had been pulled down over his head. The terror that shot through Kunta almost numbed him.

He felt a hand gripping his upper arm and urging him to stand up, then to move backward until he was pushed down onto a low stool.

He sat very still, trying to accustom himself to the darkness. It was quiet in the hut. He gulped down his fear, remembering that any boy who failed the manhood training would be treated as a child for the rest of his life, avoided, never permitted to marry lest he father others like himself.

Hours passed. The drumbeats and the shouting of the dancers in the distance ceased. He dozed, jerked awake with a start, and finally slipped into a fitful sleep.

When the *tobalo* boomed, he all but leaped from his skin. Now he could picture the morning's activities from the sounds his ears picked up—the crowing of the cocks, the barking of the *wuolo* dogs, the bumping of the women's pestles as they beat the breakfast grain. After a while, he heard the sound of people talking, louder and louder; then drums joined the din. A moment later, his heart seemed to stop as he sensed the sudden movement of someone rushing into the hut. His wrists were grabbed, and he was pushed out through the hut door into the deafening noise of drums and the blood-curdling whoops of the dancers. The noise receded, only to rise again to a frenzied pitch every time another boy was dragged from a hut.

Kunta's ears told him that he had joined a moving line of marchers, all stepping to the swift, sharp rhythm of the drums. As they passed through the village gates—he could tell because the noise of the crowd began to fade—he felt hot tears welling up and running down his cheeks. He knew that he was leaving behind more than his father and mother and his brothers and the village of his birth, and this filled him with sadness as much as terror.

But he knew it must be done, as it had been done by his father before him, and would someday be done by his son. He would return as a man—or not at all.

Between Fear and Anger

They must be approaching a bamboo grove, Kunta guessed. Through his hood he could smell the rich fragrance of freshly chopped stems. A few steps later, the pounding of the drums up ahead became muffled, as if they had entered an enclosure of some kind, and then the drums stopped and the marchers halted. For several minutes, everyone stood still and silent. Kunta remembered feeling like this once before, when his father, along the trail, had signaled

for him to stand motionless until a pride of lions had passed them by in the dusk. He listened for the slightest sound that might tell him where they were, but all he could hear was the screeching of birds and the scolding of monkeys overhead.

Suddenly, Kunta's hood was lifted. He stood blinking in the bright sun of midafternoon. Directly before Kunta and his mates stood stern, wrinkled Silla Ba Dibba, one of the senior elders of Juffure. His eyes scanned their faces as he would have looked at crawling maggots. Kunta knew that this was surely their *kintango*, the man in charge of their manhood training. Widening his gaze for a moment—careful not to move his head—Kunta saw that they stood in a compound dotted with several thatch-roofed mud huts surrounded by a new bamboo fence.

"Children left Juffure village," said the *kintango* in a loud voice. "If men are to return, your fears must be erased, for a fearful person is a weak person, and a weak person is a danger to his tribe." He turned away, and as he did so, two of his helpers sprang forward and began to lay about among the boys with sticks, pummeling their shoulders and backsides as they herded the 23-boy *kafo* into the small mud huts.

Kunta and four other boys huddled in their hut for hours, not daring to speak. Just after sunset, as Kunta's belly was panging with hunger, the *kintango* helpers burst into the hut. "Move!" A stick caught him sharply across the shoulders as he rushed outside into the dusk. The *kintango* fixed them with a dark scowl and announced that they were about to undertake a night journey into the surrounding forest. At the order to march, the long line of boys set out along the path in clumsy disarray, and the sticks fell steadily among them.

It was almost dawn when the boys stumbled back into the *jujuo* compound. Every boy's feet bore big raw blisters. Kunta himself felt ready to die. He trudged to his hut, lost his footing, stumbled to the dirt floor—and fell asleep where he lay.

On the next few nights there were other marches, each longer than the last. The *kintango* showed them how men deep in the forest use the stars to guide them, and every boy of the *kafo* learned how to lead the group back to the *jujuo*.

Animals, the *kintango* told them, were the best teachers of the art of hunting. His helpers pointed out where lions had recently crouched in wait, showed the boys how to track antelope, and set

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the *kafo* to inspecting the cracks in rocks where wolves and hyenas hid. The boys were taught to imitate the sounds of animals and birds, and the air was rent with their grunts and whistles. Soon, every bite of meat they ate was either trapped by the boys or shot by their arrows.

But no matter how much they added to their knowledge and abilities, the old *kintango* was never satisfied. His demands and his discipline remained so strict that the boys were torn between fear and anger most of the time. Any command to one boy that was not instantly and perfectly performed brought a beating to the entire *kafo*. The only thing that kept Kunta and the others from giving that boy a beating of their own was the certain knowledge that they would be beaten for fighting. Among the first lessons they had learned in life—long before coming to the *jujuo*—was that Mandinkas must never fight among themselves.

Men of Juffure

It came without warning. One day, as the sun reached the noon-time position, one of the *kintango* helpers gave what seemed to be a routine order for the *kafo* to line up in the compound. The *kintango* came from his hut and walked before them.

"Hold out your *fotos*," he commanded. The time had come for that which Kunta dreaded: the *kasas boyo* operation which would purify a boy and prepare him to father many sons. They hesitated, not wanting to believe what they had heard. "Now!" he shouted. Slowly they obeyed, each keeping his eyes on the ground as he reached inside his loincloth.

Then the *kintango* helpers wrapped around the head of each boy's *foto* a short length of cloth spread with a green paste made of a pounded leaf. "Soon your *fotos* will have no feeling," the *kintango* said, ordering them back into their huts.

Huddled inside, ashamed and afraid, the boys waited in silence until about midafternoon, when again they were ordered outside, where they stood watching as a number of men from Juffure—fathers, older brothers and uncles—filed in through the gate, Omoro among them. The men formed a line facing the boys and chanted together: "This thing to be done...also has been done to us...as to the forefathers before us...so that you also will become...all of us men together." Then the *kintango* sent the boys back inside their huts.

Night was falling when they heard many drums suddenly begin to pound, and they were ordered outside again. The fathers, uncles and brothers stood nearby, this time chanting, "You soon will return home...and in time you will marry...and life everlasting will spring from your loins." The *kintango* assistant called out one boy's name and motioned him behind a long screen of woven bamboo. A few moments later, the boy reappeared—with a bloodstained cloth between his legs. Another boy's name was called, and another, and finally, "Kunta Kinte!"

He walked behind the screen. Here were four men, one of whom told him to lie down on his back. He did so—his shaking legs wouldn't have supported him any longer anyway. The men then leaned down, grasped him firmly, and lifted his thighs upward. Just before closing his eyes, Kunta saw the *kintango* bending over him with something in his hands. Then he felt the cutting pain. In a moment he was bandaged tightly, and his mother's brother helped him back outside. The thing he had feared above all else had now been done.

As the *fotos* of the *kafo* healed, a general air of jubilation rose within the *jujuo*; gone forever was the indignity of being mere boys in body as well as in mind. Now they were very nearly men. Even the *kintango* would say, "You men..." To Kunta and his mates, this was beautiful to hear.

"When your training is finished," said the *kintango* one evening, "you will begin to serve Juffure as its eyes and ears. You will be expected to stand guard over the village—beyond the gates—as look-outs for raiders and savages. You will also be responsible for inspecting the women's cooking pots to make sure they are kept clean, and you will be expected to reprimand them most severely if any dirt or insects are found inside."

After that they would graduate, as the rains passed, to more important jobs. Men of Omoro's age—over 30—rose gradually in rank and responsibility until they acquired the honored status of elders and sat on the Council of Elders.

It was not long before the boys began to understand that the welfare of the group depended upon each one of them—just as the welfare of their tribe would depend on each of them one day. Violations

of the rules slowly dwindled to an occasional lapse and, with the decline in beatings, the fear they felt for the *kintango* was gradually replaced by a respect they had felt before only for their fathers.

Still, hardly a day would pass without something new to make Kunta and his mates feel awkward and ignorant all over again. There seemed to be no limit to the things men knew that boys did not. It amazed them to learn, for example, that a rag folded and hung in certain ways near a man's hut would inform other Mandinka men when he planned to return, or that sandals crossed in certain ways outside a man's hut told many things that only other men would understand. But the secret Kunta found the most remarkable of all was *sira kango*, a kind of men's talk in which the sounds of Mandinka words were subtly changed.

Kunta remembered times when he had heard his father say something very rapidly to another man which Kunta had not understood, nor dared to ask about. And now Kunta himself was learning that secret talk. To ask someone where he was going, for instance, one would not say, "*I be to minto?*" but instead would slur quickly, "*Is bes tas mis tos?*," which no uninformed person could ever follow. Soon Kunta and his mates spoke nearly everything in the secret talk of men.

Ancestral Cities

For the next moon, Kunta and his mates learned how to make war. "You know already," the *kintango* said, "that Mandinkas are the finest warriors."

Famous Mandinka strategies were drawn in the dust by the *kintango*, and the boys re-enacted them in mock battles. Then the boys learned how to make barbed spears tipped with poison. After that it was wrestling, taught by the champion wrestlers of Juffure. And then came instruction in tribal history.

A *griot* arrived, so old that he made the *kintango* seem young. He told the boys, squatted in a semicircle around him, how every *griot* held, buried deep in his mind, the records of the ancestors. "How else could you know of the great deeds of the ancient kings, holy men, hunters and warriors who came hundreds of rains before us?" he asked. "The history of our people is carried to the future in here"—and he tapped his gray head.

He thrilled them until late into the night with stories his own father had passed down to him—about the great black empires that had ruled over Africa hundreds of rains before.

"Long before *toubob* ever put his foot in Africa," the old *griot* said, "there was the empire of ancestral Ghana, in which an entire town was populated with only the king's court. Ghana's most famous king, Kanissaa, had a thousand horses, each of which had three servants and its own urinal made of copper. And each evening," said the *griot*, "when King Kanissaa would emerge from his palace, a thousand fires would be lighted, illuminating all between the heavens and the earth. And the king would sit on a golden porch, surrounded by his horses with their golden reins and saddles, by his dogs with their golden collars, by his guards with their golden shields and swords, and by his princeling sons with golden ornaments in their hair.

"But even Ghana was not the richest black kingdom," he exclaimed. "The very richest, the very oldest of them all was the kingdom of ancient Mali." Mali's enormous wealth came from its far-flung trade routes, its dealings in salt and gold and copper. Caravans of thousands of camels were common sights in such cities as Takedda and Niani, where huge ceremonies and pageants were held almost every day.

"Altogether, Mali was four months of travel long and four months of travel wide," said the *griot*. "And the greatest of all its cities was the fabled Timbuktu." Timbuktu, he told them, had 6000 dwelling houses and many rich mosques. The major center of learning in all Africa, it was populated by thousands of scholars, made even more numerous by a steady parade of visiting wise men seeking to increase their knowledge—so many that some of the biggest merchants sold nothing but parchments and books. "There is not a holy man, not a teacher in the smallest village, whose knowledge has not come at least in part from Timbuktu," said the *griot*.

The next visitor to the compound was a celebrated *jalli kea*, a singing man, who led the boys in songs of great hunters and wise, brave and powerful Mandinka chiefs. Hardly had he left when a famous *moro*—the highest grade of teacher—arrived. He read to them from the Koran, and then from such unheard-of books as the *Taureta La Musa* (the Pentateuch of Moses), the *Zabora Dawidi* (the Psalms of David) and the *Lingeeli La Isa* (the Book of Isaiah). When he had finished, the old man spoke to them of great events from the Christian Koran, which was known as the Holy Bible, of Adam and Eve, of Joseph and his brethren, of David and Solomon.

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In his hut at night, Kunta lay awake thinking how nearly everything they learned tied together. The past seemed with the present, the present with the future, the dead with the living and those yet to live. All lived with Allah. He felt very small—yet very large. This, he thought, is what it means to become a man.

One night, when the moon was high and full in the heavens, the *kintango* helpers ordered the *kafo* to line up shortly after the evening meal.

