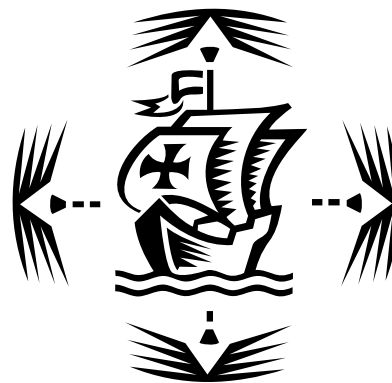


The Middle Passage

From the 16th to the latter 19th century, many thousands of Africans from various ethnic groups were displaced from their homelands all throughout Africa, and were forcibly brought to the West coast of Africa, to begin a journey known to us today as the Middle Passage. This arduous trade voyage brought human beings to the Americas, to work as slaves in exchange for raw and manufactured goods from the Americas, Britain, and other European nations.



It is called the Middle Passage because it was the middle leg of a three-part voyage that started and ended in Europe. The first leg of the voyage carried a cargo that often included iron, cloth, brandy, firearms, and gunpowder. Upon landing on Africa's "slave coast," the cargo was exchanged for Africans. Fully loaded with its human cargo, the ship set sail for the Americas, where the slaves were exchanged for sugar, tobacco, or some other product. The final leg brought the ship back to Europe.

The African slaves boarding the ship had no idea what lay ahead. Africans who had made the Middle Passage to the plantations of the New World did not return to their homeland to tell what happened to those people who suddenly disappeared.

Conditions were horrible on these ships, with hundreds of people chained down together in a tiny cargo hold, barely enough room to roll over, little ventilation, food, or water. Disease and mortality was high, it is said that between ten and twenty percent of those transported lost their lives.

It is hard to believe that this occurred in our history less than 150 years ago, yet it is important to recognize this history, and discuss this with our children. It is important to remember that each of these people brought as slaves to the New World had a life, a family, traditions, beliefs, and skills that they had to suddenly leave behind. They could bring nothing with them physically, but deep inside themselves they carried the memory of their rich cultural heritage, their strong spirit, and their incredible ability to perse-

vere.

In People Like Me 2001, we bring you just a glimpse of the many diverse cultural expressions that were carried by the strong and brave people that survived the Middle Passage. As the traditions and artistic expressions became transformed in a new land and the changing political conditions over the last two centuries, they continued to carry an essential spirit and energy that has so enriched the new lands they inhabited. In this year's People Like Me, we are honoring the contributions of African people and their invincible spirit, to our shared culture, our music and dance.

