

ZWEDRU'S CHILDREN: PART TWO

A story of a West African family in Liberia, and a young girl's life as she is brought to Virginia.

By Stephen Hanks

In the year 1715, in the fifth month, in the 33rd of the headship of Korwolo, Chief Elder of the south eastern dako, there was a woman in the village of Zwedru, near the river Cavella, who was heavy in child. Her name was Bina, and her husband, the father of her child, was Mennah, the son of Sensobo.

In the fifth month, on the ninth day of the month, the woman Bina gave birth to a daughter. They named the girl Akey, after the name of Mennah's mother. The son of Mennah was Nadi, and his brothers were Prero, whose wife was Mimba, and Bodebe, wife was Couba.

When Mennah's son Nadi reaches eight years, he is sent away to live with the village teacher to learn the skills of fishing. There he will learn to canoe, make a fishing line, the use of weights, and how to use the jlude (harpoon). He also will be taught geography, meteorology, and astronomy, so to learn how the winds, clouds, landmarks, and position of the stars all aid a skilled fisherman. Nadi's father, uncles, and grandfather all went through their training during their respective time. They were thankful for the knowledge they gained, such as knowing the fishing grounds of the rock fish, the snapper, and the cavella. And all kru fishermen would always relate with great pride

their stories of bringing home to the feast the prized shark or crocodile.

When Nadi returned home from his training, he was very eager to show his father, uncles and grandfather the seafaring skills he had acquired. In fact, Nadi wanted now to become a sailor like his grandfather. He even began to show his sister Akey some things he had been taught. Eventually in time, Akey began accompanying her brother Nadi to the fishing grounds along the river Cavella. Occasionally, the women of the village went with the men to assist with the catch. Couba, Mimba, Bina and Akey would build traps to would take the bark from certain trees, beat it on rocks, then take the chaff of the bark and throw it into the water to stupefy the fish.

One day the women had come with their men to fish. Akey was now ten years old. She became tired and went over to sit in the shade underneath a silk cotton tree away in the distance. I know this because I saw her while I was making myself a new fishing line. I continued for a time stringing my new line when I looked up and Akey was no longer there. I walked over to the spot where she had sat. Suddenly, several "Sedibo" (young soldiers), they were not of our dako, with wooden clubs and spears, rushed upon me. I ran faster than they and yelled at the top of my lungs a

warning cry "MU!!!" (RUN). One spear I nearly dodged. Many of my people fled into the forests, but the sedibo were still pursuing me. I ran along a trail they were not familiar with, bringing confusion to them. I quickly decided to run back towards the river and grab my canoe. This was not wise, as two of the soldiers were standing guard over them. I stayed still where I was and hid among the bush. But the soldiers I could hear were nearing me again and I feared that I would be discovered. Grabbing some small rocks in both hands, I threw them into the brush in the direction of the two standing by the canoes. Thinking it was sound of the rocks. Immediately I swiftly ran towards the closest canoe, grabbed it, and jumped into the river. The oars were still inside. But the time I had bought myself proved shortlived as the soldiers spotted me and came again. Two jumped in one canoe and two more in another. I tried to paddle as fast and as hard as I could, but they soon overtook my canoe, and binding me with ropes brought me back ashore. They then took me to their camp, and there I saw young Akey along with several others who had been captured, though I did not recognize any of them as my family except Akey. She cried out to me as I implored my captors to let us go. They did not understand my language, but

seeing that the child was greatly distressed and was recognizing me, allowed us to sit together through the night as they stood guard.