Was this the moment for which they had waited? Kunta looked around for the *kintango*. His eyes searched the compound and finally found the old man standing at the gate of the *jujuo* just as he was swinging it open wide. The *kintango* turned to them and called out, "Men of Juffure, you will return to your village!"

For a moment they stood rooted. Then they rushed up whooping, and grabbed and hugged their *kintango* and his helpers, who pretended to be offended by such impertinence. Then their thoughts turned homeward.

Capture

When Kunta returned to the village, he found that his father had acquired a hut for him. Kunta would now live by himself, as would each of his *kafo*. Binta still cooked for him, however, and provided his new hut with a pallet, some bowls, a stool and a prayer rug. Kunta skillfully bargained for more household possessions, trading grain and groundnuts grown on a small plot of land assigned to him by the village elders. A young man who tended his crops well and managed his goats wisely could become a man of substance by the time he reached 25 or 30 rains, and begin to think about taking a wife and raising sons of his own.

Every morning he took his prayer rug and fell in with his *kafo* as they walked with bowed heads behind the older men to the mosque. After prayers, Binta brought his breakfast. Then he joined his mates in undertaking their duties, which they performed with a diligence their elders found amusing.

The women could hardly turn around without finding one of the new men demanding to inspect their cooking pots for insects. Rummaging about outside the village fence, they found hundreds of spots where the state of repair failed to measure up to their exacting standards. Fully a dozen of them drew up buckets of well water, tasting carefully from the gourd dipper in hopes of detecting

a saltiness or a muddiness or something else unhealthy. They were disappointed, but the fish and turtle that were kept in the well to eat insects were removed anyway and replaced with fresh ones.

At night, when it was his turn, Kunta made his way along the outside of the fence, past the sharp-thorned bushes piled against it and the pointed stakes concealed beneath, to a leafy hiding place that afforded him a view of the surrounding countryside. And here he guarded the village against whatever might threaten it. One night, a full rain since manhood training, Kunta left for the sentry post, taking with him not only his spear and bow, but an ax—for in the morning he intended to select and chop the wood that he would bend and dry into a frame for a drum for the village. Quickly, he climbed the notched pole in whose sturdy fork was built a platform eight feet above the ground.

During the first of his turns alone at these vigils, every shadowy movement of monkey, baboon, hyena or panther had seemed surely to be an enemy. But, after long nights on lookout, Kunta's eyes and ears became so highly trained that he could let them maintain vigilance almost on their own, while his mind explored private thoughts.

Since his new manhood, Kunta had begun to think of taking a very special trip. He meant to put his feet upon that place called Mali where, according to Omoro and his uncles, the ancient Kinte clan had begun, 300 or 400 rains ago. The schoolmaster had drawn a map for him, and estimated that the round trip would take about one moon. Since then, Kunta had many times drawn and studied his planned route on the dirt floor of his hut.

The sudden barking of his *wuolo* dog pushed the thought from his head. Standing on his platform, Kunta whooped and waved his arms at the dark hulks of baboons which had got up the courage to rush from the tall grass adjoining the fields and snatch up a few groundnuts before fleeing back into the bush. Twice more during the night they made forays, growing bolder as dawn approached.

At the first streaks of light in the east, Kunta gathered his weapons and ax, clambered stiffly down to the ground and began limbering up. Then he set off along the *bolong* toward a stand of mangrove trees to find the wood he wanted. He passed through the

scattered first trees of the grove, for a thicker growth offered more choice. Leaning his weapons and ax against a warped tree, he moved here, there, his eyes searching for perfect trunks.

The sharp cracking of a twig mixed with a bird's squawk first registered as being merely the *wuolo* dog returning from a chase after a hare—then his reflexes flashed that no dog cracks a twig. Kunta whirled, and, comprehending the rushing, blurred pale face, knew two things that instant: *toubob* and weapons beyond reach.

Steal me...eat me. His foot, lashing up, caught the *toubob* in the belly, but a heavy object from behind grazed his head, then exploded pain in his shoulder. Glimpsing the kicked *toubob* doubling over, Kunta spun, fists flailing. He saw two black *slatee* men, and another *toubob* who was again jerking downward a short, thick club, which Kunta escaped by violently springing aside.

The blacks rushed him, and Kunta—his brain screaming for a weapon, any weapon—leaped into them, clawing, butting, kneeling, gouging. Then, as the three of them went sagging down, another club pounded against his back. A knee smashed over Kunta's kidneys, rocking him with such pain that he gasped; his open mouth met flesh; his teeth clamped, cut and tore. His fingers found a face, and he clawed deeply into an eye as the club hit his head. Dazed, he heard the dog's sudden piteous yelp. Scrambling up, wildly twisting and dodging to escape more clubbing, with blood streaming from his head, he glimpsed one of the *toubob* standing near the brained dog.

Screaming his rage, Kunta went for the *toubob* and, almost choking on the awful *toubob* stink, tried desperately to wrench away the club. Why had he not heard them, sensed them, smelled them? For a split second he clearly saw his family and all the people of Juffure, his mind flashing that if a warrior died bravely, he became a noble ancestor. Everything that had happened to him during his 16 rains seemed to flicker across his consciousness. Raging at his own weakness, he knew he was fighting for more than his life—and then the *toubob's* heavy club squarely met his ear and temple.

Toubob's Canoe

He struggled back to consciousness to find himself gagged and blindfolded, with his wrists tightly bound behind him, his ankles hobbled. He was yanked to his feet, and sharpened sticks jabbed him as he stumbled along. Somewhere on the banks of the *bolong*,

he was shoved into a canoe. When the canoe landed, he walked again, until finally that night they reached a camp where he was tied to a thick post and his blindfold removed. Kunta was then left alone. Dawn let him see other captives tied to posts—six men, three maidens and two children, their naked bodies bruised and bloody from being clubbed.

In wild fury, Kunta lunged back and forth trying to burst his bonds. A heavy blow from a club again rendered him senseless. When he woke again, he found himself also naked; his head had been shaved and his body smeared with red palm oil. Soon afterward, two new *toubob* entered the camp, one of them short and stout, his hair white. The *slatees*, now all grins, untied the captives and herded them into a line.

The white-haired one gestured at Kunta. Kunta screamed in terror as a *slatee* behind him wrestled him down to his knees, jerking his head backward. The white-haired *toubob* calmly spread Kunta's trembling lips and studied his teeth. Standing again, Kunta quivered as the *toubob's* fingers explored his eyes, his chest, his belly. Then the fingers grasped his *foto*. Two *slatees* forced Kunta finally to bend himself almost double, and in horror he felt his buttocks being spread wide apart.

The white-haired *toubob* similarly inspected the others, one by one—even the private parts of the wailing maidens. Afterward he beckoned a camp *toubob* and jabbed his finger at four men—one of them Kunta—and two maidens.

Kunta struggled and howled with fury as again the *slatees* grabbed him, pushing him into a seated position with his back hunched forward. In terror he could see a *toubob* withdrawing from a fire a long, thin iron. He thrashed and screamed as the iron burned into his back. The camp echoed with the screams of the others who had been selected. Then red palm oil was rubbed over the peculiar, white *LL* shape that Kunta saw on their backs.

A few days later they were hobbling along tied together in a line, the *slatees'* clubs falling on anyone who balked. Kunta's back and shoulders were bruised and bleeding when, late that night, the captives were put in canoes and paddled through the darkness. When Kunta finally perceived the dark hulk looming up ahead in the night, he raged anew against his bonds. Heavy club blows rained down on him as the canoe bumped against the side of the dark object, and

Forced to
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he heard above him the exclamations of many *toubob*. Helpless to resist the ropes looped around him, he was half pushed, half pulled up a rope ladder.

In the shadowy, yellowish light cast by lanterns, he glimpsed the short, stout *toubob* with the white hair calmly making marks in a book. Then Kunta was guided, stumbling, down narrow steps into a place of pitch blackness. He smelled an incredible stink, and his ears heard many men's moans of anguish. As he was shoved down, flat on his back, he felt briefly that he was dreaming—and then lapsed mercifully into unconsciousness.

“Allah, Help Me!”

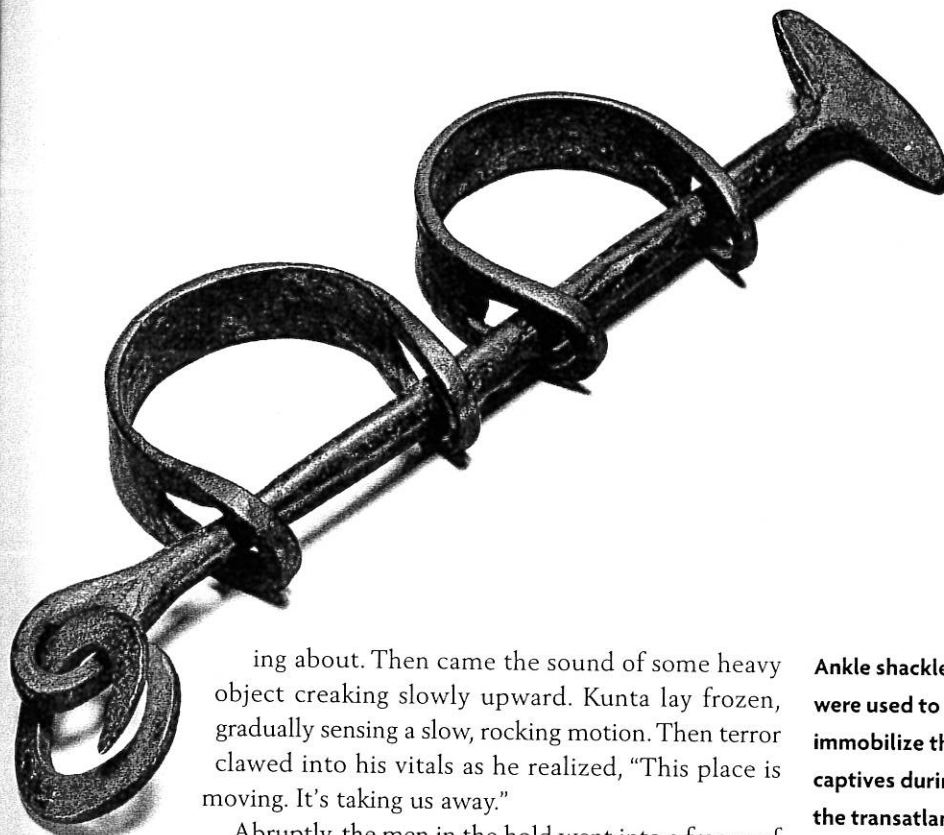
When he awoke, Kunta wondered if he had gone mad. He lay shuddering, chained down naked between two other men in a pitch darkness full of heat and stink and a nightmarish bedlam of weeping, praying and vomiting. A rat's thick, furry body brushed his cheek. As he lunged upward, his head bumped dizzily against a ceiling scarcely a foot above him. Gasping with pain, he slumped back, wishing that he might die.

I am trapped like a leopard in a snare! Kunta fought back panic. He guessed that many men must be shackled on the rough plank shelves in the foul darkness, and that some of them were down on another level below where he lay. They spoke in a babble of tongues—Fulani, Serere, Wolof and Mandinka. The man on his right, to whom he was shackled at wrist and ankle, muttered angrily to himself in Wolof. On his left, there was only a steady moaning.

Kunta lay for a while, sobbing, his mind numbed. Though he could not get onto his knees, and he was unaware of which direction was east, he closed his eyes and prayed, beseeching Allah's help.

In the darkness of the big vessel, only the occasional opening of the deck hatch enabled Kunta to tell if it was day or night. Usually, when the hatch opened, four shadowy *toubob* figures would descend, two with lanterns and whips, the others pushing tubs of food along the aisles. They would thrust tin pans of the food up onto the filth between the men shackled together. Kunta defiantly clamped his jaws shut, preferring to starve to death—until the aching of his stomach made his hunger almost as terrible as his other pains.

