

# An American Family Tree

A story that traces an African  
American family over two centuries,  
from slavery to freedom

A black and white sketch of a hand holding a wooden sign. The hand is rendered with simple lines and shading, gripping the top of the sign. The sign is made of several horizontal planks and has the words "Parker Plantation" written on it in a bold, serif font. The background shows a rough, textured surface, possibly a tree trunk or a wall.

**Parker  
Plantation**

**written by Ben Bache  
& Alissa Torzewski**

Homecourt  Publishers

■ Greenville, SC



The Year:

1707

As told by:

Kwazi, age 12

## 1 - The Auction

I had no idea what was going on. I didn't really care at this point. I was just glad to be off of the boat.

For weeks, maybe months, we had been packed together, unable to move but a few inches in any direction. The air was thick and hard to breathe, and the smell was terrible. The days and nights ran together. I didn't know where we were going, much less what was going to happen when we got there.

My mother was beside me on the boat telling me that everything was going to be okay. I didn't

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know if that was true, but I liked hearing the words.

Then the ship stopped moving up and down with the ocean current. There were no more waves crashing into the side. The feeling of movement was replaced by an odd stillness.

Wherever we were going, we were there. We had found land.

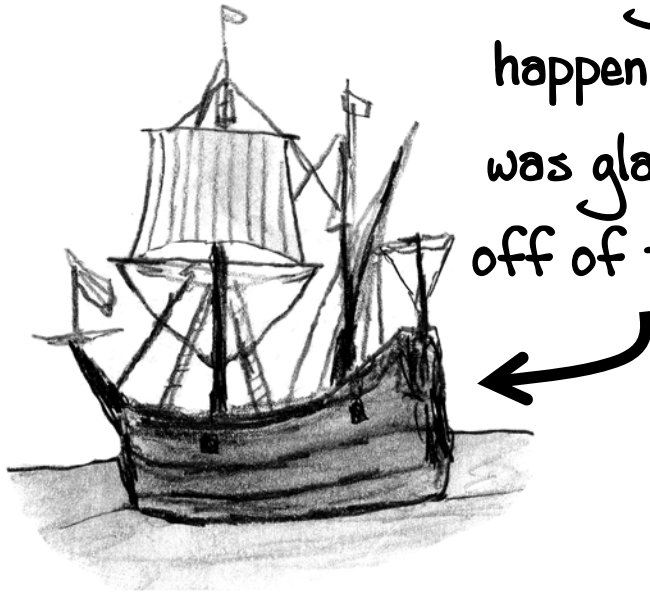
The white men came then, yelling and shoving. They pushed us up to the deck and onto the shore. Bodies were everywhere, scrambling to get away from this vessel that had been like a cage for too long.

I tried to follow my mother. I ran off as fast as I could. Then, without warning, I tripped over something and fell to the ground. Within seconds, bare feet were stepping on my legs, my back, and my head. I was going to be trampled!

Somehow, I managed to get back on my feet, and once again was caught in the wave of people moving in a single direction.

Where was my mother? I looked around to find her, but all I saw was a sea of panicked faces. My mother's face wasn't among them. She was gone.

I didn't know what was going to happen, but I was glad to be off of the ship.



I had the sinking feeling that I would never see her again.

Now we were all standing side by side, forming a long straight line. It had been hours since we were taken off of the boat.

The white men were scattered around us, speaking in a language I didn't understand. They were looking at us the same way you might look over a piece of fruit at an outdoor market.

None of us were wearing shirts. I became aware of the hot sun reflecting off of our dark, black skin. The white men all wore fancy clothes and hats.

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We stood in silence. Every now and then, someone would whisper, *“What’s going on?”* Within seconds, someone else would answer, *“I don’t know.”*

I wasn’t as scared as I’m sure I should have been. I was too tired to be scared. I was too confused. And to be completely honest, I was just happy to be off of the boat, standing on dry land on a sunny day. Whatever happened next, it couldn’t be worse than being on that ship

A few feet away from me, I spotted Tamba standing in the line. He was a man from our village back home, about twenty years old and strong as a lion. I didn’t see him on the boat, but that was no surprise. He could have been right next to me, and I still wouldn’t have spotted him with so many bodies shoved into that dark room.

Tamba was the first face I recognized since I had been separated from my mother earlier in the day. Seeing him made me miss my home, my mud hut, the hot sand on my feet. I missed my friends, many of which I knew had been taken on the boat with me, but I had not seen them since we left. My entire life was on the other side of the ocean, and I had a feeling it was gone forever.

A couple of white men were approaching Tamba. They put their hands on his arms and



The white men  
examined Tamba  
like he was an  
object, not a  
human.

chest, pulling and poking as if he was some object instead of a human. One of the men stuck his finger in Tamba's mouth, and pulled on his gums to get a better look at his teeth.

I wished that Tamba would have taken a bite of the man's finger, but he just stood there with no expression on his face. I'm sure that the large shotgun that the white man was carrying was intended to keep Tamba, and the rest of us, from doing anything unexpected.

After a few nods, Tamba was taken out of the line and walked a short distance away from the rest of us.

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One by one, the white men would take someone from the line. The hours passed, and the number of white men hovering around us grew smaller.

It was easy to notice that the young, strong, black men were the first to be taken. After a while, they were gone. All that was left were a few women, men who walked with limps or were sick, and younger children like me.

I had time to think, although I tried my best not to. It became too easy to realize what was happening. Why did the white men want to take the young men first? Because these men were good workers – and the white men had brought us here to do their work.

We were being sold as slaves. For the first time since I got off of the boat, I was scared. But there was nothing I could do. Whatever lay ahead for me, I was going to have to endure it.

A few moments later, two white men approached me. They started squeezing my arms and shoulders. One of them put his finger in my mouth to get a closer look at my teeth...

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