

Slave ships sail to the New World

A horrifying journey



Slaves were stacked in the hull of the ship. Food and drink is rationed. Many slaves die during this journey. 80.000 Africans do not survive this journey.

1600 Dutch ships with nearly 600.000 slaves make the passage to the New World, to the former Dutch Antilles, to Surinam and the surrounding region. Life on board a slave ship is horrible. Hundreds of slaves are held and chained in the holds simultaneously. In the damped space there is hardly fresh air. Often there is not enough food and water to last the entire journey, which could take up to two months. Many slaves did not survive the journey.

Surgeon David Henri Gallandat (1732-1782): "Let the slaves dance as often as possible. Ensure there is a drum and other musical instruments on board so they are enticed to move. Not only for their entertainment, but also for their health." Source: Necessary Teachings for Slave Traders (Middelburg, 1769).

Hardly anybody stands up for the slaves, but they regularly come into resistance themselves against the inhumane regime on the Dutch ships. During the 1600 slave voyages under the Dutch flag there was resistance over 300 times. That is nearly 1 in 5 ships.

- Did it every happen that the slaves successfully overtook a ship?
- For the Netherlands that really only happened once and that was on the ship the Vigilante at the end of the 18th century. That was a ship from the province of Zeeland and there the slaves revolted when the ship was just off the Surinamese coast and the crew fled the ship and the slaves went on land, nobody knows where they went.

How many slaves died on the 1600 Dutch ships? Ultimately 80.000 Africans will not survive the journey to the New World. On average 13% of the prisoners died.