Shortly after feeding time, Kunta's ears picked up a sound vibrating through the planks over his head, as if many feet were dash-



ing about. Then came the sound of some heavy object creaking slowly upward. Kunta lay frozen, gradually sensing a slow, rocking motion. Then terror clawed into his vitals as he realized, “This place is moving. It's taking us away.”

Abruptly, the men in the hold went into a frenzy of screaming, banging their heads against the planks, rattling their chains. “Allah,” Kunta shrieked into the bedlam, “hear me! Help me!” And when his voice was gone from shouting, his mind screamed out in rage and helplessness, “*Toubob fa!*” (“Kill *toubob*!”) After a while he lay back limply, sobbing.

The next time the hatch rasped open, something the *kintango* had once said flashed into his mind: *Warriors must eat well to have great strength*. Weakness for lack of food would not let him kill *toubob*. And so this time when the tin pan was thrust up next to him, his fingers dipped into the thick mush of ground corn boiled with palm oil. He swallowed painfully until he could feel the food like a lump in his belly. Then he vomited—and vomited again.

Dance of Death

As the days passed in the hold, vomit and feces gathered on the moaning, shackled men. In the filth, the lice multiplied by the millions until they swarmed all over the hold. Finally, eight naked *toubob* came down through the hatchway cursing loudly. Instead of

Ankle shackles were used to immobilize the captives during the transatlantic crossing to servitude in North and South America and the Caribbean.

food they carried long-handled hoes and large tubs. In teams of two they moved along the aisle, thrusting their hoes up onto the shelves and scraping the mess into their tubs. But when they had finished, there was no difference in the choking stench of the hold.

Not long afterward, many *toubob* descended. Kunta guessed that there must be 20 clumping down the hatch steps, some carrying whips and guns, the metal weapons of fire and smoke he had heard about when men spoke of *toubob* in Juffure. A knot of fear grew in Kunta's belly as he heard strange clicking sounds, then heavy rattlings. Suddenly, his shackled right ankle began jerking. He was being released. Why? Then the *toubob* started shouting and lashing with their whips. In different tongues, all the men around Kunta were beseeching the *toubob* not to eat them.

One after another, pairs of men, still shackled at the wrists, went thumping off their shelves into the aisles. Kunta's long-unused muscles tightened with pain. He and his shacklemate were shoved and kicked along in the darkness toward the hatchway steps. As he stumbled up onto the deck, the sunlight hit him with the blinding force of a hammer. Fumbling ahead, he opened his cracked lips, gulping in the salty air. Then his lungs convulsed and, close to choking, he collapsed on the deck with his Wolof shacklemate.

In the light, the *toubob* looked even more wild and sickly pale than below, their long hair in colors of yellow or black or red, some of them even with hair around their mouths and under their chins. Some had ugly scars from knives, or a hand, eye or limb missing, and the backs of many were crisscrossed with deep scars from whips. A lot of the *toubob* were spaced along the rails, holding cutlasses or guns. Turning about, Kunta saw that a high barricade of bamboo extended completely across the width of the huge craft. Showing through its center was the black barrel of a cannon.

For the first time, Kunta observed his Wolof shacklemate in the light. Like himself, the man was crusted with filth, and pus was oozing from where the *LL* shape had been burned into his back. Looking about, Kunta saw more suffering men.

Now they were chained together by their ankle shackles in groups of ten and doused with buckets of sea water. *Toubob* with long-handled brushes then scrubbed the naked men. Kunta cried in agony as the salt water hit him, stinging like fire in his whip cuts,

cried out again as the bristles tore the scabs from his back and shoulders. Bleeding from his wounds, Kunta and his shacklemates were herded back to the center of the deck, where they flopped down in huddled terror.

The sudden cries of women brought the chained men jerking upright. About 20 of them came running, naked and unchained, from behind the barricade. With a flooding rage, Kunta perceived all of the *toubob* leering at their nakedness. Then a *toubob* near the rail began pulling out and pushing in some peculiar thing in his hands which made a wheezing music. A second man beat on a drum. Other *toubob* began jumping up and down in short hops, keeping time to the drumbeats and gesturing that the petrified men in chains should jump in the same manner.

"Jump!" shrieked the oldest woman suddenly, in Mandinka. "Jump now to kill *toubob*!" She began jumping up and down, her arms darting in the movements of the warriors' dance. When her meaning sank home, one after another shackled pair of naked men commenced a weak, stumbling hopping, their chains clanking and jangling against the deck. Kunta felt his legs rubbery under him, vaguely hearing the singing of the women. Then he became aware that in their singing the women were saying that the *toubob* took them into the dark corners of the vessel and made use of them. "*Toubob fa!*" they shouted, jumping up and down in a frenzy, while the grinning *toubob* clapped their hands with pleasure.

"We Must Be One Village!"

Chained back down in his place in the stinking hold, Kunta gradually noticed a low murmuring of voices in the darkness. He and his Wolof shacklemate had occasionally exchanged cautious whispers, picking up words in the other's tongue, much as toddling children of the first *kafo* learned their early words. But now that the men had actually seen each other in the daylight, there was a new quality to the whispers, as if there was between them for the first time a sense of brotherhood.

As their understanding improved, many questions were asked in the darkness. "How long have we been here?" brought a rash of guesses, until the question finally reached a man who had been able to keep a count of daylights through a small air vent. He said that he had counted 18 days since the great canoe had begun moving. Some asked if there were others in the hold from the same village.

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One day, Kunta nearly burst with excitement when the Wolof relayed the question, "Is one here from Juffure village?"

"Kunta Kinte!" he whispered breathlessly. He waited tensely during the hour it took for a response to return: "Yes, that was the name. I heard the drums—his village was grieving." Kunta dissolved into sobs, his mind streaming before him pictures of his family weeping and mourning their son, Kunta Kinte, gone forever.

How could the *toubob* on the big canoe be attacked and killed? How many were there? Days of questions and replies sought the answers. In the end the most useful information came from the women's singing as the men danced in their chains on deck. They said about 30 *toubob* remained on the craft, after five dead ones had been sewn into white cloth and thrown into the endless blue water.

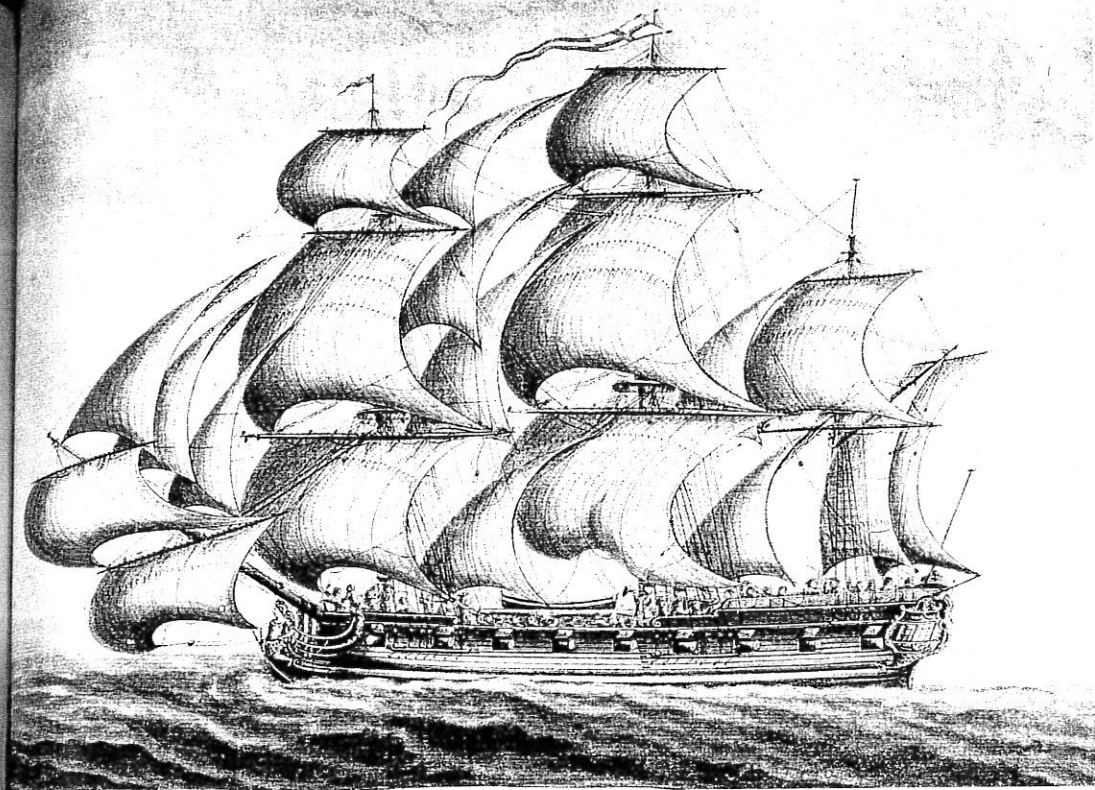
Arguments arose as to how to kill the *toubob*. Some wanted to attack the next time they were allowed on deck. Others felt it would be wiser to watch and wait. Bitter disagreements grew in the stinking darkness, until one day the voice of an elderly man rang out: "Hear me! Though we are of different tribes and tongues, we must be together in this place as one village! And we must be as one behind our leader!" Murmurs of approval spread in the hold.

One fierce-looking Wolof led the argument that the *toubob* should be attacked immediately. On deck, everyone had seen this man dancing wildly in his chains while baring his sharply filed teeth at the *toubob*, who clapped for him because they thought he was grinning.

The group that believed in watchful preparation was led by a gloomy, whip-scarred Fula. Kunta had no doubt that the fierce Wolof could have led an army, but he joined in choosing the Fula as leader. Everyone knew that a Fula would spend years, even his entire life, bitterly avenging a serious wrong.

Soon they were herded on deck again, where, in obedience to the Fula, they tried to act happy in order to relax the *toubob's* guard. Still, Kunta worried that the *toubob* might sense the growing difference in the way they danced, for now they could not keep their bodies from reflecting what was deep in their minds. But the grinning *toubob* appeared to remain unsuspecting.

One day on deck, Kunta stood rooted in astonishment, watching thousands of fish fly over the water like silvery birds, when suddenly he heard an animal-like scream. Whirling, he saw the fierce Wolof snatch a gun from a *toubob*. Swinging it like a club, he sent the *toubob's* brains flying. Then, bellowing in rage, he clubbed the



others swarming toward him, until a cutlass flashed and the Wolof's head was lopped off. Then the big black barrel of the cannon exploded with a thunderous roar of heat and smoke just above the shackled men, and they screamed and sprawled on top of each other in terror.

Amid shouts, the *toubob* rushed the shackled men back toward the hatch with their guns and cutlasses. Almost before they realized it, the men found themselves again below, chained in their dark places as the hatch cover slammed down. For a long while, no one dared even to whisper. Bitterly, Kunta wondered why the signal to attack had not been given. From the gradually louder muttering sounds around him, it became evident that many men shared his thoughts. Soon word was passed from the Fula that the attack would come the next time they were all on deck being washed.

But, that night, Kunta heard a new sound from on deck. He guessed that strong winds must be making the great white cloths above flap more than usual. Then there was another sound, as if rain were pelting onto the deck. The big canoe began violently, jerkily rolling, and the men cried out in agony as their shoulders, elbows and buttocks, already festered and bleeding, were ground down on the rough boards beneath.

On the edge of consciousness, Kunta became dimly aware of the

Pen, ink and wash
illustration of
the *Southwell*
Frigate, a British
slave ship that
traded on
Africa's west
coast, c. 1760.

sound of water spilling down heavily into the hold. There was a clomping of feet, the sound of something like heavy cloth being dragged across the deck, and the noise of falling water lessened as the openings were covered. But now the heat and stench were trapped entirely within the hold. Gaggling, Kunta gasped for breath.

