

## *Unit Three: The Transatlantic Slave Trade, 15-18<sup>th</sup> centuries*

**Grade Level:** Grades 6-12

### **National History Standards:**

**Era 6:** Standard 1B

The student understands the encounters between Europeans and peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa...and the Americas in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Standard 4B

The student understands the origins and consequences of the trans-Atlantic African slave trade.

Standard 4C

The student understands patterns of change in Africa in the era of the slave trade.

### **National Geography Standards:**

Standard 1: How to Use Maps and Other Geographic Representations, Tools, and Technologies to Acquire, Process, and Report Information

Standard 9: The Characteristics, Distribution, and Migration of Human Population on Earth's Surface

Standard 17: How to Apply Geography to Interpret the Past

### **New Jersey Social Studies Standards:**

6.2.12.B.1.a Explain major changes in world political boundaries between 1450 and 1770, and assess the extent of European political and military control in Africa, Asia and the Americas by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

6.2.12.B.1.b Determine the role of natural resources, climate, and topography in European exploration, colonization, and settlement patterns.

6.2.12.C.1.b Trace the movement of essential commodities from Asia to Europe to America, and determine the impact trade on the New World's economy and society (???)

6.2.12.D.1.b Compare slavery practices and other forms of coerced labor or social bondage common in East Africa, West Africa, Southwest Asia, Europe and the Americas.

6.1.12.D.1.e Assess the impact of economic, political and social policies and practices regarding African slaves, indigenous people, and the Europeans in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies.

6.2.12.D.1.f Analyze the political, cultural and moral role of Catholic and protestant Christianity in the European colonies.

### **Objectives:**

1. Research the history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade
2. Research slavery practices in West Africa
3. Force migration
4. Analyze three eye-witness accounts of slavery to appreciate the emotional costs of slavery
5. Evaluate the costs and gains of the slave trade.

**Lesson Length:** Three to Four Class Periods

### **Materials:**

Images, maps, and texts for "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" at Inmotion.org, a collection of materials from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at [http://www.inmotionaame.org/source\\_materials](http://www.inmotionaame.org/source_materials), see especially the Timeline.

Map of Atlantic Slave Routes and African-European Trade Routes  
<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum/lm6/activityfive.htm>

Handout: Slave Resistance—What would you do?  
<http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk/year9links/blackpeoples/slaveresistance.pdf>

Slave Trade and Its Consequences at  
<http://www.senegalonline.com/anglais/histoire/esclavage.htm>

Slavery's Legacy in West Africa at  
<http://www.npr.org/programs/re/archivesdate/2004/apr/slavery/>

Three eye-witness accounts of slavery: John Barbot, a slave agent; Olaudah Equiano, a slave; and Alexander Falconbridge, a slave ship surgeon at  
<http://www.historywiz.com/africanslavery.htm#SlaveTrade>

Other useful research sites: <http://hichcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/search.html>

"Lest We Forget" UNESCO Slave Route Project Virtual Exhibition at  
<http://digital.nypl.org/lwf/english/site/flash.html>

### **Lesson Overview:**

Slavery existed in Africa from at least the 11th Century, as Arab traders sought salt, gold, ivory and other natural resources in Africa and African populations were subjugated or moved. The slavery practices that existed at the time differed from slavery as it later took hold in the Americas. For example, in Senegal, there might be one, four or sixteen slaves for each free adult. The slaves would most likely be individuals captured in fighting with opposing tribes. The slaves would be forced to work but they would be treated more as members of the family rather than as inferiors. In the 1450s, Portuguese mariners found their way around the Horn of Africa on their way to Asia and later set up trading posts along the West African coasts. One of the most valuable "commodities" was African slaves.

Students will use maps to determine the origins of enslaved people from Africa and their destinations in the Americas. They will study the trade routes from Europe to Africa and from Africa to the American colonies/states. Timelines will be studied to follow the growth of the slave trade. Students will read a history of slavery from a Senegalese viewpoint. They will read and compare eyewitness accounts of the slave trade from various perspectives and evaluate the economics of the slave trade.

### **Introduction/Anticipatory Set:**

Write the number 12 million on the board. Can anyone grasp the enormity of the number? This figure represents the number of people who were forced to migrate from their homeland to a new land and to live under horrific conditions of slavery. As a point of comparison, New Jersey has over 8 million people living in the state in 2006. Imagine that all the people in the state and an additional 4 million (half the state

population) were relocated to another country.

If you were torn from your family, placed in the cargo hold of a slave ship and transported across the Atlantic Ocean, how would you react? Would you accept your fate or resist? Answer the questions on the Slave Resistance handout (<http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk/year9links/blackpeoples/slaveresistance.pdf>) or use the variation of this handout on page 24 to gauge your reaction to your loss of freedom. What would be your emotional reaction?

### Activities/Procedures:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 students. Utilize the maps, images and texts at the website [http://www.inmotionaame.org/source\\_materials](http://www.inmotionaame.org/source_materials) to create displays that show the history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Students should concentrate on answering the questions: Who, what, when, where and how. See maps on page 25.
2. Read the section entitled "Slave Trade and Its Consequences" at the Senegal website at <http://www.senegal-online.com/anglais/histoire/esclavage.htm>. Then read and/or listen to "Slavery's Legacy in West Africa" at <http://www.npr.org/programs/re/archivesdate/2004/apr/slavery> or attached on pages 26-29. Compare and contrast African slavery practices to slavery as practiced in the Americas. How did they differ? How were they the same? See pages 30-31.
3. Read and discuss the eyewitness accounts of slavery by John Barbot, a slave agent; Olaudah Equiano, a slave; and Alexander Falconbridge, a slave ship surgeon that can be found at the website <http://www.historywiz.com/africanslavery.htm#SlaveTrade> or attached on pages 32-40. Compare and contrast the viewpoints expressed. Do the authors agree on any details? Why do they see similar events from a different perspective? Do they disagree about events? Is any account more truthful than another? Would any of the authors distort the truth? Why did each author write his account? What can you infer about how people viewed slavery when these accounts were written?