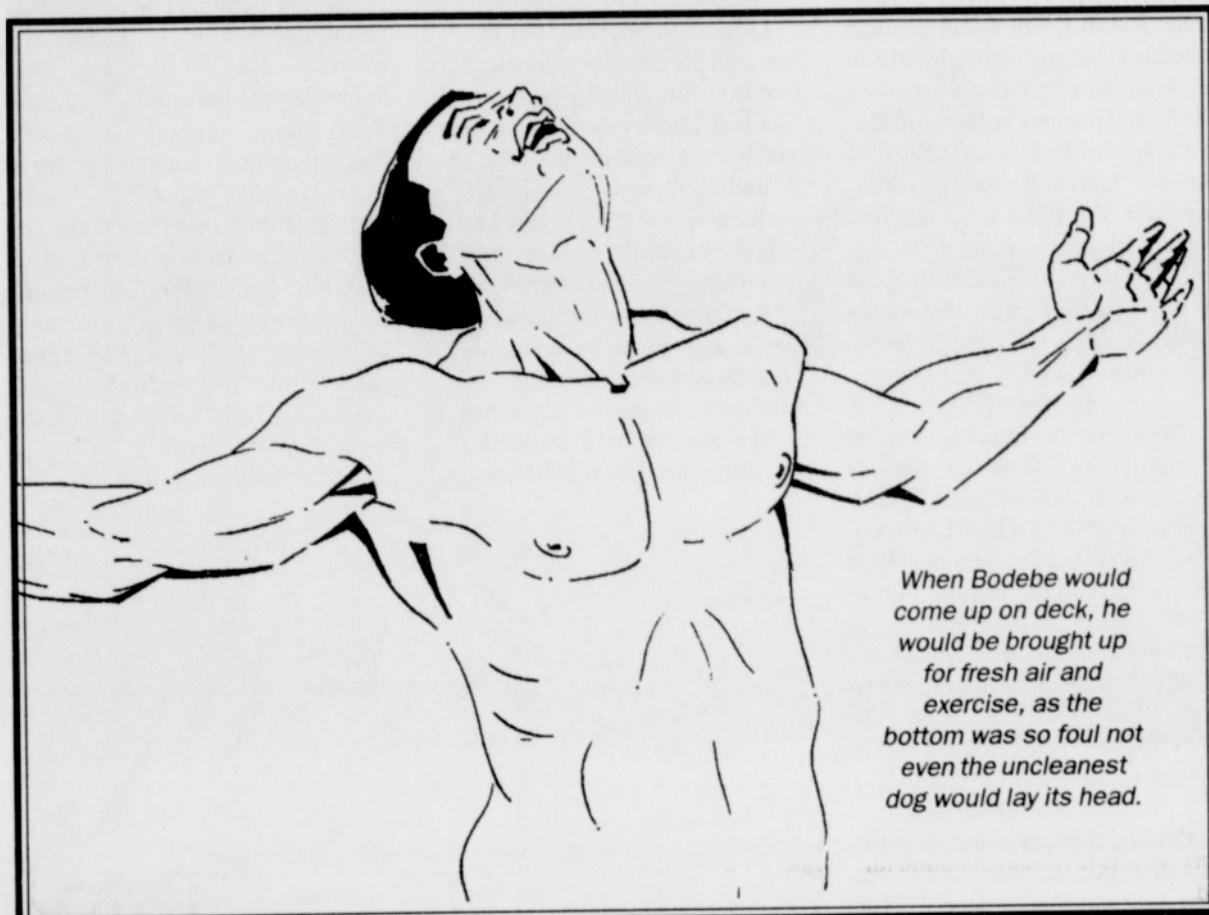
The next day we were all roped together by the neck and marched to the coast, where upon arriving we were then sold to the nye-puru (the Europeans) and put aboard their ship. Akey and the other two women were then fastened with irons on the deck of the ship, while I and the other men, twenty of us were taken below in the hold. As Akey saw me go down, she screamed my name "Bodebe! Bodebe!! Bo..."

The ship "Providence," an English vessel, left the young African men, women and children. They were princes, teachers, doctors, artisans, weavers, welders,

fishermen, fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, sons, and daughters. They were human beings, shackled away from their motherland, but still human beings. The long voyage would take many days to reach its destination across the boisterous, choppy Atlantic sea. From time to time, the men down in the hold would be brought up for fresh air and exercise, as the bottom was so foul not even the uncleanest dog would lay its head. When Bodebe would come up on deck, he would look up at the stars to try and pinpoint his position, and how far he was from the river Cavella; but his bearings were totally thrown off in his weak could, he would check on young Akey, the daughter of his brother Mennah, from the village of Zwedru. The young

child Akey was at least given a blanket to be put around her when the winds proved too cold for her shivering body to absorb. Bodebe would shout encouragement to his niece each chance he could, "Dju (child), stay strong! The great Nyeswa (God) will protect us!" And at other times he would say, "Be like by name "Bodebe" (antelope), you will have water to drink soon," and still yet, "Be like your name "Akey" (fruit tree), the fruit that saved your father when but a baby, and also helped give birth to your grandmother." Bodebe was permitted to shout these things to her either because their English captors could not understand wish to pay him any attention due to the many cries and wails that were being made by all.

TO BE CONTINUED...



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Dirty Little Secrets

By DR. CLAUD ANDERSON

Why Were Blacks Preferred Slaves?