That night, he revived on deck, jerkily breathing fresh sea air. By lantern light he saw *toubob* stumbling up through the open hatchway, slipping in vomit, dragging limp, shackled forms onto the deck and dumping them down near him. The great canoe was still pitching heavily, and the white-haired chief *toubob* had difficulty keeping his balance as he examined the bodies closely. Sometimes then, cursing bitterly, he would bark an order, and other *toubob* would drag a limp form over to the rail and dump it into the ocean.

These had died in the hell below. Kunta envied them.

Delirium

By dawn, the weather had cleared. Looking dully around him, Kunta saw men lying on deck, many of them convulsing. The chief *toubob* was now moving among the chained men, applying salve and powder to their wounds. He opened the mouths of some of the men and forced down their throats something from a black bottle. When the *toubob* put grease on him, Kunta looked away. He would rather have felt a lash than the pale hands against his skin.

The next days were a twilight of pain and sickness. Lying below deck in his filth, Kunta did not know if they had been in the stinking belly of the *toubob* canoe for several moons, or even as long as a rain—for the man was now dead who had counted the days. Kunta's shacklemate had died, too. The *toubob* came, detached him from Kunta and dragged his stiff body away. Kunta lay limp with fear and shock: "*Toubob fa!*" he screamed into the darkness. But he was too sick and weak to care much about killing anyone anymore.

It was at first only a few of the men in the hold who began to make terrible new cries of pain. Their bowels had begun to drain a mixture of clotted blood and thick, yellow mucus. The *toubob* bringing the food, upon first smelling and glimpsing the putrid discharge, displayed great agitation. Minutes later, the chief *toubob* descended. Despite the camphor bag clamped between his teeth, he was soon gagging. Gesturing sharply, he had the newly sick men taken up through the hatch.

But it was of no use, for the contagion of the bloody flux moved

swiftly. Severe pains in the head and back, a roasting fever and a shivering of the body were already in most of the men. When Kunta felt the awful, hot compulsion in his bowels, his cries of pain joined the increasing bedlam in the hold. In delirium he cried out the names of his father and grandfather: "Omoro—Omar the second Caliph, third after Muhammad the Prophet! Kairaba—Kairaba means peace!"

Each day now, the shackled sufferers were dragged up on deck into the fresh air, while *toubob* took down buckets of boiling vinegar and tar to fumigate the hold. Yet every day someone else died and was thrown overboard—sometimes a *toubob*.



One day when Kunta got up into the light and air, he dimly noticed that the great white sheets on the tall poles were drooping. It was hard to see; Kunta's once keen eyes were now gummy with some rheumy, yellowish matter—but the big canoe seemed to be almost motionless on a layer of gold-colored seaweed. The ship had entered the Sargasso Sea and was becalmed.

No more lashings now fell on the men's backs, and they were given more food and water. As much as 100 pounds of flying fish were lured aboard each night with lanterns, and the flesh added to the cornmeal. Still, the time finally came when Kunta could no longer even eat without help. The shreds of muscles in his arms refused to lift his hands for him to claw into the tin food pan. A *toubob* put a hollow tube into his mouth and poured gruel down his gullet.

At last the breeze freshened. Soon the big canoe was again cutting through the water with a foaming sound and, as the days passed, Kunta sensed a kind of excitement among the *toubob*. One morning they seemed particularly elated as they rushed into the hold and helped the crawling, scrambling men up through the hatch. Blinking in the early-morning light, Kunta saw the other *toubob* all wildly laughing, cheering and pointing. Between the scabbed, festering backs of the lice-encrusted men, Kunta kept squinting with his rheumy eyes—and then he was petrified.

Blurry in the distance, there was unmistakably some piece of Allah's earth again.

Land of Toubabo Doo

Capt. Thomas Davies, with Cape Henry, Virginia, now in sight, retired to his cabin and began reviewing the whole voyage, his first as captain after years as a mate on slave ships. It was, moreover, the maiden voyage of his vessel, the *Lord Ligonier*. Built not quite two years before, in colonial New England, she was 68 feet long and 150 tons.

Drawing a document from his desk, he looked over his sailing orders: "We request the taking of only prime, able-bodied, well-formed, healthy, strong Negroes...and secondly any other items of cargo such as a lack of slaves may make room for."

Being as candid as possible with himself, the white-haired captain could find no major mistakes that he had made. The storm, the flux, the death of 42 Negroes and several crewmen, he could see but as the will of God. The 98 slaves remaining would bring a huge profit to the ship's owners. His personal salary called for \$1200, plus a bonus of £6 for every slave delivered.

He had first sailed the *Lord Ligonier* from Annapolis to Gravesend, England, ballasted with a cargo of rum, which was easily sold. With part of the profits he bought 450 sets of wrist and ankle shackles; six dozen 20-foot lengths of thick chain; two branding irons with the ship's initials; and a plentiful supply of colorful, cheap goods for trading on the coast of Africa.

With additional crewmen, the *Lord Ligonier* sailed for Africa in July 1766. On her way, the ship was prepared to receive slaves. The carpenter raised ventilation openings on the deck and built long plank shelves in the hold. On these, with ruler and paint, he marked the 16-inch width allowed for each slave. The gunner made cartridges for the swivel guns; the mate plaited from strips of rawhide a supply of cat-o'-nine-tails. Sixty-eight days later—a disappointingly slow passage—Davies sighted land, entered the mouth of the Gambia River and paid a tax to the black King of Essau, who ruled the territory. Then he proceeded upriver and anchored off British-owned Fort St. James, which shipped up to 2000 slaves a year.

Before doing anything else, Davies sent men ashore to purchase mangrove thatching to build a barricade deckhouse. One wall would have an opening for mounting a swivel gun in case the slaves tried mutiny at sea. Then he visited some of the other ships in the harbor. Their captains warned him that prices were high—£25 apiece for prime slaves. And the black *slatees* would no longer take trinkets

for their help; they demanded money. Captain Davies determined not to pay ransom prices for a quick cargo. He would patiently buy one black at a time, meticulously examining and selecting the individual Negroes who would bring top money in Annapolis.

Afterward he went to inspect some slaves. He bought two good specimens, a young male and female, endured their screaming as one of the new branding irons seared the identifying *LL* between their shoulders. In his log, when finally he put them on the ship, he made the traditional entry for the first male and female: "Adam and Eve on board."

Working with independent dealers, he began to acquire the slaves he sought. But, as the months passed, he increasingly had to turn to dealing with the larger, more expensive slave factories. There were 13 on the Gambia River, usually run by a degraded former ship captain and manned by *slatee* guards. The factories bought—at wholesale prices—entire coffles of slaves captured in village raids.

By the end of May 1767, he still had only 118 slaves. There was space for 200 on board—males in the hold, women and children in the barricade house. But a number of ships, arriving after the *Lord Ligonier*, had already departed with second-rate cargoes of slaves. Word of their quick round trip would travel fast. The captain knew his owners must be wondering what was keeping him so long.

Finally, on July 5, having bought 22 more slaves and filled the ship's empty spaces with 1250 elephant's teeth, 3700 pounds of beeswax, 800 pounds of cotton and 32 ounces of gold, Captain Davies set sail. He reached Cape Henry the third week of September.

In his cabin, Davies continued figuring. The 98 slaves still alive should bring at least \$600 apiece—a gross of about \$58,000, since the children would bring less—and the incidental cargo another \$1000. Even after paying off the crew (at \$5 a month), sundry expenses and the cost of the ship, his owners would have \$36,000 clear profit. He had not done badly for them. They should volunteer him a good bonus beyond what he was owed. A few more voyages and he could comfortably retire—God willing.

As Kunta squinted at the still blurry land, his whole body began to shake. Sweat glistened on his forehead. Then tears flooded everything into a gray swimming mist as a deep sense of foreboding came

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over him. These *toubob* really did have some place to put their feet upon—the land of *toubabo doo*—and deep within himself Kunta knew that whatever would come next was going to be yet worse than what lay behind.

Auction in Annapolis

The small ship, the *Lord Ligonier*, arrived off the coast of Virginia in September 1767, and entered the strong current of Chesapeake Bay for the four-day journey to its home port of Annapolis. Belowdecks, in a misery of filth, lice and disease, was a cargo of 98 blacks, the weakened remnants of the 140 slaves who had been on board when the ship sailed from Gambia, West Africa.

Down in the stinking darkness, trembling with new fears now that they knew they were approaching the land of the *toubob*—the white man—the chained men did not open their mouths. Their silence let them hear more clearly the ship's timbers creaking, the muted *ssss* of the sea against the hull and the dulled clumpings of *toubob* feet on the deck overhead. During the two months and three weeks at sea, the ship's countless motions had rubbed the men's weight against the rough planking on which they lay until their buttocks and shoulders were badly ulcerated and seeping blood.

On one of the shelves allotted to the blacks lay 17-year-old Kunta Kinte. In his native village of Juffure it was an honored name, the name of his grandfather, a holy man who had earned lasting fame by praying to Allah unstintingly for five days and nights to end a drought, thus saving Juffure from famine.

Kunta's back, like the others', was raw from the voyage and had been deeply branded, before departing, with the ship's initials, *LL*. Like the others, he had suffered terribly from the whips of the *toubob* and from a host of diseases and parasites. And, like most of the others, he had prayed constantly to Allah for an end to this time of horror.

On the fourth day after land was sighted, the blacks were yanked roughly to the deck for a final scrubbing with coarse brushes, then were rubbed with oil until they shone. When the ship finally docked, the weak, sick, fear-numbed black men were driven under steadily cracking whips down the gangway onto the *toubob* earth. The impulse to escape surged wildly in Kunta, but *toubob* whips kept his chained line under tight control.

As they shuffled in single file alongside a gesturing, jeering

TO BE SOLD on board the
Ship *Bance-Yland*, on tuesday the 6th
of May next, at *Ashley-Ferry*; a choice
cargo of about 250 fine healthy

NEGROES,
just arrived from the
Windward & Rice Coast.
—The utmost care has
already been taken, and

shall be continued, to keep them free from
the least danger of being infected with the
SMALL-POX, no boat having been on
board, and all other communication with
people from *Charles-Town* prevented.

Austin, Laurens, & Appleby.

N. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the
SMALL-POX in their own Country.

crowd, he glimpsed finely clothed *toubob* watching the chained blacks with expressions of loathing. He saw incredulously what was surely a she *toubob*, with hair the color of straw. And he saw two black men, unmistakably a Mandinka tribesman and a Serere. They walked behind a *toubob*, their faces expressionless. Kunta's mind reeled: how could blacks docilely follow behind *toubob*?

The men were taken to a large square house of burnt mud with bars set into the few open spaces along the sides. In a large room, the wrists and ankles of Kunta and his mates were locked in thick iron cuffs, which were chained to bolts set in the walls. Terrified, Kunta huddled down on the cold earthen floor and beseeched Allah to save him.

After darkness fell—Kunta could see stars through one of the iron-barred spaces near him—he became more composed, and thoughts began to flicker through his mind like shadows in a dream. Wincing, he remembered the carelessness which had led to his capture as he searched outside his village for a piece of wood with which to make a drum; the nightmarish trip down the waters of the *bolong* to the place where the big *toubob* canoe waited. Although he did not wish to bring even their memory to this hated

A newspaper
ad from the 1780s
announcing
the sale, near
Charleston, South
Carolina, of
people captured
on the west coast
of Africa.

place, he could not help but think of his father, Omoro, and his mother, Binta, and his three younger brothers. And then he was sobbing.

It was nearly dawn, Kunta sensed, when there came into his head the sharp voice of his teacher, the *kintango*: "A man is wise to study and learn from the animals." Was this some message from Allah? Kunta was like an animal in a trap. The animals which he had known to escape their traps had not raged within, but quietly conserved their strength until a moment of carelessness gave them the chance to explode in flight. So, too, must Kunta appear to the *toubob* to have given up hope.