### Closure:

Look at the images on pages 41-43 of the Slave House on Gorée Island, Senegal, a major point of embarkation for slaves from West Africa in the 15-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ask your students to comment on the slave holding quarters on Gorée Island. Do you think that the Africans being forced on ships to the Americas had any idea what awaited them? Read the song heard on Gorée Island, in the eighteenth century (attached on page 44). Then ask students to comment about the lyrics of this song. Do you think that the songwriter has any idea what life as a slave in the Americas will be like? If he did, do you think that he would still want to follow the woman he loves?

Ask students in small groups to make a list of the groups that played a role in the slave trade. After a few minutes of brainstorming, ask for the students' responses. Guide the discussion to include the following groups: European slave traders, Arab slave traders, African slave traders, tribal chiefs, American slave owners, African slave owners and enslaved people. Lead students to understand that without the cooperation of multiple layers of people and economic incentives, the practice of slavery could not have survived for generations. (Teacher note: Excellent background materials can be found at the websites listed in the materials section.)

Why has slavery persisted for so many centuries? Give each student the T-chart handout, "The Economics of Slavery" (attached on page 45). In small groups ask them to analyze what the various groups gained and/or lost as a result of the slave trade. Tell them to list their ideas on the T-chart handout. As a whole class, discuss student responses and allow time for students to list any new ideas on their own handout. Students will use the ideas generated to write their essays.

Ask students to reflect on the human cost of the slave trade on Africa and on America. They will write an essay in which they address the following questions:

- Who bears responsibility for the slave trade?
- What were its costs? What were its gains?
- In your opinion, did the gains justify the costs? Why or why not?

Students will share their essays with the class.

**Assessment:**

The teacher will grade the displays and essays.

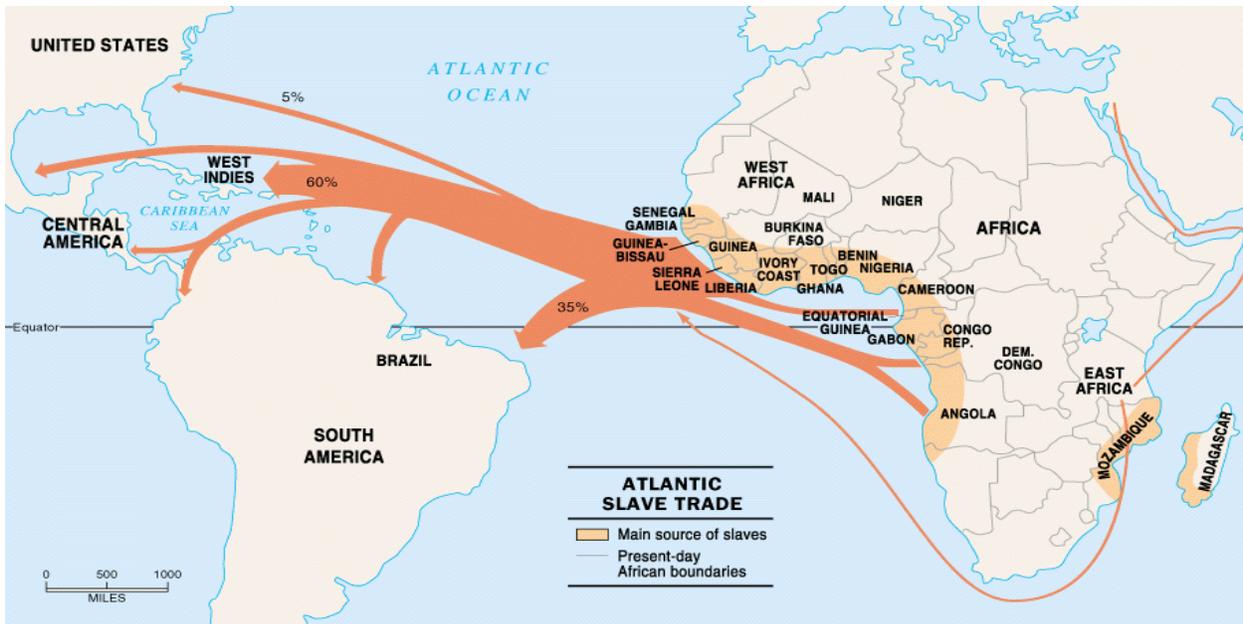
## Slave Resistance- What would you do?

1. **If you were kidnapped and taken far from your home. Would you....**
  - a. Try to escape no matter what the cost?
  - b. Wait for help to come?
  - c. Make your escape if the opportunity arises?
  
2. **It becomes clear to you that your kidnappers are not going to return you to your home. Do you....**
  - a. Resign yourself to your fate?
  - b. Make a do or die attempt to escape?
  - c. Plan ways of surviving until the chance to escape arises?
  
3. **It also becomes clear that even if you do escape your kidnappers' clutches that you will be escaping into a dangerous foreign land from which you cannot return home. Do you....**
  - a. Attempt to escape in spite of the difficulties?
  - b. Stay with the kidnappers because they at least feed you?
  - c. Stay but cause as much disruption as possible without getting caught?
  
