

Quotes from *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”* by Zora Neale Hurston

Directions: All of the quotes below have been taken from *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”* by Zora Neale Hurston. These quotes do not use the standard English spelling conventions of their time. Modern audiences may be able to hear their voices more clearly with the more familiar spelling and grammar conventions used today. We've marked these sections as a translation, although that's not exactly accurate.

PART ONE

Opening Quote

Pages 20-21

“Where is de house where de mouse is de leader? In de Affica soil I cain tellee you ‘bout de son before I tellee you ‘bout de father; and derefore, you unnerstand me, I cain talk about de man who is father (*et te*) til I tellee you bout de man who he father to him, (*et, te, te, grandfater*) now, dass right ain’ it?”

Translation

Where is the house where the mouse is the leader? In Africa, I can't tell you about the son before I tell you about the father; and therefore, I can't talk about the father until I tell you about the grandfather. Now, isn't that right?

Home in Africa:

Page 44

“De king of Dahomey, you know, he got very rich ketchin slaves. He keep his army all de time making raids to grabee people to sell so de people of Dahomey doan have no time to raise gardens an’ make food for deyselves.”

Translation

The king of Dahomey got rich catching slaves. He kept his army raiding villages all the time, so they could grab people to sell. So, the people of Dahomey did not have time to raise gardens to make food for themselves.

Pages 44-45

“Maybe de king of Dahomey never come make raid in Takkoi, but one traitor from Takkoi go in de Dahomey. He a very bad man and de king (of Takkoi) say, ‘Leave this country.’ Dat man want big honors in de army so he go straight in Dahomey and say to de king, ‘I show you how to takee Takkoi.’ He tellee dem de secret of de gates.”

Translation

Maybe the king of Dahomey would have never raided Takkoi, but a traitor from Takkoi went to the king of Dahomey right after he was asked to leave and said, “I’ll show you how to take over Takkoi,” and he showed them the secret of the gates.

Page 45

“I see de people gittee kill so fast! De old ones dey try run ‘way from de house but dey dead by de door, and de women soldiers got dey head. Oh, Lor’!”

Translation

I saw people get killed so fast. The old ones tried to run away from the house but they were killed by the door and the women soldiers took their heads. Oh, Lord!

Pages 45

“Everybody dey run to de gates so dey kin hide deyself in de bush, you unnerstand me. Some never reachee de gate”

Translation

Everybody ran to the gates to hide in the bushes. Some never reached the gates.

Pages 45-46

“Some dey snatch de jaw-bone while de people ain’ dead. Oh Lor,’ Lor, Lor’! De poor folks wid dey bottom jaw tore off dey face! I runnee fast to de gate but some de men from Dahomey dey derer too. I runnee to de nexy gate but dey dere too. Dey surround de whole town. Dey at all de eight gates.”

Translation

Some snatched the jaw bone off of people while they were still alive. Oh Lord! Lord! Lord! The poor folks had their bottom jaw torn off their face. I ran fast to the gate, but some of the men from Dahomey were there, too. I ran to the next gate, but they were there, too. They surrounded the whole town. They were at all eight gates.

Pages 48-49

“De heads of de men of Dahomey got ‘gin to smell very bad. Oh, Lor’, I wish dey bury dem! I doan lak see my people head in de soldier hands; and de smell makee me so sick!”

“De nexy day, dey make camp all day so dat de people kin smoke de heads so dey don’t spoil no mo’. Oh Lor’ Lor’, Lor’! We got to set dere and see de heads of our people smokin’ on de stick. We stay dere in dat place de nine days. Den we march on to de Dahomey soil.”

Translation

The heads of the men of Dahomey got to smelling very bad. Oh Lord, I wish they would bury them. I don’t like to see my people’s heads in the soldiers’ hands and the smell made me so sick!

The next day, they made camp so that people could smoke the heads so they wouldn’t spoil anymore. Oh Lord! Lord! Lord! We had to sit there and see the heads of our people smoking on a stick. We stayed there in that place for nine days. Then, we marched on to Dahomey.

PART TWO

Preparing for Voyage

Page 55

“When we ready to leave de Kroo boat and go in de ship, de Many-costs snatch our country cloth off us. We try save our clothes, we ain’ used to be without no clothes on. But dey snatch all off us. Dey say, ‘You get plenty clothes where you goin’.’ Oh Lor’, I so shame! We come in de ‘Merica soil naked and de people say we naked savage. Dey say we doan wear no clothes. Dey doan know de Many-costs snatch our clothes ‘way from us.”

Translation

When we were ready to leave the Kroo boat and go on the ship, the “Many-costs” snatched our clothes off of us. We tried to save our clothes because we weren’t used to being without our clothes on. But they snatched them all off of us and said, “You will get plenty of clothes where you’re going.” Oh Lord! I was so ashamed. We came to America naked and the people said we were naked savages. They said we don’t wear clothes. They didn’t know our clothes were snatched away from us.

Page 55

“Soon we git in de ship dey make us lay down in de dark. We stay dere thirteen days. Dey doan give us much to eat. Me so thirst! Dey give us a little bit of water twice a day. Oh Lor’, Lor’, we so thirst! De water taste sour. (Vinegar was usually added to the water to prevent scurvy—Canot.)”

Translation

As soon as we got on the ship they made us lay down in the dark. We were there for thirteen days. They didn’t give us much to eat. I was so thirsty! They gave us a little bit of water twice a day. Oh Lord! Lord! We were so thirsty. The water tasted sour.

