

Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade DBQ

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Document #1:

Letter about Spain's interactions with its colonies in 1559

From New Spain are obtained gold, silver and other things. One fifth of all profits go to the king. Great quantities of gold and silver used to be out in the open; with all of it gone, now gold and silver have to be mined.

The work is hard and the Spaniards are not willing to do the work, Natives who have become Christians are not allowed to be forced to do the work because the Emperor freed them.

Merrick Whitcomb, ed., "The Gold of the Indies — 1559," The University of Pennsylvania

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Document #2

The Life of Olaudah Equiano

I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that with the loathsomeness of the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables, and on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before, and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless could I have got over the nettings I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water: and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating.

In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men I found some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired of these what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate: but still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among my people such instances of brutal cruelty, and this not only shown towards us blacks but also to some of the whites themselves. ... The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. What was life like on the slave ship? What were the conditions these slaves face?

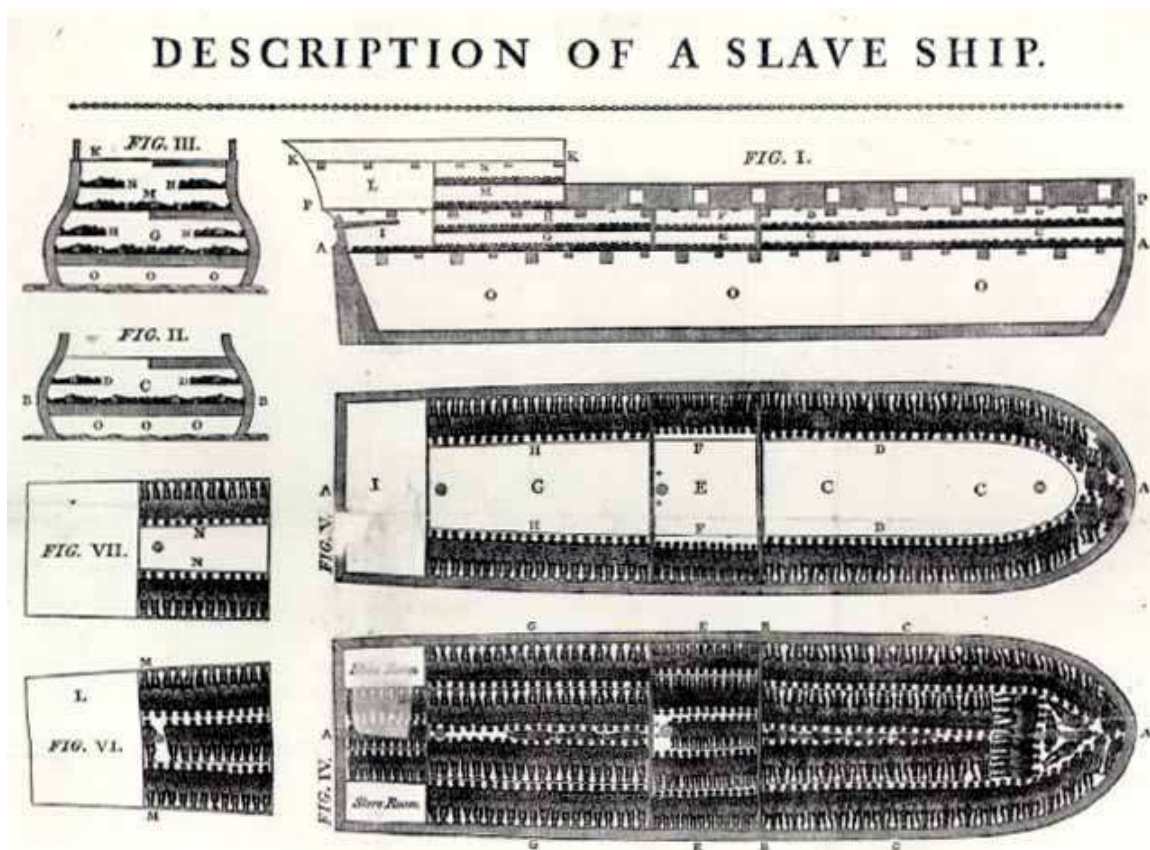
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Document #3

The Slave Ship the Brookes 1789



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Document #4

A description of institution of slavery

Slavery was one form of exploitation. Its special characteristics included the idea that slaves were property; that they were outsiders who were alien by origin or who had been denied their heritage through judicial or other sanctions; that coercion could be used at will; that their labor power was at the complete disposal of a master; that they did not have the right to their own sexuality and, by extension, to their own reproductive capacities; and that the slave status was inherited unless provision was made to ameliorate(improve) that status.