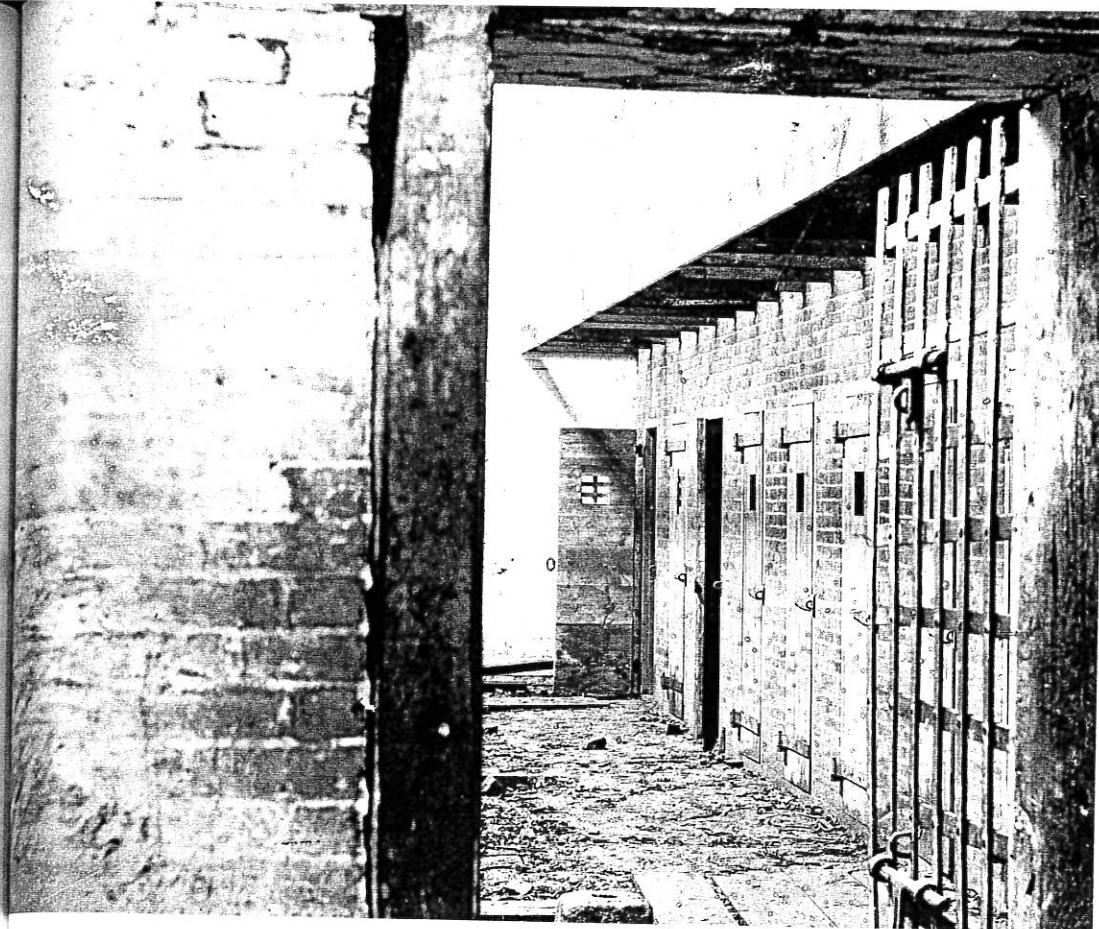
Through the small, barred space, Kunta counted six daylight and six nights. Three times each day a strange black man brought food. Kunta forced it down, knowing it would give him strength. Then, after the seventh morning meal, four *toubob* entered. Two stayed just inside the doorway, holding guns and clubs. The others unlocked the iron cuffs. In a chained line of six men, Kunta was shoved out into the bright sunlight.

"Just picked out of the trees! ... Bright as monkeys!" A shouting man was standing on a low wooden platform, addressing a crowd. Kunta's nose rebelled at the heavy *toubob* stink as he and his mates were jerked through the mass of people. Then Kunta was unchained from the others and pushed toward the platform.

"Prime—young and supple!" The *toubob* was shouting again. Numb with terror, Kunta could scarcely breathe. Other *toubob* were moving in closely around him. With short sticks and whip butts they thrust apart his compressed lips, exposing his clenched teeth. They prodded him all over, on his back, his chest, his genitals. Then they stepped back and, amid the babbling of the shouting man, began to make their own strange cries: "Three hundred dollars!" "Three fifty!"

There were more strange sounds, and then Kunta heard, "Eight hundred fifty!" When no other calls came, the shouting one unhitched Kunta's chain and pulled him toward a *toubob* who had stepped forward. He then saw behind the *toubob* a black one with distinct Wolof-tribe features. *My brother, you come from my country.* ... But the black one seemed not even to notice Kunta. He pulled hard on the chain so that Kunta came stumbling after him, and they began moving through the crowd. They stopped at a kind of box on

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Interior view
of a slave pen
in Alexandria,
Virginia, between
1861 and 1869.

wheels behind a large animal—the first horse Kunta had ever seen. The black one grabbed Kunta about the hips and boosted him onto the floor of the box.

Kunta heard the free end of his chain click into something at the front of the box. The black one and the *toubob* climbed up onto a seat, and the horse began pulling the box away, away from the big water which, far off where the sun rose, touched the land where Kunta had been born. Again into his head came a voice, this time of a village elder sitting beside a fire in Juffure: "No man really knows the land of *toubob*, for no one has ever returned from there to describe it."

Flight

As the box creaked along, Kunta raised himself up and could see what he guessed were *toubob* fields. In one he recognized stalks of corn, the ears already picked; in another, he could distinguish the figures of black workers with a *toubob* standing over them. They passed a line of about 20 black men, chained together by wrist cuffs

and guarded by a *toubob* on a horse. The men were singing mournfully, but the sounds made no sense to Kunta.

At dusk, the rolling box turned off onto a small road and drew up before a large white house. Kunta saw several black people there, and hope surged in him when the *toubob* walked off toward the house. Would these black ones free him now? But they did nothing, and he wondered with a burst of rage what kind of blacks these were who acted as the goats of the *toubob*.

Kunta slept on the ground chained to a stake. In the morning, he had barely time to make his dawn prayer to Allah, bowing to the east, before they were on the road again. The sights and sounds were similar to those of the previous day. Twice more, always distant from the road, he saw large white *toubob* houses; nearby were mud and log huts where Kunta guessed the blacks lived.

A

fter the sun set on the third day, the box turned off the main road. Squinting through the moonlit darkness, Kunta could see the ghostly whiteness of another big house. Soon the box came to a stop. The *toubob* got down, spoke to the black one and went into the house. The box creaked on toward some small huts and stopped again. Kunta heard the click of the thing which had held his chain. The black one got down, came to the edge of the box and with one powerful arm levered Kunta up over the side to the ground.

In that instant the smaller Kunta exploded upward, his hands clamping about the black one's throat like the jaws of a hyena. The black one gave a hoarse sound; then he was pounding and clawing at Kunta's face and arms. Kunta's hands clamped tighter still until the man stumbled backward and went limp.

Springing up, Kunta fled wildly toward where he could see, in the moonlight, a distant forest. He kept low, his flailing legs crashing through frosted cornstalks. His long-unused muscles screamed with pain, but the cold, rushing air felt good, and he grunted with the pleasure of being free again. He reached the forest and plunged in, stumbling through brambles and vines, deeper and deeper, until suddenly he burst upon low brush. He saw with a shock that he had come to another wide field and another white house.

He ran back into the thickest part of the woods, his bare feet cut and bleeding. Then, on all fours, he crawled into deep undergrowth

and passed the night there. As dawn came he kneeled and, facing the east, prayed to Allah.

Kunta first heard the deep baying of the dogs at a distance. The sound became louder and more insistent, and behind the baying he soon detected the shouting of men. Wildly, he went plunging through the brambles. But when he heard a *toubob* gun, he panicked and fell in the tangled briers.

Two dogs came crashing through the brush, snarling and biting at him. He tried to fight them off with his hands, at the same time sliding away from them like a crab. He heard men yelling from the edge of the thicket. Again the gun fired; the growling dogs backed off.

Several men with knives and clubs rushed toward him. Kunta recognized the black one whom he had choked. He looked murderous. Behind him were *toubob*, their faces reddish and sweating from exertion. The black one came forward, uncoiling a rope. A heavy blow to Kunta's head sent him into numbing shock. His arms were bound to his sides, and he was roughly hauled by a rope out of the forest and across a field to a tree. There the rope was thrown over a limb, and the black one pulled on it until Kunta's feet barely touched the ground. A *toubob* whip lashed against his back. He writhed under the pain, refusing to cry out, but each stroke felt as if it were tearing him in half. He began screaming, the lashing went on—and he passed out.

When consciousness returned, Kunta found himself spread-eagled, chained by his ankles and wrists to four stout poles in the corners of a small hut. The slightest movement brought excruciating pain, so he lay completely still, his face wet with sweat, his breath coming in shallow gasps. He berated himself for not waiting longer—as the wise animal would have waited. He had failed, he told himself, because he had tried to escape too soon.

The Lost Tribe

On the fifth morning, shortly after the wakeup horn had blown, the black one entered carrying two thick iron cuffs connected by a short chain. Bending down, he fastened the cuffs around Kunta's ankles. Only then did he unfasten Kunta's other chains. Roughly jerking him to his feet, he began jabbing at Kunta's chest with his finger, uttering strange sounds: "You—Toby!" Kunta did not understand. He stared at him dumbly.

The black one tapped on his own chest. "I Samson!" he



family in
ton fields
intation
vannah,
a, c. 1860s.

exclaimed. His finger poked again at Kunta. "You Toby! Massa say you name Toby!"

His meaning slowly registered on Kunta, and he felt a flooding rage. He wanted to shout at the black one, "I am Kunta Kinte, the first son of Omoro, who is the son of the holy man Kairaba Kunta Kinte!"

The black one led Kunta outside to a large tin bucket that held water for him to wash in. Then he threw him some *toubob* garments to cover his chest and legs, and a hat of yellowish straw. Following the man called Samson, Kunta was taken on a quick tour of his surroundings. The blacks lived in ten huts, arranged in two rows, made of logs and chinked with a reddish mud.

In one of them he was given food by an old woman. Then Samson motioned with his head toward the distant fields. He

walked off and Kunta followed, hobbling in his iron shackles. As they approached, he could see black men slashing down cornstalks while the women and younger men gathered them up.

In the field, a *toubob* rode up on his big horse and briefly exchanged words with Samson, who picked up a long, stout knife and slashed down about a dozen stalks. Turning about, he made motions for Kunta to pick them up. The *toubob* jerked his horse closer, his whip cocked. Enraged at his helplessness, Kunta bent down and began gathering the stalks.

In the days that followed, Kunta forced himself to do what was wanted of him. But behind his blank expression he missed nothing. He learned that he was in a place called Spotsylvania County, Virginia. The *toubob* who had brought him to this place was called "massa" by the black ones. In the big white house where the massa lived, there was a she *toubob* called "missis." Kunta had seen her once at a distance, a bony creature the color of a toad's underbelly. In the fields, Kunta learned, there was "corn," and when all the stalks had been cut and piled they then picked large round things the blacks called "punkins." They were put on a "wagon" and taken to a "barn."

But the thing which most interested and mystified him was the attitude of the other blacks. In the evenings, Kunta would sit down just inside the doorway of his hut with his legs stuck out to reduce the pain of the cuffs, while the other adults quietly seated themselves on wooden stools around a fire before the old cooking woman's hut. The sight filled him with a melancholy memory of the night fires in Juffure.

Usually the woman who cooked at the big house would speak first. She mimicked things said by the massa and missis, and Kunta heard the others all but choking to suppress their laughter lest it carry across to the big white house.

But then the laughter would subside, and the blacks simply talked among themselves. Kunta heard the helpless, haunted tone of some and the bitter anger of others, even when he could not know what they were saying. Finally the talking would die away as one of the women began singing and all joined in. Kunta did not understand the words, but he sensed deep sadness in the melodies.

