

The death of slaves on the voyage, 1725

Introduction

Slavery in English America underwent profound changes during the first two centuries of settlement. During the early seventeenth century, some black servants were permanently unfree; others, however, were treated like white indentured servants and were freed after a term of service.

As early as the late 1630s, however, English colonists began to make a sharper distinction between the status of white servants and black slaves, and merchants began importing slaves to the thirteen North American colonies. The passage in the holds of ships was a horrific experience, and many did not survive.

This matter-of-fact letter written in 1725 by Stephen Bayard in New York to Robert Livingston (1654–1728), a wealthy and influential landowner and trader from Albany, New York, reports that thirty negroes had died on seventeen-week voyage to New York due to a shortage of food.

Excerpt

Since your Departure is arrived here from Amsterdam Robert Linnerd in W^{ch} ship Onckell Phillip is Concerned, & Gerritsen from Gersey with 60 negroes 30 dyed in the passage, they ware trough the fatige of a 17 weeks Voyage obliged to Divide their bread 14 Days – before they came in; Each man then having 12 Bisketts for their share & Just so much meath Left as Served them the Day they Came in –;

Questions for Discussion

View the original letter, and read the introduction and the transcript. Then apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow. Please note that the letter includes unusual grammar and archaic spelling. Concentration should be focused on the first full paragraph.

1. Carefully review the first paragraph and attempt to put the information into English as it is written and spoken today.
2. Describe the conditions in the letter that explain why so many of the slaves perished during the voyage.
3. How does the writer further explain the costs and dangers involved in shipping during this period of time?

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Image

1725
Nov
12

Honoured Sir

Since your Departure is arriv'd
here from Amsterdam Robert Linnier
in the Ship Buckell Phillip is Concern'd &
Gerittson for your Genery with 60 Negroes
30 dyed in the passage, they were
through the fatigue of a 17 Weeks Voyage
Obliged to Devide their bread 14 Days
before they came in, each man then having
12 Biskets for their Share, & not so
much meate left as served them the
Day they came in, the Supper the
Gov^r sent from hence is Comback
the Sloop fell to Seaward of his Coast,
its supposed they will Durc this
Voyage about 800, the Sloop by
report now wants New Standing
Rigger & a Mast. One Kerstede
who loaded about 3 months agoe at
Esopus for the West India is cast a
Way on the East End of Long Island
part of the Cargo is Saved but the
Hull of the Sloop Quite Lost, —

Last night walking a Lon^d the
Warfe I met with Moses Levey who of
had some Discourse with I askt
him if you had paid him, he told
no, but you had said you would
pay every body before you went out.

Stephen Bayard to Robert Livingston, November 12, 1725. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03107.01740)

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of Town & for that Reason he was
 sure you would send it by y^e Sloop
 in flowers or money, on which I told
 him there was a Letter at Van
 Hornes for him, wherein he is sure
 his money is, the Thoughts of w^{ch}
 pleased him very much. I told
 him you would make him as good
 as his word in being paid, & that
 I had told him you at the time
 he said that was no matter for you
 had been to see him, when he
 rec^d the Letter. I do believe he will
 be of a better Opinion.

Aida Joque with me in
 our Duty to you & Francis & wish
 you a pleasant Winter & good
 of health we are the Daily prayers of

Y^r Obed^t Son & most
 N. York Nov 24th Humble Serv^t to you

1725

Stephen Bayard

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Transcript

Stephen Bayard to Robert Livingston, November 12, 1725. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03107.01740)

Honoured Sir

Since your Departure is arrived here from Amsterdam Robert Linnerd in W^{ch} ship Onckell Phillip is Concerned, & Gerritsen from Gersey with 60 negroes 30 dyed in the passage, they ware trough the fatige of a 17 weeks Voyage obliged to Devide their bread 14 Days – before they came in; Each man then having 12 Bisketts for their share & Just so much meath Left as Served them the Day they Came in –; the negro the Gov^r Sent from hence is Comback – the sloop fell to Luward of his Cost, it's supposed they will Luse [*sic*] this Voyage above £800[4-4] the sloop by report now wants New Standing Rigger & a Masst; One [Kersteede] who loaded about 3 months ago at Esopus for the West India – is Cast a way on the East End of Long Island part of the Cargoe is saved the but the Hull of the sloop Quite Loste –

last night walking a Lond the warfe I mett with Moses Levey who I had some Discourse with I askt him if you had paid him; he tould no, but you had said you would pay Every body before you went out [2] of town – & for that Reason he was sure you would send it by yo^r sloop in flower or money, on w^{ch} I tould him their was a Letter at Van Hornes for him, wherein he is sure his money is, the Thoughts of w^{ch} pleased him Verry much; I tould him you would make him as good as his word in being badd pay & that I had tould [*struck*: him] you ab^t the Wine he said that was no matter for you had been to see him – when he rec^d the Letter I doe beleave he will be of a nother oppinion. –

Alida joynes with me in our Duty to you & Graney, & wish you a pleasen winter & a [Greadell] of health w^{ch} are the Daly prayers of

S^r y^r Gran Son & most humble Serv^t to Com^d –

N. York Nov 12th

1725

Stephen Bayard

[*address leaf*]

Robert Livingston Esq^r at the

Manner of

The death of slaves on the voyage, 1725

Livingston

[*docket*]

1[8] Novimb 1725

Steph: Bayard [*illegible*] fr: n: york