4. **You are part of a large group of people who have been kidnapped. Some of your group decides to attempt an escape. Do you....**
  - a. Refuse to join them but wish them luck?
  - b. Join them in the attempt?
  - c. Tell the kidnappers about the plan so they will favor you more?
  
5. **Most of the kidnapped people are fighting the kidnappers who they outnumber. Do you?**
  - a. Stay on the kidnappers' side because you know that when they restore order they will punish those who fought against them?
  - b. Keep out of the way and watch to see which side is winning before choosing whom to fight with?
  - c. Take up arms against your kidnappers?



This map indicates the British shipping “triangle”, of which the trade of African slaves was a part, circa 1700.

Source: Michigan State University



This map indicates the distribution of slaves through the African Slave Trade by 1780.

Source: Michigan State University

## SLAVE-TRADE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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An accurate estimation of the importance of the drastic cuts in the population is practically impossible to make. Loss of life would first occur when would-be slaves were being chased, would continue while they were taken to the Atlantic coast and literally loaded on board ships, then again during the crossing. It is thought that only 30 % of the captives were to reach the American shores (or others) and land.

Between 20 and 100 million men and women were actually lost for the African continent ; what's more they were all young, thus fit for procreation.

The deportation was the very origin of a major upheaval of the political and economic structures of Africa...

Slavery was (officially) abolished in 1833 (Great Britain), 1848 (France), 1865 (U.S.A.), 1963 (Saudi Arabia) and July 5th ... 1980 in Mauritania where the U.N.O. have estimated current slave population is ...125,000.



Same engraving as above, presumably before 1848 (French ban on slavery) ...

## HISTORICAL REVIEW OF SLAVERY AND SLAVE TRADE BACKGROUND

It is both painful and perilous to write about slavery and slave-trade. Indeed painful because the horrors of that trade are obvious for everybody nowadays, and the abject behaviour of the slave-traders inspires fears, just like a fiend of the past lying dormant in mankind's history. Indeed perilous because dates, figures, places, protagonists' names are sometimes subject of uncalled for polemics.

Slavery and serfdom have been at the root of the economy of most civilizations.

In Senegal for one free man there used to be one slave, and, in certain areas from four up to sixteen slaves for one free adult.

The Coniagui and the Bassari were of service as "*hunting preserves for slave-hunt*" before they became the main suppliers for the West to the detriment of the [Dioula](#), Mandjaque and other populations settled by the rivers of the South. (Majhemout Diop, 1972)

The Tekroun region was known for practising slavery as far back as the XIth century.

The [Sereres](#), one of the most ancient populations in Senegal, did not practise slavery on a large scale before populations arrived from the North ([Peulh and Toucouleur](#)).

When the kingdoms of Sine and Saloum were established, the [Sereres](#) adopted the slave states' institutions of the Djolof.

In 1455, navigator Ca da Mosto reports that Senegalese King Zucholin "*maintains his economic power by means of plundering several slaves in both his own country and his neighbours' whom he makes use of, in several ways, mostly in making them cultivate his lands. He sells a good number of those slaves to Arab traders, and also hands some over to the Christians, since the latter started trading with those countries.*".

After the decree of April 27th 1848 which abolished slavery in the French colonies was promulgated, Governor Baudin tried to establish "*villages of Liberty*" at Ndar Toute and Sor, around [Saint-Louis](#) in 1849.

In 1880 [missionaries](#) of Paris's missionary Society founded the village of Bethes ou Khor, near [Saint-Louis](#). But the most important of those villages were situated near Matam at Civé, at [Podor](#) and in the Niani Ouli (Maka Kaba, Gamou, Diendé, Baby and Tambacounda). Then other smaller villages were founded almost everywhere ; Kaolack and [Karabane](#) being the best known.

The rulers' economic and military power was based on the enslavement principles, so much so that the new law wasn't actually enforced until the beginning of the XXth century .

Moreover several centuries of trade over the Atlantic, what with the Exchange Economy, had furthered the development of a feudal society : the old feudalism type (dom-i-bour) and the feudalism of the robe type (marabouts, almany, damel, cadis) reigned over the countrymen (badolo) up to the European colonization

Thus castes and feudal systems were to set up the structure of the Senegalese society.

## THE SLAVE TRADE

The slave trade appears in 1444 with the arrival of Portuguese. As well as enslaved servants, the civilizations of the Mediterranean Basin have always been in need of traded slaves to build their cities and temples and to man the galleys either for commerce or for war. Those

slaves were either prisoners of war, sentenced men or the victims of the slave trade the Moors were engaged in Black Africa.

1441, Adahu, a nobleman Moor captured by the Portuguese proposes buying himself back and paying with six black slaves. The "swap" took place in 1443.

The "Infant" (Iberic crown prince) wished to obtain information about the country of legendary Priest John , in the hope of being then able to take the Moors from the rear ( that country may correspond to present Ethiopia which had been a Christian land since King of Axoum Ezana's conversion in the course of the IVth century).

1444, Dinis Dias reached Senegal and took four captives back to Lagos : it was the beginning of a systematic slave trade .

As soon as 1450 steady organized trade with Arabs and Guinean Chiefs will take the place of brutal capture.

At the end of the XVth century 800 to 1,000 Blacks arrived from Arguin Island to Portugal every year.

In 1552 slaves made up 10 % of the population in Lisbon, i.e. 10,000 persons composed of Moors, Blacks and Canarians. At that time there were an estimated 70 slave traders in the city. Servants in Portugal at first and converted to Christianity, the victims of the trade were quickly sent to the Canaries' sugar cane plantations from Madera to the Azores.