They were heathen, pagan blacks—they even ate the flesh of the filthy swine—yet they did some things which were unmistakably African, and Kunta could tell that they were totally unaware of it themselves. All his life he had heard in Juffure the same sounds of

spontaneous exclamations, punctuated with the same gestures and facial expressions. The way they moved their bodies was identical, and the way they laughed when they were together.

How had these people come to be in this place? Kunta could not fathom what had happened to them to so destroy their minds that they acted resigned, complacent, grinning at the massa and the "overseer."

Perhaps, he thought, it was because they had never known a home village in Africa. They had been born black in this place. They were as a lost tribe.

Kunta reflected on all that he saw and heard and could neither understand nor accept it. And each night before sleep came he swore to his forefathers that he would escape; that he would die before he became like these black ones here.

Cruel Choice

Kunta's left ankle finally became so infected from the chafing of the iron that the overseer had the cuffs removed. With his iron bonds gone and unable to abide waiting, Kunta stole away that night, but Samson caught him only a short distance from his hut.

Kunta was pummeled and kicked, but not whipped or shackled. Soon he fled again after what the blacks called "snow" had fallen from the sky. The overseer caught up with him on one of the big farm horses by following the marks he made in the filmy whiteness. This time he was whipped and chained down. Yet he knew that as soon as the opportunity came, he would try again.

The moons went by, the fields were plowed, and spring planting began with seeds of various kinds, mostly of corn and something called "cotton." Kunta was unshackled, and he did what he was ordered to do, biding his time, chopping away weeds from the plants. As the harvesting began, Kunta noticed that wagons appeared more and more frequently on the distant roads, carrying the cotton to market. It came to him: the way to escape was to hide in a wagon which would carry him far away.

His head burst with working out the details of the plan. He ruled out the cotton wagons of the farm on which he worked; someone was always watching. It must be one of the wagons which he had seen far off, moving along the main road.

One night, on the pretext of going to the outhouse, he studied the road. The flickering light of lanterns inching along told him that

the wagons traveled in darkness as well as daylight. Another night he was able to kill a rabbit with a rock; he dried it as he had learned to do in Juffure. Then he honed to sharpness an old, rusty knife blade he had found and carved a wooden handle for it. He also made a *safo* charm. It had a cock's feather to attract the spirits, a horse's hair for strength and a bird's wishbone for success, all wrapped and sewed inside a square of burlap.

One evening he pushed into a pocket the dried pieces of rabbit and tied the *safo* tightly about his upper right arm. Listening tensely through his hut's door, he heard the familiar night routine of the other blacks. Finally their mournful singing ended. When he was sure they were asleep, Kunta grasped his homemade knife and slipped out.

Seeing and sensing no one about, he bent low and began running. Where the farm road met the big road he huddled down into a thick growth of brush. Soon he heard a wagon. It seemed forever before its flickering light even came into view, but finally it was directly opposite Kunta. Two figures sat in front, but there was no rear lookout. Teeth clenched, muscles quivering, Kunta burst from the brush, hunkered down behind the squeaking wagon and—as it bumped over a rough spot—clawed over the tailboard.

The night was his friend, and he burrowed into the cotton and rode undetected. But when dawn touched the sky he left the wagon and quickly disappeared into the underbrush.

The dew that sprinkled him felt good, and he swung his knife as if it were weightless, working deep into what he assured himself was a large area of forest. In the afternoon he chewed a piece of the dried rabbit with water. He plunged on until after sundown, when he made a bed of leaves and grass.

In the morning, he continued on. He did not know where he was or where he was going—only that he must escape. If he followed the way to where the sun rose, it should lead him back, in time, to the big canoe. And then? Kunta felt a growing uncertainty and fright. He prayed often to Allah and fingered his *safo*.

For four days he traveled through the forest, hearing nothing but toads and birds and insects. But on the morning of the fifth day he was awakened by the sound he feared most—the baying of dogs. He sprang up and began running—then realized he had forgotten his knife. Dashing back, he searched desperately among the vines and leaves but could not

find it. Steadily the baying came closer. He found a rock about the size of his fist and ran wildly, tripping, falling.

The bloodhounds cornered him early the next morning. Too exhausted to run farther, he waited, with his back against a tree. His left hand clutched a stout branch, and his right was like a claw about the rock. The dogs stayed out of range of his makeshift club, baying and slaving, until two *toubob* appeared on horses. Kunta had never seen them before. They were professional slave catchers.

The older of the two men dismounted and walked toward him, a club in one hand, a whip in the other. As the *toubob* came closer, Kunta hurled the rock. He heard the *toubob* shout and saw blood running down his head.

Now both men approached him with guns and clubs. He knew from their faces that he would die and he did not care. They clubbed him nearly senseless, but still he writhed and shrieked as they tore his clothes off and roped him to a tree. Kunta steeled himself to be beaten to death.

Then the bleeding *toubob* halted abruptly. A look came on his face, almost a smile, and he spoke briefly to the younger one, who grinned and nodded. The younger one went back to his horse, unlashed an ax from the saddle and gave it to his companion.

The bleeding one stood before Kunta. He pointed to Kunta's testicles, then to the hunting knife in his belt. He pointed to Kunta's foot, and then to the ax in his hand.

Kunta understood. He was being given a choice: his foot or his testicles. Something deep in his marrow shouted that a man, to be a man, must have sons. Involuntarily, his hands flew down to cover his genitals.

The *toubob* were grinning. One of them pushed a log under Kunta's right foot, and the other tied the foot to the tree so tightly that all of Kunta's raging could not free it. Then the bleeding *toubob* picked up the ax.

Kunta screamed and thrashed. The ax whipped up, then down, and severed the front half of his foot. As the blood spurted out, Kunta's body went limp.

A Woman Named Bell

When he regained consciousness, he was in some new place—a hut. He was tied down by the wrists and ankles, with his right foot propped against something soft.



A tall *toubob* came in carrying a small black bag. Kunta had never seen this one before. Brushing aside the flies, the *toubob* bent down alongside Kunta and did something that brought such spasms of pain that Kunta shrieked like a woman. "Bell!" the man called out, and a short, powerfully built black woman came inside bringing water in a tin container. The *toubob* took something from his black bag and stirred it into the water. The black woman kneeled and tilted the cup for Kunta to drink. It had a strange taste, and soon Kunta drifted into deep sleep.

When he awoke he knew that he was very ill. His whole right side felt numb, his lips were parched from fever, and his sweat had a sick smell. Involuntarily, he made an effort to flex his toes; it brought a blinding pain. The door opened, and the black woman came in again. Squatting down, she pressed a damp, cooling cloth against his forehead.

On her next visit she tried to get him to eat. He was even thinner now than he was the week before when Bell, serving the noon meal, was hurriedly called to help lift from a wagon the bloody heap. The sheriff had ordered the slave catchers to deliver it to Dr. William Waller, the brother of Kunta's owner. The doctor, who was Bell's massa, had been livid when he learned of the maiming.

Bell covered Kunta's bare chest with an acrid, steaming poultice of boiled elderberry leaves mixed with sulfur. Then she packed wet cloths over the poultice and covered Kunta with quilts.

Slave quarters and wood house on the grounds of an estate in Maryland.

When Kunta next awakened, he realized that his fever had broken. He wondered where the woman had learned what she had done. It was like the medicines of his mother, Binta, the herbs of Allah's earth passed down from the ancestors.

His pain became less of an agony now, except for the tall *toubob's* daily treatment of his foot. One day Kunta was untied from the stakes, and he managed to prop himself on his elbows. He spent hours staring at the bandages over his foot stump. For most of his 18 rains (the Gambian way of saying 18 years, based upon one rainy season per year) he had run and climbed anywhere he wanted to go. It seemed monstrous that a *toubob* would chop his foot off.

He took out his rage and his humiliation on the black woman when she came in to feed him, snarling in Mandinka and banging down the tin cup after he drank. Afterward he lay, even more furious, reflecting that the woman's eyes had seemed to warm upon his show of anger.

After three weeks the *toubob* took off the bandages. Kunta almost screamed as he saw the swollen half of his foot covered with a thick, brownish scab. The *toubob* sprinkled something over it, bandaged it loosely and left. Three days later he returned with two stout sticks with forked tops—Kunta had seen injured people walk with these in Juffure.

When the *toubob* had gone, Kunta painfully pulled himself upright and tried the sticks. He managed a few awkward, forward swings of his body. When Bell brought his breakfast the next morning, his glance caught the quick pleasure on her face at the marks the sticks had made on the dirt floor. Kunta glowered at her. He refused to touch the food until she left. But then he ate it hungrily, wanting its strength. Within a few days, he was hobbling freely about the hut.

The Fiddler

In the evening on this farm the black ones gathered at the last hut in the row. It was occupied by a *sasso borro*—a man of about 50 rains who had brown skin, indicating that his father had been white. Listening intently from within his own doorway, Kunta could hear the brown one talking almost continuously. Sometimes the others burst into laughter. At intervals, they barraged him with questions. Who was he, Kunta wondered.

One day as Kunta passed on his crutches, the brown one beckoned him to take a stool by his hut. Kunta sat down opposite the man.

"I been hearin' 'bout you so mad," the brown one said. "You lucky dey ain't kilt you! Law say anybody catch you escapin' can kill you; law say cut your ear off if white folks say you lied. Law 'gainst teachin' any nigger to read or write; law 'gainst nigger beatin' any drums—any of dat African stuff. ..."

Somehow it did not matter that Kunta could not understand. An exhilaration gripped him that someone actually was talking to him directly. And the man simply loved to talk. If he had lived in Africa, Kunta thought, he would be a wandering *griot*, one who told the history of ancient kings and family clans.

Late that night, sleepless, his mind tumbling with inner conflicts, Kunta recalled something his father had once said when he had refused to let go of a mango so that his brother Lamin could have a bite. "When you clench your fist," said Omoro, "no man can put anything in your hand." Yet he also knew that his father would not want him to become like the other black people.

"Looka here!" the brown one said abruptly one afternoon. "You—you Toby!" Kunta's face flushed with anger. "Kunta Kinte!" he blurted aloud, astonished at himself. It was the first utterance to anyone in the more than a year since he had been in the *toubob* land.

The brown one frowned his disapproval. "You is Toby! You got to forgit dat African stuff! Make white folks mad and scare niggers." He looked around the room and picked up an oddly shaped wooden thing with a slender black neck. "Fiddle!" he exclaimed.

In their privacy, Kunta decided to repeat the sound. "Fiddle..." he said tentatively.

The brown one began pointing at other objects—"Bucket... chair... cornshucks"—and Kunta repeated the sounds. After they had gone through more than a score of words, the brown one grunted: "You ain't as dumb as you looks."

The lessons continued. In time Kunta was able not only to understand, but to make himself understood to the brown one, who wished to be called "fiddler."

One day, special shoes were brought to Kunta by a black man called Gideon, who made horse collars and shod the black people. One shoe's front half was stuffed with cotton. Kunta put them on. He felt stinging sensations in his right half-foot as he gingerly walked around his hut, but finally he put his full weight on it and did not

"You lucky dey ain't kilt you!" the brown man said. "Law say anybody catch you escapin' can kill you."

feel undue pain. He had thought he would always have to walk with crutches.

That same week the fiddler heard from Luther, the black driver, that the *toubob* doctor now owned Kunta. He carefully explained the news to Kunta. "Luther say the massa got a deed to you from his brother who had you at first. Niggers here claim he a good massa," the fiddler continued, "an' I seen worse. But ain't none of 'em no good."

At about this time, Kunta began keeping a calendar by dropping pebbles into a gourd. He guessed he had spent 12 moons on the first *toubob* farm, so he dropped 12 pebbles into the gourd. Then he dropped in six more, making a total of 18 moons that he had been in the land of the *toubob*. Adding the 18 moons to his 17 rains when he was taken from Juffure, Kunta figured that he was now in his 19th rain.

"War Am Ober!"