It was not by simple chance that the black race was selected for enslavement. It resulted from a process of elimination. Europeans were not interested in enslaving members of their own race. Asians were protected by geographical barriers. Indians refused to be enslaved, indicating a willingness to die first. What group was next? Blacks! The Catholic Church recommended blacks because they felt one black slave was worth three to four Indian slaves. More specifically, African blacks were selected and effectively enslaved for at least five reasons: 1) They had an agricultural history based upon an extended family work system; 2) They lacked a broad sense of community based on skin-color and were divided along the lines of tribalism; 3) They were simultaneously invaded and enslaved by every religious denomination, national government, ethnic and racial group; 4) They lacked guns and exploding powder; and 5) Their "internal disposition" allowed them to accept enslavement. This combination of factors set the stage for African blacks to become the "chosen people" for enslavement.

"Black Holocaust"

From the 15th to 19th centuries, a "black Holocaust" was carried out. Two-thirds of the 35 million slaves shipped out of Africa died en route to the Americas. Neither an apology nor reparations have been offered to the victimized black race.

African Colonies

At a Berlin conference in 1876, European governments arbitrarily divided up the entire African continent into colonies, then exploited them until they were the most economically impoverished nations on earth.

Slavery Gave Birth To Capitalism

The international commercialization of black slavery changed the world and its economic concepts. The old European mercantilism was replaced by capitalism. Mercantilism meant profiting from the product, capitalism profited from another's la-

bor. The word, "factory" was first introduced in the 15th century to describe Portuguese buildings that were used as holding places for slaves at points along the West African coast.

The "franchising concept," as popularly known, was introduced by the English Royal African Company in 1668 to establish a monopoly on the slave trading industry. Like modern day franchising chains, for a 15 percent fee, the Royal African Company provided its franchised slave plantation owners with land, supplies, military protection, and a ready market for the raw, slave-produced cash products.

By the early 1800s, with a renewed interest in cotton production, plantations that had at least 100 slaves introduced a gang system of work. In the gang system, slaves were assigned work using an assembly line-type process that revolutionized the use of slave labor, introduced mass production and significantly increased productivity. Raw materials produced by slaves fueled both Europe's and America's industrial and banking revolutions.

Black Market

During the latter part of the 1700s, all five of the "civilized tribes" were slave holders, slave traders and slave chasers. Indians earned \$20 for every captured and returned runaway slave.

Who Was "Black"?

By the 1900s, every state in the United States had laws that defined who was black based upon parentage, varying quantities of black blood or the "one drop" of black blood rule.

Slaves Marketed On Easy Terms

African slaves were typically purchased at auction houses in the slave markets of major urban ports such as the District of Columbia, Charleston, New Orleans, Hampton and Savannah. For those who rarely left the rural areas of the country, slave wagons traveled the back roads hawking their slave wares at bargain prices. But, unlike large auction houses, they did not guarantee their "goods."

For those who did not have access to an auction house or roving slave wagons, there was always the mail order route. An interested slave buyer could order by mail

specifying the size, sex, and even the tribe of the African slave he wished to purchase. Many mail order houses allowed slaves to be bought for a small down payment and reasonable payment terms of three, six, nine or twelve months. Needless to say, slaves damaged after purchase could not be returned to the auction houses, slave wagons, or mail order centers, for monies back.

The Last Boat Load of Slaves

International slave trading was outlawed in the United States in 1807, but illegal international and domestic legal slave trading continued right up until the Civil War began. The *Clothilde* docked in Alabama in 1859 with a slave cargo making it possibly the last ship to bring illegal slaves into an American port. The ship carried approximately 130 men, women and children who had been kidnapped from Tarkar, a village in West Africa. The ship's captain, William Fowler, eluded federal authorities patrolling the Mississippi Sound, unloaded his ship in Mobile, Alabama, then said farewell to slave trading by burning it.

Unfortunately, for Fowler, the pending Civil War had drastically closed down most slave markets. He was unable to sell the slaves, so he set them free as soon as the war started. This last shipment of black slaves was able to stay together and formed a village, Africa Town, in an area known as the Plateau, near Mobile. They were probably the only blacks able to keep their African customs, names, and language. Descendants of these black slaves can still be found in East Mobile. Cudjoe Lewis, the last of the original Tarkar slaves, died in 1935.

The Last Black Slave Dies

On October 2, 1979 the last former black slave died. Charlie Smith, who claimed to be America's only living former slave, passed at an unbelievable one hundred and thirty-seven years of age. Smith lived in North Florida, in the heart of the old Cotton Belt. In a public ceremony in the mid-1970s, Governor Reuben Askew of Florida recognized Smith with a special certificate of merit. Smith's mind remained lucid on his personal life, slavery, and black history up until his death.

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Pay Tribute To Black History Month