As the colonial empires developed rapidly across the Atlantic, the black slaves were deported to America and the Caribbean in appalling conditions. In 1600, 300,000 of them had been deported to America. In the course of the XVIIth century, Africa handed over one and a half million slaves. This figure will reach six and a half million during the XVIIIth century.

The largest trade centres were situated on the "Wind Coast" (the Gambia, Guinea), on the "Seed Coast" (Sierra Leone, Guinea), the "Ivory Coast", the "Gold Coast" (Ghana, Togo), the "Slave Coast" (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon and Gabon) and on the Angola coast line (the Congo, Angola).

In order to make up their load some slave traders travelled as far as the Eastern coastline of the Mozambique. Thus, for more than 300 years, that "*triangular trade*" was at its height.

As a country which opens on to the Ocean and at the same time borders up on the Moorish regions, Senegal benefited by this geographical position with regard to that trade. Bakel was but a huge slave-market mainly supplied by the Bambara and the Dawiches : in the XVIIIth century, 60,000 slaves were traded every year.

Joal was named Diong originally and had been founded by Massai Diome to pen his slaves. The fact that there was no sand-bar along the small coastline of the Cap Vert helped the development of the trading posts of Rufisque, Portudal and [Joal](#).

[The island of Goree](#), thanks to a privileged position that made it getat-able in any season strengthened its strategic situation with regard to both the control of the west coast and the slave trade. At [Karabane](#), one can still see the Captives' House, which, though ruined, is still the most important building on the island.

[Saint-Louis](#), first French trading post was not to be outdone at that time : the large Captives' House the building of which can be seen round the back of the Hôtel de la Poste, testifies to

this past period.

From 1827, when the slave trade was banned (1815 the Vienna Treaty and 1818, the Aachen Treaty) the French chased from [Goree](#) the slave traders that were still trading north of the Equator.

Then, from 1821, slave trade was no longer "legal" except on board Portuguese ships and only south of the Equator.

Once slave trade was totally banned on the West Coast, the heinous trade picked up on the East Coast : Zanzibar became the new centre for trading at the end of the XIXth century. In 1846 [Goree](#) sheltered 250 slaves taken away from a slave-ship off the Angola Coast. After three years spent in [Goree](#), those freed slaves settled in Gabon where they founded Libreville.

Nowadays [Goree](#) is universally acknowledged as a memory site of the slave trade. The sanguinary "[Maison des Esclaves](#)" ([Slaves' House](#)) an the memorial to be, Goree-Almadies, will allow symbol and reality to converge for ever and ever.

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## Slavery's Legacy in West Africa: *Descendants Cope with Complicity in Brutal Trade*

National Public Radio

**April 12, 2004** -- The Portuguese began trading African slaves in Europe in the 1440s, and by the early 1500s ships filled with slaves captured in Africa began sailing across the Atlantic to the New World. During the four centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, an estimated 12 million Africans were taken from their continent and brought to the New World and Europe.

Americans are still struggling to come to terms with this nation's history of slavery. And in West Africa, some are also trying to reconcile the complicity of African rulers and slave merchants in the slave trade.

For the latest journey of the National Geographic Radio Expedition project, NPR's John Burnett traveled to Benin where he met a woman who's trying to tell the complete story of the slave trade -- and her own family's role in it.

Martine de Souza, a museum guide in Ouidah, Benin, has made it her cause to educate visitors -- both African and foreign -- about Africa's domestic slave trade.

She has quite a perspective on the issue: Her great grandmother was a slave, and her great, great, great-grandfather was the infamous Francisco "Cha Cha" de Souza, a Portuguese slave trader.

De Souza led Burnett down the old slave route to the spot on the beach where it is believed the terrified captives boarded ships for the "Middle Passage" -- the route across the ocean to the New World. Many would not survive the trip, cut down by disease, malnutrition, abuse or neglect.

A vigorous debate continues over whether the descendants of those now alive in the United States and European nations should pay reparations for their ancestor's involvement in the African slave trade. And Africans are having their own dialogue over this dark chapter of their history.

"Today, 150 years after the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there is still bad blood between descendants of raided villages and descendants of the Kingdom of Dahomey," Burnett says. "The kings of Dahomey -- located in Abomey, in present-day Benin -- aggressively captured and sold neighboring tribespeople to the slavers. The practice was quite developed, and went on for some three centuries."

The story of the slave trade is kept alive in the songs of village *griots*, or tribal storytellers, who sing the history of the slave-conquering kings of Dahomey.

"The slave trade could not have endured for four centuries and carried nearly 12 million people out of Africa without the cooperation of a huge network of African rulers and merchants," says Dr. Robert Harms, a professor of African History at Yale University who has extensively researched the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

"Most Americans think that ships would come from the United States or from Europe to Africa and the sailors would just get off and run out and grab a shipload of people and stuff them in the

ship and bring them back. And I think that is a very condescending view of Africans.

"That view suggests that Africans were so disorganized that they could let that happen year after year after year after year," Harms says. "I think we need to see African societies as well-organized societies that participated in the slave trade, because the ruling classes often thought they had something to gain from it."

Harms is the author of [\*The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade\*](#), an award-winning book detailing the day-to-day routine on a French slave vessel in the 1700s.

## From Slave Trade Documents

John Barbot, **1732**

**John Barbot, an agent for the French Royal African Company, made at least two voyages to the West Coast of Africa, in 1678 and 1682.**

Those sold by the Blacks are for the most part prisoners of war, taken either in fight, or pursuit, or in the incursions they make into their enemies territories; others stolen away by their own countrymen; and some there are, who will sell their own children, kindred, or neighbours. This has been often seen, and to compass it, they desire the person they intend to sell, to help them in carrying something to the factory by way of trade, and when there, the person so deluded, not understanding the language, is old and deliver'd up as a slave, notwithstanding all his resistance, and exclaiming against the treachery....