Soon afterward, Kunta was told by an old black man who worked a small vegetable garden, "Massa put you to workin' with me." He showed Kunta how to hoe the weeds and pick off tomato worms and potato bugs. When the feeble old gardener became ill, Kunta tilled the garden alone.

The season of snow came, and the other blacks were caught up in an increasing excitement about some day called "Christmas." It had something to do with singing, dancing and eating. Kunta overheard talk that Christmas also involved the Allah of the *toubob* and the black ones. It made him ill at ease, and during the days of festivities he did not leave his hut even to visit the fiddler.

Spring came for Kunta, and then summer, in a sweating blur of days as he struggled to plow, plant and cultivate the garden, and supply vegetables to Bell, who was cook for the big house. At night he was too tired to do more than throw himself down on his cornshuck mattress, his clothes wet with sweat, and sleep. Sometimes he still thought of escape, but his impulse to flee was always tempered by the terrible memories of what had happened to him.

When the harvest was in and the fall chores were begun, there was talk of Christmas again. This Christmas, Kunta felt, Allah would have no objection to his merely observing the activities. But the Muslim Kunta was deeply offended when he watched the preparation of liquor from fermented apples. He thought it sickening when

the young black ones amused themselves by holding dried hog bladders on sticks close to the fire until they burst. And he was particularly repulsed when Bell supervised the cooking of a large, black iron potful of hogs' jowls and black-eyed peas for the "New Years" of "Sebenteen Sebenty."

"Hog jowl an' peas is good luck!" the fiddler shouted at him, his mouth full. Kunta was disgusted. Sitting on his stool in his hut, he worried that he might find himself easing into an acceptance of the ways of the other blacks. Yet he wanted to know them better—the fiddler and the old gardener and the cook Bell.

One day, on an impulse, Kunta told Bell that she looked like a Mandinka. He meant it in a complimentary way, and he was astonished by her irate outburst: "What fool stuff you talkin' 'bout? Don' know how come white folks keep on emptyin' out boatloads of you black African niggers!"

Bell remained tight-lipped for days afterward. But one morning in March 1770, she came rushing out to the garden filled with excitement. "Sheriff jes' rid off! He tol' massa been some big fightin' up nawth somewhere called Boston! Massa sho' upset." Later Luther, the buggy driver, brought more information. "Dem Boston peoples got so mad at dat king 'crost the big water dey marched on his soldiers. Dem soldiers start shootin', an' first one kilt was a nigger name of Crispus Attucks! Dey callin' it de 'Boston Massacre.'"

From then on Luther brought regular news from slaves, stable hands and other drivers he talked to about the trouble with England. And scarcely a day passed when the field hands did not hear from an adjoining plantation, or a slave passing on a mule, a rising, lingering, singsong, "Yooo-hooo-ah-hoo! Don'tcha hear me callin' youuuu?" Then the nearest field hand would go running to pick up the latest report and would rush back to tell the others.

News of what was happening "up nawth" continued to come in fragments across the changing seasons. As Kunta dropped pebble after pebble into his gourd calendar, he tried to understand it all. It became increasingly clear to him that the *toubob* folks were moving toward a crisis with the *toubob* king. Kunta was especially interested in the thing called "freedom." As best he could find out from the fiddler, it meant having no massa at all, doing as one wanted and

going wherever one pleased. But why would the white folks have to talk about freedom, he wondered.

The biggest excitement came with the news late in 1775 that Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, had proclaimed freedom for slaves who would serve on his fleet of ships and help the *toubob* king. Not long afterward, Massa Waller called Bell to the living room. Twice he read slowly an item in the *Virginia Gazette*. He then ordered Bell to “read” it to the slaves, telling them what it meant. It said that the Virginia House of Burgesses had decreed “...death without benefit of clergy for all Negro or other slaves conspiring to rebel.”

“What do it mean?” a field hand asked.

“It mean,” the fiddler said dryly, “uprise, an’ white folks won’t call no preacher when they kills you.”

The next summer there was more excitement when Luther returned from the county seat with the news that “all the white folks is jes’ carryin’ on, hollerin’ an’ laughin’. Somethin’ ’bout some Declaration of Independence.”

The old gardener shook his head. “Ain’t nothin’ neither way for niggers to holler ’bout. England or here, dey’s white folks.”

In 1778 Bell brought the news that slaves were being promised their freedom if they would join the army as fifiers or pioneers. Someone asked what “pioneers” meant. The fiddler replied, “It mean git stuck up front an’ git kilt!” And when Bell reported later that two states—South Carolina and Georgia—would not let slaves enlist, the fiddler had a quick retort: “Dat’s the only thing good I ever heard ’bout neither one of dem!”

In May 1781 came the astounding story that redcoats on horses had ruined Massa Thomas Jefferson’s plantation. Then Luther reported that Massa George Washington’s army was coming to save Virginia—“an’ niggers aplenty is in it!” That October, the army attacked England’s General Cornwallis at Yorktown, and soon came the news that set Slave Row shouting: Cornwallis had surrendered.

“War am ober! The freedom am won!” Bell told everybody. “Massa say gon’ be peace now.”

“Ain’t gon’ be no peace!” the fiddler said in his sour way. “Jes’ watch what I tell you—it’s gon’ be worse’n it was—for niggers.”

Slave Talk

Shortly after the war ended, Luther helped a slave girl run away. He was found out and sold at auction. Kunta took Luther’s place as buggy driver, and the new job vastly broadened his world. Taking Dr. Waller on his rounds, he visited plantations all over the countryside, he saw poor whites, he came into the nearby towns.

In the back yard of one big house he saw a very black woman, who appeared to be of the Wolof tribe. Both of her large breasts were hanging out, a *toubob* infant sucking at one, a black infant sucking at the other. When Kunta later described the sight, the old gardener said, “Ain’t hardly a massa in Virginia ain’t sucked a black mammy, or least was raised by one.”

Speaking to Bell and the fiddler and the old gardener about such things, Kunta was astonished to learn that many white young’uns and black young’uns grew up together and became very attached to each other. The old gardener said that on his second plantation a *toubob* and black boy grew up together until finally the *toubob* young massa took the black one off with him to a William and Mary College.

“He say heap of times dey take dey niggers wid ’em to classes, den dey argue later on whose nigger learnt de most. Dat nigger we knowed couldn’t jes’ read an’ write, he could figger, too, an’ ’cite dem poems an’ stuff dey has at colleges.”

“Lucky if he ain’t dead,” the fiddler said. “’Cause white folks is quick to ’spicion a nigger like dat be de first to hatch a uprisin’ or revolt. Don’t pay to know too much.”

Sometimes Massa Waller invited a friend to ride with him, and then Kunta’s rigid back belied that he heard every word. They talked as if he were not there. Whites seldom shared a buggy ride without expressing regional fears of slave conspiracies and revolts. “We should never have let them bear arms against white men during the war. Now we witness the result!”

Massa Waller went on to say that he had read that more than 200 slave outbreaks and revolts had occurred since the first slave ships came. “But beyond that,” he added, “I’ve seen white deaths that, well, I’ll not go into details—I’ll just say I’ve thought them suspicious.”

Kunta, in fact, knew as much, or more, of these matters. Black men often met secretly. Right in this county he had heard of black ones who had vowed to kill their massa or missis. He had knowledge

of hidden muskets and had overheard whisperings of intended revolts.

Kunta's most consistent source of information, especially from faraway places, was when the massa happened to be in the Spotsylvania County Seat as a mail coach came whirling in. Minutes after the mail sacks and bundles of the Virginia *Gazette* had been dropped off, scores of massas, shopkeepers and other *toubob* men were gathered in clusters, talking and exclaiming, and usually Kunta was within hearing.

His ears filled with the *toubob* folks' fury and dismay at the increasing number of "Quakers" who, according to the *Gazette*, had been encouraging black ones to escape, and more recently had begun aiding, hiding and conducting such runaways to freedom in the north.

Returning home, Kunta told what he had seen and heard, with all of Slave Row gathered at the fiddler's cabin listening to him intently. Bell added that she had just overheard Massa Waller and some dinner guests bitterly discussing the news that slavery had recently been abolished in a northern state called "Massachusetts," and reports that other states near there would do the same. "What ' 'bolished' mean?" a field hand asked.

The old gardener replied, "It mean all us niggers gon' be free, one dese days!"

Mortar and Pestle

In the spring of 1788, Kunta was 38 rains of age. In Africa, he thought, he would have been married and have had three or four sons by this time. But the bride's proper age should be 14 to 16 rains, as in Juffure. He had not seen one black female of this age in the *toubob* land whom he had not considered preposterously giggly and silly.

In fact, the only woman he knew well at all was Bell, who was probably beyond 40 rains. She was also disrespectful of men, and she talked too much. But he remembered how, when he had lain near death, Bell had nursed and fed him, cleaned him when he soiled himself and broken his fever. And she did cook endless good things, grinding her corn by hand, although her stone mortar and pestle obviously did not grind as well as those carved from hard wood by the people of Juffure.

For days Kunta kept to himself, turning everything over in his mind. One evening when the horses were fed, he picked up an old,

discarded hickory block, took it to his hut and began carving. He saw in his mind the mortar and pestle which Omoro had made, and which his mother had worn slick with grinding.

Whenever he had free time, he sat in his cabin, chopping carefully around the hickory block with a hatchet, making the rough shape of a mortar. Then he began to carve with a knife. Once finished with the block, he found a seasoned hickory limb, perfectly straight and of the thickness of his arm, from which he soon made a pestle, which fit snugly against the mortar's bottom. He smoothed the upper part of the handle, scraping it first with a file, next with a knife and finally with a piece of glass.

After the task was done, he took the mortar and pestle to Bell's kitchen door and set them down on the steps outside. Catching the thumping sound, Bell turned and saw Kunta limping away. She examined the painstaking carving and was deeply moved. It was the first time in her life that a man had made something for her with his own hands. Indeed, she was not even sure it was meant for her.

When Kunta returned in the afternoon to find out if the massa had need of him, Bell blurted out, "What dat?" and gestured toward his gift.

In deep embarrassment, Kunta said, almost angrily, "For you to grind cawn wid."

For the next two weeks, beyond exchanging greetings, neither of them said anything. Then one day Bell gave Kunta a round cake of cornbread whose meal he guessed she had made with the mortar. Grunting, he took the bread back to his hut.

After that they saw each other oftener, and though Bell usually did all the talking, Kunta was drawn closer to her. The next summer he accompanied her and the other blacks to the annual Sunday camp meeting. Although he found the "O Lawd" religion repugnant, he recognized in the others' fervor many of the emotions of festivals back in Juffure. On the way home, with Kunta driving, the black ones began to sing: "Sometime I feels like a motherless chile...a long ways from home...a long ways from home —"

Kunta thought about the times when he had been driving the massa somewhere along a lonely road, and suddenly a sound would rise loudly; it would be some black one somewhere alone in the fields or the woods, who had simply opened his mouth and poured from his soul a single, echoing holler that rang and echoed in the

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still air. The singing of the black ones, he thought, like his own silence, was a reflection of a terrible yearning.

One morning in August 1789, Bell invited Kunta to eat dinner with her in her cabin. He said nothing. But after work he scrubbed himself hard, using a rough cloth and a bar of brown lye soap. As he carefully put on his clothes he found himself singing softly a song from his village, "Mandumbe, your long neck is very beautiful. ..." Bell did not have a long neck, but it didn't seem to matter.

Bell's cabin was the nearest one on Slave Row to the big house. The room that he entered when Bell opened the door had a feeling of coziness with its wall of mud-chinked oak logs and a chimney of handmade bricks. There were two windows and two rooms, one of them curtained off. On a table in the center of the main room there was a jar filled with flowers from Bell's garden. Over the fire, Bell heated some chicken and dumplings which she knew Kunta loved.

When Bell again asked Kunta to eat dinner, she cooked things which Kunta had told her also grew in the Gambia—black-eyed peas, and a stew made with peanuts, and yams baked with butter. As she ground up meal for hoecakes with the mortar and pestle he had given her, Kunta could envision her beating the breakfast grain in Juffure.