Page 55

“De boat we on called de *Clotilde*. Cudjo suffer so in dat ship. Oh Lor’! I so skeered on de sea! De water, you unnerstand me, it makee so much noise! It growl lak de thousand beastes in de bush. De wind got so much voice on de water.”

Translation

The boat we were on was called the *Clotilde*. I suffered so much on that ship. Oh Lord! I was so scared on the sea! The water, you understand, it made so much noise! It growled like a thousand beasts in the bush. The wind was so loud on the water.

Page 55

"One day de color of de water change and we see some islands, but we doan come to de shore for seventy days."

Translation

One day the color of the water changed and we saw some islands, but we didn't come to shore for seventy days.

Page 56

"We been on de water seventy days and we spend some time layin' down in de ship till we tired, but many days we on de deck. Nobody ain' sick and nobody ain' dead. Cap'n Bill Foster a good man. He don't 'buse us and treat us mean on de ship."

Translation

We had been on the water for seventy days and we spent some time laying down in the ship until we were tired, but many days we were on the deck. Nobody was sick and nobody was dead. Captain Bill Foster was a good man. He didn't abuse us or treat us mean on the ship.

Page 56

"Dey tell me it a Sunday us way down in de ship and tell us to keep quiet. Cap'n Bill Foster, you unnerstand me, he skeered de gov'ment folks in de Fort Monroe goin' ketchee de ship."

Translation

They told me it was Sunday so we should keep quiet. Captain Bill Foster was scared that the government folks in Fort Monroe were going to catch the ship.

PART THREE

After Arriving in Mobile

Page 56

"When it night de ship move ain. Cudjo didn't know den whut dey do, but dey tell me dey towed de ship up de Spanish Creek to Twelve-Mile Island. Dey took us off de ship and we git on another ship. Den dey burn de Clotilde 'cause dey skeered de gov'ment goin' rest dem for fetchin' us 'way from Affica soil."

Translation

When it was night, the ship moved on. I didn't know what they were doing then, but I was told they towed the ship up Spanish Creek to Twelve-Mile Island. They took us off the ship and we got on another ship. They burned the Clotilde because they were scared the government would arrest them for taking us from Africa.

Page 61

"De war commences but we doan know 'bout it when it start: we see white folks runnee up and down. Dey go in de Mobile. Dey come out on de plantation. Den somebody tell me de folkse way up in de North make de war so dey free us. I lak hear dat. Cudjo doan want to be no slave. But we wait and wait, we heard de guns shootee sometime but nobody don't come tell us we free. So we think maybe dey fight 'bout something else."

Translation

The war started but we didn't know about it. We saw white folks running up and down. They went to Mobile. They came out on the plantation. Then somebody told me the folks up North made war to free us. I liked hearing that. I didn't want to be a slave. But we waited and waited. We heard guns shoot sometimes, but nobody came to tell us we were free, so we thought they might be fighting about something else.

Page 62

"Free George, he come to us and tell us not to dance on Sunday. Den he tell us whut Sunday is. We doan know whut it is before. Nobody in Afficky soil doan tell us 'bout no Sunday. Den we doan dance no mo' on de Sunday."

Translation

Free George came to tell us not to dance on Sunday. Then he told us what Sunday is. We didn't know what it was before. Nobody in Africa told us about Sundays (God's day of rest). Then we didn't dance on Sunday anymore.

Page 62

"Know how we gittee free? Cudjo tellee you dat. De boat I on, it in de Mobile. We all on dere to go in de Montgomery, but Cap'n Jim Meaher, he not on de boat dat day"

Translation

Want to know how we got free? I'll tell you. The boat I was on was in Mobile. We were all on there to go to Montgomery, but Captain Jim Meaher was not on the boat that day.

Page 62-63

"I doan forgit. It April 12, 1865. De Yankee soldiers dey come down to de boat and eatee de mulberries off de trees close to de boat, you unnerstand me. Den dey see us on de boat and dey say 'Y'all can't stay dere no mo'. You free, you doan b'long to nobody no mo'. Oh, Lor'! I so glad. We astee de soldiers where we goin'? Dey say dey doan know. Dey told us to go where we feel lak goin', we ain' no mo' slave."

Translation

"I won't ever forget it. It was April 12, 1865. The Yankee soldiers came down on the boat eating mulberries off of the trees that were close to the boat. Then they saw us on the boat and said, "Ya'll can't stay there anymore. You're free. You don't belong to anybody anymore." Oh Lord! I was so glad. We asked the soldiers where we were going. They said they don't know. They told us to go wherever we felt like going since were weren't slaves anymore

“We glad we free, but den, you unnerstand me, we cain stay wid de folks what own us no mo'. Derefo' where we goin' live, we doan know. Some de folks from cross de water dey done marry and got de wife and chillun, you unnerstand me. Cudjo not marry yet. In de Affica soil when de man gottee de wife, he build de house so dey live together and derefo' de chillun come. So we want buildee de houses for ourselves, but we ain' got no lan'. Where we goin' buildee our houses?”

Translation

We were glad to be free, but we can't stay with the folks that don't own us anymore. Therefore, we didn't know where we were going to live. Some of the folks from Africa had married and had a wife and children. I wasn't married yet. In Africa, when a man has a wife he builds a house so they can live together and then children come. We all wanted to build homes for ourselves, but we didn't have any land. Where were we going to build our houses?