The kings are so absolute, that upon any slight pretense of offences committed by their subjects, they order them to be sold for slaves, without regard to rank, or possession....

Abundance of little Blacks of both sexes are also stolen away by their neighbours, when found abroad on the roads, or in the woods; or else in the Cougans, or corn- fields, at the time of the year, when their parents keep them there all day, to scare away the devouring small birds, that come to feed on the millet, in swarms, as has been said above.

In times of dearth and famine, abundance of those people will sell themselves, for a maintenance, and to prevent starving. When I first arriv'd at Goerree, in December, 1681, I could have bought a great number, at very easy rates, if I could have found provisions to subsist them; so great was the dearth then, in that part of Nigritia. . . .

To conclude, some slaves are also brought to these Blacks, from very remote inland countries, by way of trade, and sold for things of very inconsiderable value; but these slaves are generally poor and weak, by reason of the barbarous usage they have had in traveling so far, being continually beaten, and almost famish'd; so inhuman are the Blacks to one another....

The trade of slaves is in a more peculiar manner the business of kings, rich men, and prime merchants, exclusive of the inferior sort of Blacks.

These slaves are severely and barbarously treated by their masters, who subsist them poorly, and beat them inhumanly, as may be seen by the scabs and wounds on the bodies of many of them when sold to us. They scarce allow them the least rag to cover their nakedness, which they also take off from them when sold to Europeans; and they always go bare- headed. The wives and children of slaves, are also slaves to the master under whom they are married; and when dead, they never bury them, but cast out the bodies into some by place, to be devoured by birds, or beasts of prey.

This barbarous usage of those unfortunate wretches, makes it appear, that the fate of such as are bought and transported from the coast to America, or other parts of the world, by Europeans, is less deplorable, than that of those who end their days in their native country; for aboard ships all possible care is taken to preserve and subsist them for the interest of the owners, and when sold in America, the same motive ought to prevail with their masters to use them well, that they may live the longer, and do them more service. Not to mention the inestimable advantage they may reap, of becoming Christians, and saving their souls, if they make a true use of their condition....

Many of those slaves we transport from Guinea to America are prepossessed with the opinion, that they are carried like sheep to the slaughter, and that the Europeans are fond of their flesh; which notion so far prevails with some, as to make them fall into a deep melancholy and despair, and to refuse all sustenance, tho' never so much compelled and even beaten to oblige them to

take some nourishment: notwithstanding all which, they will starve to death; whereof I have had several instances in my own slaves both aboard and at Guadalupe. And tho' I must say I am naturally compassionate, yet have I been necessitated sometimes to cause the teeth of those wretches to be broken, because they would not open their mouths, or be prevailed upon by any entreaties to feed themselves; and thus have forced some sustenance into their throats....

As the slaves come down to Fida from the inland country, they are put into a booth, or prison, built for that purpose, near the beach, all of them together; and when the Europeans are to receive them, every part of every one of them, to the smallest member, men and women being all stark naked. Such as are allowed good and sound, are set on one side, and the others by themselves; which slaves so rejected are there called Mackrons, being above thirty five years of age, or defective in their limbs, eyes or teeth; or grown grey, or that have the venereal disease, or any other imperfection. These being set aside, each of the others, which have passed as good, is marked on the breast, with a red-hot iron, imprinting the mark of the French, English, or Dutch companies, that so each nation may distinguish their own.

Source: John Barbot, "A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea," in Thomas Astley and John Churchill, eds., Collection of Voyages and Travels (London, 1732).

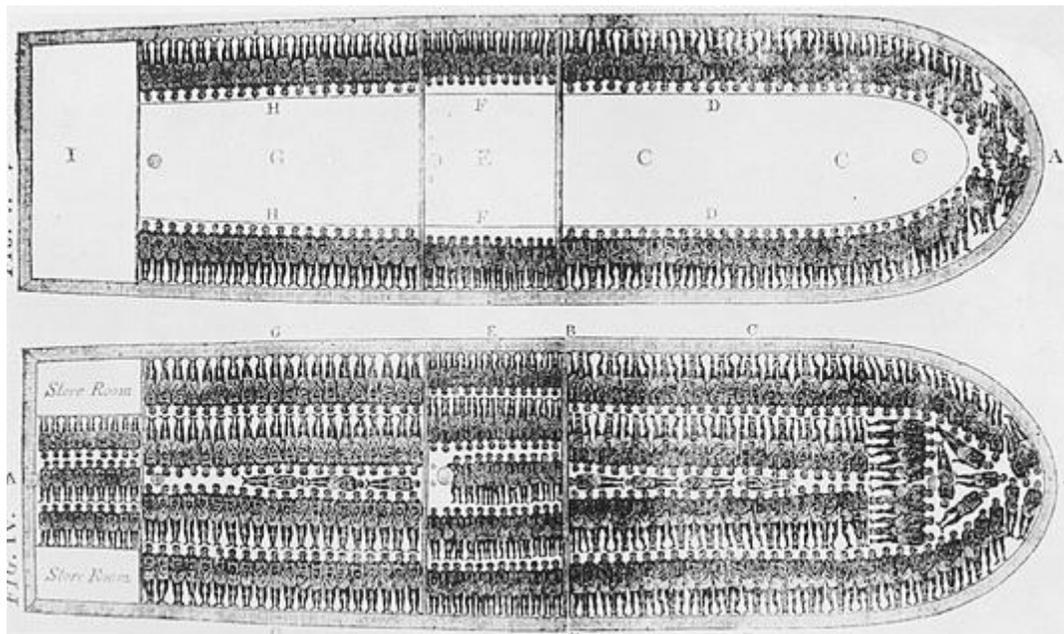


Diagram of the slave ship *Brooks*

## From The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano - 1789

Born in Benin in the late 18th century, Equiano was enslaved at the age of 11, but he became educated and secured his freedom. He was a major voice advocating an end to slavery. His narrative, written in English in 1789, immediately became a popular sensation. It is a rare glimpse of the slave trade from the point of view of the slave.

I have already acquainted the reader with the time and place of my birth. My father, besides many slaves, had a numerous family, of which seven lived to grow up, including myself and sister, who was the only daughter. As I was the youngest of the sons, I became, of course, the greatest favorite with my mother, and was always with her; and she used to take particular pains to form my mind. I was trained up from my earliest years in the art of war: my daily exercise was shooting and throwing javelins, and my mother adorned me with emblems, after the manner of our greatest warriors. In this way I grew up till I had turned the age of eleven, when an end was put to my happiness in the following manner: Generally, when the grown people in the neighborhood were gone far in the fields to labor, the children assembled together in some of the neighboring premises to play; and commonly some of us used to get up a tree to look out for any assailant, or kidnapper, that might come upon us -- for they sometimes took those opportunities of our parents' absence, to attack and carry off as many as they could seize. One day as I was watching at the top of a tree in our yard, I saw one of those people come into the yard of our next neighbor but one, to kidnap, there being many stout young people in it. Immediately on this I gave the alarm of the rogue, and he was surrounded by the stoutest of them, who entangled him with cords, so that he could not escape, till some of the grown people came and secured him. But, alas! ere long it was my fate to be thus attacked, and to be carried off, when none of the grown people were nigh.

One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent the night. We were then unbound, but were unable to take any food; and, being quite overpowered by fatigue and grief, our only relief was some sleep, which allayed our misfortune for a short time. The next morning we left the house, and continued traveling all the day. For a long time we had kept the woods, but at last we came into a road which I believed I knew. I had now some hopes of being delivered; for we had advanced but a little way before I discovered some people at a distance, on which I began to cry out for their assistance; but my cries had no other effect than to make them tie me faster and stop my mouth, and then they put me into a large sack. They also stopped my sister's mouth, and tied her hands; and in this manner we proceeded till we were out of sight of these people. When we went to rest the following night, they offered us some victuals, but we refused it; and the only comfort we had was in being in one another's arms all that night, and bathing each other with our tears. But alas! we were soon deprived of even the small comfort of weeping together.

The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was tom from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth. . .

From the time I left my own nation, I always found somebody that understood me till I came to the sea coast. The languages of different nations did not totally differ, nor were they so copious as those of the Europeans, particularly the English. They were therefore easily learned; and, while I was journeying thus through Africa, I acquired two or three different tongues. In this manner I had been travelling for a considerable time, when, one evening, to my great surprise, whom should I see brought to the house where I was but my dear sister! As soon as she saw me, she gave a loud

shriek, and ran into my arms -- I was quite overpowered; neither of us could speak, but, for a considerable time, clung to each other in mutual embraces, unable to do anything but weep. Our meeting affected all who saw us; and, indeed, I must acknowledge, in honor of those sable destroyers of human rights, that I never met with any ill treatment, or saw any offered to their slaves, except tying them, when necessary, to keep them from running away.

When these people knew we were brother and sister, they indulged us to be together; and the man, to whom I supposed we belonged, lay with us, he in the middle, while she and I held one another by the hands across his breast all night; and thus for a while we forgot our misfortunes, in the joy of being together; but even this small comfort was soon to have an end; for scarcely had the fatal morning appeared when she was again torn from me forever! I was now more miserable, if possible, than before. The small relief which her presence gave me from pain, was gone, and the wretchedness of my situation was redoubled by my anxiety after her fate, and my apprehensions lest her sufferings should be greater than mine, when I could not be with her to alleviate them. . . .

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast, was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had ever heard), united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed, such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little, I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who had brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair. They told me I was not, and one of the crew brought me a small portion of spirituous liquor in a wine glass; but being afraid of him, I would not take it out of his hand. One of the blacks therefore took it from him and gave it to me, and I took a little down my palate, which, instead of reviving me, as they thought it would, threw me into the greatest consternation at the strange feeling it produced, having never tasted any such liquor before. Soon after this, the blacks who brought me on board went off, and left me abandoned to despair.

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. This indeed was often the case with myself.

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 any people such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shown towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves. One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute. This made me fear these people the more; and I expected nothing less than to be treated in the same manner. I could not help expressing my fears and apprehensions to some of my countrymen; I asked them if these people had no country, but lived in this hollow place (the ship)? They told me they did not, but came from a distant one. "Then," said I, "how comes it in all our country we never heard of them?" They told me because they lived so very far off. I then asked where were their women? had they any like themselves? I was told they had. "And why," said I, "do we not see them?" They answered, because they were left behind. I asked how the vessel could go? They told me they could not tell; but that there was cloth put upon the masts by the help of the ropes I saw, and then the vessel went on; and the white men had some spell or magic they put in the water when they liked, in order to stop the vessel. I was exceedingly amazed at this account, and really thought they were spirits. I therefore wished much to be from amongst them, for I expected they would sacrifice me; but my wishes were vain -- for we were so quartered that it was impossible for any of us to make our escape.

While we stayed on the coast I was mostly on deck; and one day, to my great astonishment, I saw one of these vessels coming in with the sails up. As soon as the whites saw it, they gave a great shout, at which we were amazed; and the more so, as the vessel appeared larger by approaching nearer. At last, she came to an anchor in my sight, and when the anchor was let go, I and my countrymen who saw it, were lost in astonishment to observe the vessel stop -- and were now convinced it was done by magic. Soon after this the other ship got her boats out, and they came on board of us, and the people of both ships seemed very glad to see each other. Several of the strangers also shook hands with us black people, and made motions with their hands, signifying I suppose, we were to go to their country, but we did not understand them.

At last, when the ship we were in, had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. 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 gaffing of the chains, now became 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. Happily perhaps, for myself, I was soon reduced so low here that it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck; and from my extreme youth I was not put in fetters. In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries. Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself. I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my condition for theirs. Every circumstance I met with, served only to render my state more painful, and heightened my apprehensions, and my opinion of the cruelty of the whites.

One day they had taken a number of fishes; and when they had killed and satisfied themselves with as many as they thought fit, to our astonishment who were on deck, rather than give any of them to us to eat, as we expected, they tossed the remaining fish into the sea again, although we begged and prayed for some as well as we could, but in vain; and some of my countrymen, being

pressed by hunger, took an opportunity, when they thought no one saw them, of trying to get a little privately; but they were discovered, and the attempt procured them some very severe floggings.

One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea; immediately, another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same, if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly alarmed. Those of us that were the most active, were in a moment put down under the deck; and there was such a noise and confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before, to stop her, and get the boat out to go after the slaves. However, two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and afterwards flogged him unmercifully, for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery. In this manner we continued to undergo more hardships than I can now relate, hardships which are inseparable from this accursed trade. Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many.

At last we came in sight of the island of Barbadoes, at which the whites on board gave a great shout, and made many signs of joy to us. We did not know what to think of this; but as the vessel drew nearer, we plainly saw the harbor, and other ships of different kinds and sizes, and we soon anchored amongst them, off Bridgetown. Many merchants and planters now came on board, though it was in the evening. They put us in separate parcels, and examined us attentively. They also made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought by this, we should be eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and, when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch, that at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and were soon to go on land, where we should see many of our country people. This report eased us much. And sure enough, soon after we were landed, there came to us Africans of all languages.

We were conducted immediately to the merchant's yard, where we were all pent up together, like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age. As every object was new to me, everything I saw filled me with surprise. What struck me first, was, that the houses were built with bricks and stories, and in every other respect different from those I had seen in Africa; but I was still more astonished on seeing people on horseback. I did not know what this could mean; and, indeed, I thought these people were full of nothing but magical arts. While I was in this astonishment, one of my fellow prisoners spoke to a countryman of his, about the horses, who said they were the same kind they had in their country. I understood them, though they were from a distant part of Africa; and I thought it odd I had not seen any horses there; but afterwards, when I came to converse with different Africans, I found they had many horses amongst them, and much larger than those I then saw.

We were not many days in the merchant's custody, before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this: On a signal given (as the beat of a drum), the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehension of terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted. In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again.

I remember, in the vessel in which I was brought over, in the men's apartment, there were several brothers, who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion, to see and hear their cries at parting. O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you -- Learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should

do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends, to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? Are the dearest friends and relations, now rendered more dear by their separation from their kindred, still to be parted from each other, and thus prevented from cheering the gloom of slavery, with the small comfort of being together, and mingling their sufferings and sorrows? Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely, this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress, and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery.

Source: *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, by Olaudah Equiano, St. Martin's Press

## From Conditions on an English Slaver

Alexander Falconbridge 1788

Alexander Falconbridge, a surgeon aboard slave ships and later the governor of a British colony for freed slaves in Sierra Leone, gives this account of the Middle Passage.

From the time of the arrival of the ships to their departure, which is usually about three months, scarce a day passes without some Negroes being purchased and carried on board; sometimes in small and sometimes in large numbers. The whole number taken on board depends on circumstances. In a voyage I once made, our stock of merchandise was exhausted in the purchase of about 380 Negroes, which was expected to have procured 500...

The men Negroes, on being brought aboard the ship, are immediately fastened together, two and two, by handcuffs on their wrists and by irons riveted on their legs. They are then sent down between the decks and placed in an apartment partitioned off for that purpose. The women also are placed in a separate apartment between the decks, but without being ironed. An adjoining room on the same deck is appointed for the boys. Thus they are all placed in different apartments.

But at the same time, however, they are frequently stowed so close, as to admit of no other position than lying on their sides. Nor with the height between decks, unless directly under the grating, permit the indulgence of an erect posture; especially where there are platforms, which is generally the case. These platforms are a kind of shelf, about eight or nine feet in breadth, extending from the side of the ship toward the centre. They are placed nearly midway between the decks, at the distance of two or three feet from each deck. Upon these the Negroes are stowed in the same manner as they are on the deck underneath.

In each of the apartments are placed three or four large buckets, of a conical form, nearly two feet in diameter at the bottom and only one foot at the top and in depth of about twenty- eight inches, to which, when necessary, the Negroes have recourse. It often happens that those who are placed at a distance from the buckets, in endeavoring to get to them, tumble over their companions, in consequence of their being shackled. These accidents, although unavoidable, are productive of continual quarrels in which some of them are always bruised. In this distressed situation, unable to proceed and prevented from getting to the tubs, they desist from the attempt; and as the necessities of nature are not to be resisted, ease themselves as they lie. This becomes a fresh source of boils and disturbances and tends to render the condition of the poor captive wretches still more uncomfortable. The nuisance arising from these circumstances is not infrequently increased by the tubs being too small for the purpose intended and their being emptied but once every day. The rule for doing so, however, varies in different ships according to the attention paid to the health and convenience of the slaves by the captain. . . .

Upon the Negroes refusing to take sustenance, I have seen coals of fire, glowing hot, put on a shovel and placed so near their lips as to scorch and burn them. And this has been accompanied with threats of forcing them to swallow the coals if they any longer persisted in refusing to eat. These means have generally had the desired effect. I have also been credibly informed that a certain captain in the slave- trade, poured melted lead on such of his Negroes as obstinately refused their food. . . .

On board some ships the common sailors are allowed to have intercourse with such of the black women whose consent they can procure. And some of them have been known to take the inconstancy of their paramours so much to heart as to leap overboard and drown themselves. The officers are permitted to indulge their passions among them at pleasure and sometimes are guilty of such excesses as disgrace human nature....

The hardships and inconveniences suffered by the Negroes during the passage are scarcely to be enumerated or conceived. They are far more violently affected by seasickness than Europeans. It frequently terminates in death, especially among the women. But the exclusion of fresh air is among the most intolerable. For the purpose of admitting this needful refreshment, most of the ships in the slave trade are provided, between the decks, with five or six air-ports on each side of the ship of about five inches in length and four in breadth. In addition, some ships, but not one in twenty, have what they denominate wind-sails. But whenever the sea is rough and the rain heavy it becomes necessary to shut these and every other conveyance by which the air is admitted. The fresh air being thus excluded, the Negroes' rooms soon grow intolerable hot. The confined air, rendered noxious by the effluvia exhaled from their bodies and being repeatedly breathed, soon produces fevers and fluxes which generally carries off great numbers of them. . . .

Source: Alexander Falconbridge, An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa (London, 1788).



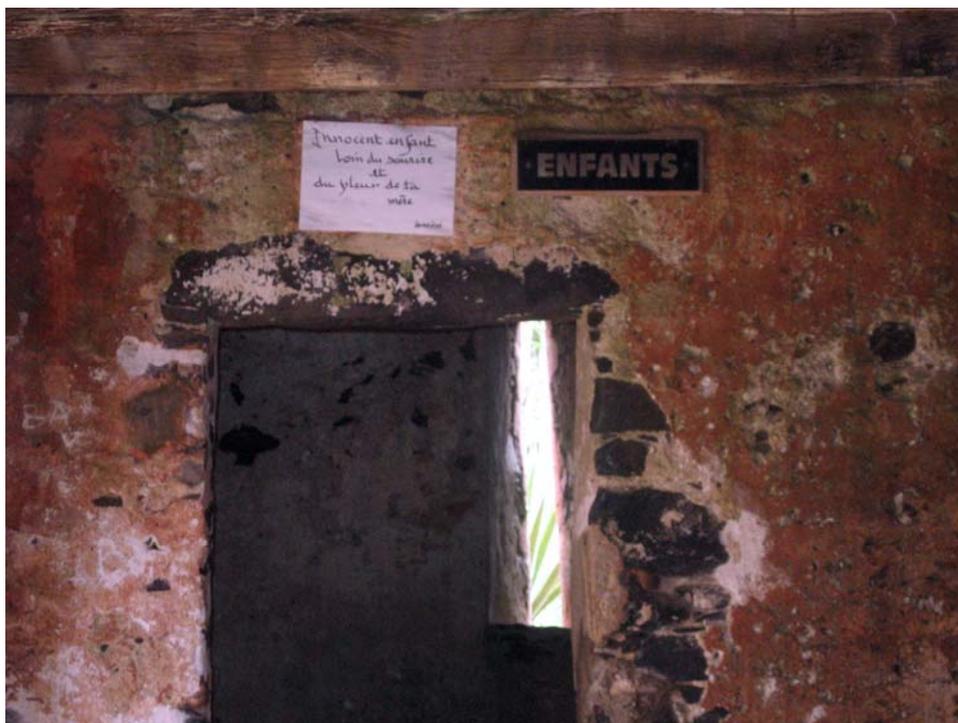
Fort at the tip of Gorée Island, Senegal, as approached by boat from Dakar, Senegal.



Slave Statue at the entry to the Slave House on Gorée Island.



A door to one of the small rooms where slaves were held in the Slave House prior to being forced onto boats to the Americas.



The entry to the room where children were kept in the Slave House.



"The Door of No Return": on the other side of this door, slaves were placed in boats that brought them to colonies in the West Indies, Central America, South America and North America.

**Song heard on Gorée Island, Senegal, in the eighteenth century.**

Damel [the king] has raided the village of Yene

He has enslaved the woman I love

Since then, I have so much pain

That I cannot drink palm wine

And I cannot eat couscous

My love is going to be shipped to the islands [West Indies]

I will ask to be made a slave to be with her

I'd rather be a slave and be with her

Than a free man in a place where she no longer is.

Published in Jean René Antoine Verdun de la Crenne, *Voyage fait par ordre du roi en 1771 et 1772, en diverses parties de l'Europe, de l'Afrique et de l'Amérique* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1778)

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## THE ECONOMICS OF SLAVERY

GROUPS	COSTS	GAINS
American slave owners		
American nations/colonies		
European slave traders		
Arab slave traders		
African slave traders		
African tribal leaders		
African slave owners		
Enslaved African people		
African nations		