

## **Our Babies Used Alligator Bait**

### **“How Black Babies Were Used As Alligator Bait By Hunters In America”**

“In 418 B.C Herodotus, the Greek philosopher who is known as the father of history said “a man who does not know anything about the events that took place before he or she was born will remain forever a child.”

We must go a step further by saying that “any human being who refuses to learn from his or her history is condemned to repeating its mistakes and as such will share the same fate in the consequences of such mistakes.”

Africa is a continent rich in history. As we enjoy telling stories of our golden past, it is important that we also give a complete and undiluted account of our journey through slavery and man’s inhumanity to man.

Of all the atrocities committed against the enslaved Africans in the Americas and Europe, the use of babies as alligator bait is one which leaves anyone with a conscience, with a tear in the eye. Imagining that the child in question was yours, would send shivers down your spine.

These things are not easy to say, but we must say them, for posterity sake. And for the sake of the present and future.

Alligator bait, also called gator bait, was the evil practice of using infant African children as bait to lure alligators out from water to land.

This practice was popular in Louisiana and Florida, and other parts of the South in America.

During that era, there was a high demand for alligator skin, which was used in the production of leather shoes, jackets, belts, and other leather materials. Alligator skin was very profitable in the 1800s-1900s. But the hunters often had accidents and lost their arms or lives as they rustled the swampy waters in their attempt to attract the alligators to the surface at night.

So, their other viable option was to steal slave babies and use them as bait. They didn't find any rodents, or chickens, or rabbits, or little goats. Those were too valuable. It had to be a baby that a woman carried for 9 months under intense pain, brutality, and hard work. This account has been denied by many in their attempt to cover up this atrocity. But there are oral accounts, documentaries, and publications to substantiate our right to closure, empathy and healing.

In 1923 a publication on 'Time Magazine 'reported that "From Chipley, Fla., it was reported that colored babies were being used for alligator bait. The infants were left to play in shallow water while expert riflemen watch from concealment nearby. When a saurian approach his prey, he is shot by the riflemen.

The Chipley Chamber of Commerce said the story was "a silly lie, false and absurd." Maybe so, but it was widely reported in the

American press, so it was at least believable among white Americans of the time.”

To give further evidence of this vile practice, photos and postcards found in the Jim Crow museum shed clear light on this. A man in Florida had a picture framed and put on his wall showing nine naked little African boys with the words “Alligator Bait” written below.

To further buttress this account, on June 3, 1908, the ‘Washington Times’ reported that a zookeeper at the New York Zoological Gardens baited “Alligators with pickaninnies” out of their winter quarters. He sent two African slave children into an enclosure that was housing alligators and crocodiles numbering more than 25.

The reptiles had to be led out of their winter tanks into summer tanks so they could be seen by people. They didn’t find any other way to do this, other than placing these children in the tank to lure the alligators and crocodiles out. How artistic!!!

The article read that: Two small colored children happened to drift through the reptile house among the throng of visitors” and they were “pressed into service. The alligators “wobbled out as quick as they could after the ebony mites, who darted around the tank just as the pursuing monsters fell with grunts of chagrin into the water. The alligators were “coaxed” into their summer quarters by “plump little Africans.

There were sources who claimed that the mothers were paid \$2 (Two Dollars) for their babies to be used as bait. They also claimed that the babies were not hurt. But those were just false accounts, to hide the heinous crimes. Which sane mother would allow her infant to be tied with a rope around the neck and kept by the river or lake banks as bait? No mother would do that. And at the time, African slaves could not read or write, so how did they read the adverts and apply, as some sources have claimed?

Such lies could be found in the September 21, 1923, headline of the 'Oakland Tribune which read: "PICKANINNY BAIT LURES VORACIOUS 'GATOR TO DEATH. And Mother Gets Her Baby Back in Perfect Condition; Also \$2".

It is indeed very callous for a person to risk a baby's life in such manner, and then go ahead to justify it with charming words. In an article by T.W Villiers Chronicles the gator bait process was described thus: "these little black morsels are more than glad to be led to the 'sacrifice' and do their part in luring the big Florida gators to their fate without suffering so much as a scratch."

But on the contrary, oral accounts of this practice report that most times, the babies are eaten by the alligator, before the hunters shoot at it. The hunters would sometimes aim to kill the alligator only after the baby was in its jaws. Evidence of this is found in the postcards, pictures, and trinkets they made at the time to commemorate the practice.

There are other articles that claim that the African slave infants were not only regularly used as alligator bait but violently skinned alive in preparation for this. We believe the smell of the blood and wounded flesh was meant to attract the alligators.

There was an account by the grandson of a man who used to engage in his business of gator baiting, and this is what he had to say: "The slaves who had babies, they would steal the babies during the course of the day, sometimes when their mothers weren't watching... Some would be infants; some would be a year old; he said some would be toddlers. He said they would grab these children and take them down to the swamp and leave them in pens like little chicken coops.

They would go down there at night, take these babies and... tie them up, put a rope around their neck and around their torso, around here, and tie it tight.

They'd be screaming... What they were doing would help them to chum the water. He said when they would throw the babies in tied to this rope, he said in a matter of minutes, he said, the alligators were on them. He said the alligator would clamp his jaws on that child. As a matter of fact, once he clamped on them, he was really swallowed. He said you couldn't see anything but the rope! Some would be infants, some would be a year old, toddlers, some would be infants."

Some of these evil and unimaginable practices by slave owners in America could also be found in the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia in Michigan, USA.

“Shelved in the museum alongside the many stereotypical representations of “pickaninnies” (a racial slur applied to African-American youngsters) speaking fractured English, eating watermelon, catching opossums, etc., are similar cartoonish portrayals of black children (and sometimes black adults) as worthless “alligator bait,” according to accounts.

The practice of using African slave children as “alligator bait” could also be found in movies and popular music and the lullaby “Mammy’s Little Alligator Bait,” composed by Henry Wise and Sidney Perrin in the year 1899.

There is a deliberate attempt by those who carried out slavery to hide these parts of slave history. Not much is done by them to apologize and make reparations for these hideous crimes against humanity. Trying to deny this actually adds more grief to the descendants of the African slaves, being that their children are still killed in America today.

The world asks Africans in Diaspora to forget these things. They say “those who committed these crimes and their victims are long dead, so let the history die with them.” But they soon forget that the Jews still remember and talk about the Holocaust every year. Japan still remembers and commemorates the nuclear bombing a Hiroshima.

So why should the African diaspora shut up about the crimes against them?

Studies have shown that the legacy of the events of slavery, still affects the African American's mental health. This is because trauma can be transferred from mother to child, and no one knows how many generations that psychological trauma can travel.

These accounts of painful history are meant to provide knowledge and also help the African Diaspora community in the tackling of these traumas.

We can forgive, but we must never forget.!!!"

Source: Liberty Writers Africa

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