One evening, when he again came to dinner, Kunta presented Bell with a mat he had plaited from bulrushes with a bold Mandinka design in the center. "Ain't nobody gon' put dey feets on dat mat!" Bell exclaimed. She took it into her bedroom and soon came back. "Dese was to be fo' yo' Christmas, but I make you somethin' else. ..."

Kunta took the gift. One of the finely knitted woolen socks had a half-foot, with the front part a soft woolen cushion. Neither he nor Bell seemed to know what to say. A strange feeling swept over Kunta; her hand sought out his. And for the first time in his 39 rains, a woman filled his arms.

Firstborn and Fā

With Massa Waller's permission, Kunta and Bell "jumped de broom" into slave matrimony on Christmas Eve, 1789. In the simple ceremony in Bell's cabin, with all of the people of Slave Row gathered, they locked arms and solemnly jumped together over a broomstick lying in the middle of the floor. That was all there was to it.

Afterward there was feasting and cheer. Kunta noticed uneasily

that Bell was enjoying the wine and brandy which the massa had sent as his gift. Once he overheard her confiding to a woman friend, "Sister Mandy, been had my eye on 'im ten years!" He was mortified.

But Kunta got over that. And in the spring of 1790, when Bell announced that she was pregnant, he was overjoyed. In his mind he could see a small face—a manchild face—peering from a bundle on her back.

The baby came in September. Massa Waller was in the cabin with Bell for more than two hours. Kunta squatted just outside, hearing Bell's anguished moans rise into screams that ripped the quiet of Slave Row before there came an infant's sharp cries. Then Massa Waller emerged. "She had a hard time," he said. "But she'll be fine. You can go in now and see your baby girl."

Kunta's heart sank. A girl. But he limped through the doorway. Bell lay quietly, her drawn face managing a weak smile. Kunta kissed her, and for a long while he stared into the black infant's face. She definitely looked Mandinka. He thought to himself that he could not disappear for seven days, as a new father would in Juffure, to think of a meaningful name for the child; he must decide on one right away.

That night, as he walked the paths where he had first courted Bell, he remembered Bell telling of her greatest grief. Before she was 20 she had been married. But her husband had been killed in an escape attempt, leaving her with two babies. Suspicious of her, her massa had sold Bell away—without the children. "Two li'l gals I ain't never seed since," Bell had said. "Ain't got no dream of where dey is, even if dey's livin' or dead!"

Thinking of this, Kunta chose a name. In Mandinka it meant, "You stay here." He did not tell Bell the name, for by the tradition of his tribe, the baby must be the first ever to hear its name spoken.

The next night, over Bell's protests, Kunta carried his firstborn, snugly wrapped in a blanket, out into the crisp fall air. A short distance from Slave Row, he raised the baby up and whispered three times into her right ear: "*Ee to mu Kizzy leh.*" ("Your name is Kizzy.") Lifting a corner of the blanket, he bared the small black face to the moon and stars and spoke aloud the words that once, in a village in Gambia, had been spoken to him: "Behold—the only thing greater than yourself!"



He told Kizzy of how he had been captured and how he had been brought to this white folks' land. He would picture for her the village of Juffure. He told her story after story, drawing on long-forgotten incidents. She learned fast; she remembered well. Kunta was deeply pleased. "You will have children," he said. "They must know from you where they come from."

This Cruel Land

The world was changing. When Kizzy was only three the cotton gin was invented, and by the time she was ten it was altering age-old patterns throughout the land.

By 1802, the gin had made large cotton plantations in the deep south more and more profitable. Slave traders roamed the roads inquiring of every owner if he had any slaves for sale, and coffles of slaves streamed south toward the black lands of Mississippi and Alabama. Bell reported to Slave Row that the massa said he would never sell any slave—unless that slave broke one of his

rules. Kunta remembered Luther, the previous buggy driver. Now that he had Bell and Kizzy to live for, he did everything he could to stay out of trouble.

And yet in one year—1806, when Kizzy was 16—more than 20,000 blacks had been brought into just two states, Georgia and South Carolina. Slaves were selling for unheard-of prices. Even a baby a few weeks old was worth \$200.

And one morning in that year, the county sheriff visited Massa Waller. Bell, who was sent from the kitchen while the sheriff spoke to the massa, knew instinctively that something was wrong, and that it somehow involved her. Just before lunchtime, Massa Waller called her in.

His voice was strained and angry as he told Bell the sheriff's news. A young field hand had been captured after running away. Under beating, he had confessed that he had been helped by Kizzy. "You know my rules," he told Bell. "She will have to be sold." Bell fled screaming from the house to her cabin.

When Kunta returned from an errand in the buggy, Massa Waller

Bell was indignant when she heard the name. "Kizzy? Ain't nobody never heard of dat name! Ain't gon' do nothin' but stir up trouble." But Kunta explained its meaning, and she relented. The next day it was entered in Massa Waller's big black Bible: "Kizzy Waller, born September 12, 1790."

Kizzy was a bright and lively child; and as the years passed, Kunta began teaching her words in Mandinka. "Fā!" Kunta would say, pointing to himself, and was thrilled when the child finally repeated the word. As Kizzy grew, he taught her more involved words—his name, Kunta Kinte, and Kamby Bolongo (which was Mandinka for the Gambia River), and Juffure. And he told her about his father, Omoro, and his brothers, and of the Kinte clan as far back as the days of old Mali. Bell sometimes objected; such things would make trouble with the massa, but Kunta insisted.

Her father's gourd of pebbles had a fascination for Kizzy. Bell told her, "Don't never mess wid dem rocks," but Kunta was pleased at the child's interest. Now, each morning after a new moon, he would let her drop the pebble into the gourd.

led him into a small room in the big house. He told him what he had told Bell.

Kunta went to his cabin numbly. He could not really comprehend what the massa had said. His Kizzy—sold away? It was inconceivable. At the sight of Kunta, Bell began screaming, "Ain't gon' take my baby! Ain't gon' sell my baby! Sell he, not my baby!" The truth sank in, and all the bitterness that had ever been in Kunta boiled in him anew, all that he had ever felt of *toubob*, all that he had never ceased to feel in this cruel land.

The sheriff returned in the middle of the afternoon with a slave trader. The trader went inside the house and emerged holding a chain attached to cuffs around the wrists of a weeping Kizzy.

Bell charged from her cabin. "You done dis?" she shouted at Kizzy. Kizzy's face was an agony. It was plain that she had helped the black escape.

"Oh, Lawd Gawd, have mercy, massa!" Bell screamed. "She ain't meant to! She ain't! Please, massa, please! Please!"

Massa Waller spoke tersely: "Wrong is wrong. You know my rules. I have already sold her." He nodded to the slave trader who started to pull Kizzy toward his cart. Then Kunta sprang to his daughter, seizing her about the waist, hugging her as if he would crush her. "Save me, Fä!" she cried.

The sheriff's pistol butt came crashing down against Kunta's head, and he fell to his knees, dazed. Vaguely he saw the slave trader pushing Kizzy, her body thrashing, flailing, into the cart. The cart gathered speed; Bell went lumbering after it, and Kizzy was screaming.

Kunta rushed to where Kizzy had last stood. Bending, he scooped into his hands the dust of her footprints. The spirits said that if he kept that dust, her feet would return to that spot.

He ran with the dust toward the cabin in Slave Row. He must put it in some safe place. His eyes fell upon the gourd full of pebbles. He flung away the dust and, snatching up the gourd, banged it down against the packed-dirt floor. The gourd burst into pieces, and the pebbles which had been his record of the rains of his life went flying in all directions.

"He Were a African"

Kizzy was bought from the slave trader by a man named Tom Lea, who took her to a small plantation in North Carolina. Her new massa forced himself on her, and she bore a child named George. It

bothered Kizzy that he was brown, but she learned not to think about it.

By the time he was four, George knew that his grandfather was African. Since few slave children on the Lea plantation even knew who their fathers were, George pestered his mother for more information about the man who had said his name was "Kunta Kin-tay," who called a fiddle or guitar "*ko*," and a river "Kamby Bolongo."

"Where he from?" George would ask.

"He were a African, I tol' you!"

"What kin' of African, Mammy? Where 'bouts in Africa he from?"

Kizzy, remembering how her father had said she must tell her children where they came from, told George how Kunta Kinte had been not far from a village called Juffure, looking for wood to make a drum, when four men had captured him, put him on a ship, and taken him to a place called "Naplis."

In 1827, when George was 21, he "jumped de broom" with a girl named Matilda. Between 1828 and 1840 they had seven children. Each time one was born, George would assemble all the family in his cabin. With the new infant on his knee, the older children gathered about the hearth, he would implant in their minds the story of their great-granddaddy, "the African who said his name was 'Kin-tay,' who called a guitar '*ko*,' and a river 'Kamby Bolongo,' and said that he was out looking for wood for a drum when..."

The children of George and Matilda grew up, each one entering field work as he got old enough, all except the fourth child, Tom, who became a blacksmith. In 1856, Massa Tom Lea fell on hard times and had to sell his slaves. They all went to a tobacco plantation in Alamance County owned by Massa Murray.

There, in 1858, Tom, the blacksmith, married a half-black, half-Cherokee girl named Irene. As Irene had one child after another, Tom did what his father had done, and his grandmother Kizzy before that, telling his children about the African whose name was "Kin-tay." When the hard and bitter years of the Civil War were over, they became free. But they had no land and no place to go, so they stayed at the Murray plantation, the white Murrays and the black Murrays struggling on together.

Then, in 1872, George led a 29-wagon train of black families out of Alamance County, North Carolina, and through the Cumberland Gap to Henning, Tennessee. The last wagon was driven by his

blacksmith son, Tom Murray, with his wife, Irene, and their seven children, the youngest a two-year-old girl named Cynthia.

That little girl was my grandma. At her knee I first heard the story of "the African," Kunta Kinte, which led to my search for roots.

Today the Haley family continues to reflect, in microcosm, the changing attitudes and opportunities of black America. Author Alex Haley's father, Simon, worked as a part-time Pullman porter while attending the Agricultural and Technical State University at Greensboro, N.C. In the summer of 1916, making the run from Buffalo to Pittsburgh, Simon Haley was befriended by R.S.M. Boyce, a retired executive of the Curtis Publishing Co. Boyce subsequently provided the funds that enabled Haley to graduate and go on to the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University for a master's degree. Then, Simon Haley taught at small Negro colleges in the South.

Alex Haley's mother, Bertha, was a grammar-school teacher. He has two brothers, George W. Haley, an assistant director of the United States Information Agency; and Julius C. Haley, a Navy architect. Alex Haley himself, since retirement from the U.S. Coast Guard, has pursued an increasingly successful career as a writer of books, magazine articles and screenplays. To further the study of black heritage and genealogy, he and his brothers have established the Kinte Foundation, in Washington, D.C.

ALEX HALEY

The Man Who
Traced America's
ROOTS

Reader's
Digest

A READER'S DIGEST BOOK

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Foreword

W

hen *Reader's Digest* published the first excerpts from Alex Haley's *Roots* in our May and June 1974 issues, we said it was an epic work, "destined to become a classic of American literature." That has proved to be an understatement. In just five months after the book hit stores in 1976, more than one million hardcover copies were purchased. Since then, *Roots* has taken its place among the greatest bestsellers of all time as the number of copies sold has grown to over six million worldwide. Its impact on television was also historic: Some 130 million Americans watched at least part of the 12-hour drama, making it the highest-rated miniseries ever.

But the story of *Roots* started long before a page of the book was written or a frame of the TV drama was filmed. One evening at a lawn party in 1966, Haley met Lila Acheson Wallace, cofounder of *The Digest*. On evenings such as this, sitting on his front porch in Tennessee with his mother and his aunts, Haley had heard stories about his forebears—especially Kunta Kinte, the one they called the African. Through family stories, he absorbed the tragic struggle and