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Document #5

Offobah Cugoano describes his capture into slavery

I was early snatched away from my native country, with about eighteen or twenty more boys and girls, as we were playing in a field. We lived but a few days' journey from the coast where we were kidnapped, and consigned to Grenada... We were soon led out of the way which we knew, and towards evening, as we came in sight of a town. I was soon conducted to a prison, for three days, where I heard the groans and cries of many, and saw some of my fellow-captives. But when a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men. Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner

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Document #6

- from Volume 1 of J.H. Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Voyage to the Isle de France, Isle de Bourbon, The Cape of Good Hope...* (1773)

"I do not know if coffee and sugar are essential to the happiness of Europe, but I do know well that these two products have accounted for the unhappiness of two great regions of the world: America has been depopulated so as to have land on which to plant them; Africa has been depopulated so as to have the people to cultivate them."

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Document #7

Letter from King Affonso of Kongo to the King of Portugal to end Portuguese Slave trade in Kongo

Sir, Your Highness should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways that it is convenient to provide for the necessary remedy, since this is caused by the excessive freedom given by your agents and officials to the men and merchants who are allowed to come to this Kingdom to set up shops with goods and many things which have been prohibited by us, and which they spread throughout our Kingdoms and Domains in such an abundance that many of our vassals, whom we had in obedience, do not comply because they have the things in greater abundance than we ourselves; and it was with these things that we had them content and subjected under our vassalage and jurisdiction, so it is doing a great harm not only to the service of God, but the security and peace of our Kingdoms and State as well.

And we cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this Kingdom which they are ambitious of; they grab them and get them to be sold; and so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness that our country is being completely depopulated, and Your Highness should not agree with this nor accept it as in your service. And to avoid it we need from those (your) Kingdoms no more than some priests and a few people to reach in schools, and no other goods except wine and flour for the holy sacrament. That is why we beg of Your Highness to help and assist us in this matter, commanding your factors that they should not send here either merchants or wares, because it is our will that in these Kingdoms there should not be any trade of slaves nor outlet for them.¹ Concerning what is referred [to] above, again we beg of Your Highness to agree with it, since otherwise we cannot remedy such an obvious damage. Pray Our Lord in His mercy to have Your Highness under His guard and let you do forever the things of His service. I kiss your hands many times. . . .

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Document #8

Europe Supported by Africa and America
Engraving by William Blake 1796

1. In what ways does this portrait depict the relationship between Africans, Native Americans and Europeans? (*Remember it is symbolism!*)



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Document #9

Selection from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845)

If at any one time of my life more than any another, I was to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold. It could never rain, blow, hail or snow too hard for us to be in the field.... The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him...Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the desire to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; behold a man transformed into a brute.....

You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man...Long before daybreak I was called to go and rub, curry and feed the horses. I obeyed. And was glad to obey. But whilst thus engaged in the act of throwing some blades from the loft, Covey entered the stable with a long rope; and just as I was half way out of the loft, he caught hold of my legs and went about tying me. And soon as I found out what he was up to, I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, he holding to my legs brought me sprawling on the stable floor. Mr. Covey seemed to think he had me, and could do what he pleased, but for a moment - - from whence came the spirit, I do not know - - I resolved to fight; and suiting my action to the resolution I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose up. He held on to me and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected, that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf. This gave me assurance and I held him uneasy causing the blood to run where I touched him.... Mr. Covey soon called out to Hughes for help. Hughes came and while Covey held me, attempted to tie my right hand. While he was in the act of doing so, I watched my chance and gave him a heavy kick close under the ribs. The kick fairly sickened Hughes, so that he left me in the hay with Mr. Covey. This kick had the effect of not only weakening Hughes, but Covey also. While he saw Hughes bending over with pain, his courage. He asked me if I meant to persist in my resistance. I told him I did, come what might. I told him that he had used me like a brute for six months, and that I was determined to be used no longer. With that he strove to drag me to a stick that was lying just outside the stable door. He meant to knock me down. But just as he went over to get the stick, I seized him with both hands by his collar, and brought him by a sudden snatch to the ground. By this time, Bill came. Covey called upon him for assistance. Bill wanted to know what he could do. Covey said, "Take hold of him, take hold of him!" Bill said his master hired him to work, and not to help to whip me; so he left Covey and me to fight our own battle out. We were at it for nearly two hours. Covey sat length let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half as much.

The truth was, that he had not whipped me at all; I considered him as getting entirely the worst end of the bargain; for he had drawn no blood from me but I had from him. The whole six months afterwards that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid the weight of his fist upon me in anger. He would occasionally say he did not want to get hold of me again. "No," thought I, "you need not or you will come off worse than you did before."

This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my life as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self confidence and inspired me with a determination to be free.... and now I resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form; the time had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact....