

“The Middle Passage was worse for African prisoners than life on the Plantations”. How far do you agree?

Source Sheet

Sources about the Middle Passage

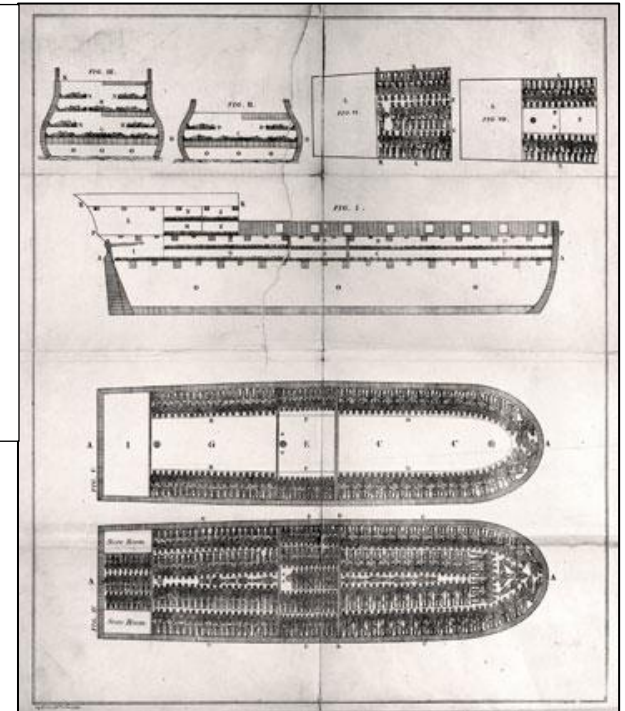
Source 1: Oludah Equiano, a Black African and former slave. There is evidence that he was born a slave in America (and not transported), but he had worked as a sailor for many years.

“The lack of space 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. The air soon became unfit for breathing, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. This wretched situation was made worse by the rubbing of the chains, which now became unbearable; and the filth of the necessary tubs. One day, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together jumped into the sea. Another followed their example. Two of them were drowned, but they got the other and afterwards, flogged him unmercifully for thus preferring death to slavery”.

Source 3: A slave ship commander’s view

“Slaves on board are, most assuredly, treated humanely. Rice is a principal article of their food on the Windward Coast; often fish. When Rice cannot be got, ships carry out beans and from Africa, palm oil, pepper, sheep, goats and fowls. Never knew slaves on board without plenty of food. It is almost the sole employment of the officers to serve them”.

Source 2:
Plan of the Slave Ship, Brooks, made around 1850



Source 4: A reconstruction of a slave ship produced by the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum.



“The Middle Passage was worse for African prisoners than life on the Plantations”. How far do you agree?

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Sources about life on the Plantations

Source 5: A school textbook published in 1999

Slaves had no rights. They were the property of their master. They could own nothing. They were not allowed to marry, but the owners encouraged them to have children, who would be new, young slaves for the future.

If slaves committed serious crimes they could have their noses slit, their ears cut off or their faces branded. The most common punishment was whipping.

Source 7: from *Gone With the Wind*, a book published in 1936 about the old South. It is written from the point of view of the slave owners

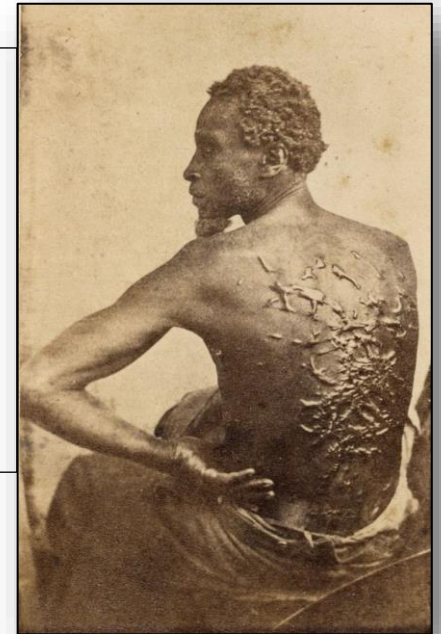
“With unerring African instinct, the negroes had all discovered that Gerald had a loud bark and no bite at all, and they took shameless advantage of him. The air was always thick with threats of selling slaves south and of direful whippings, but there never had been a slave sold and only one whipping for a slave who did not groom down Gerald’s pet horse after a long day hunting”.

Source 8: the 1847 slave narrative of William Wells Brown

“During the time that Mr. Cook was overseer, I was a house servant—a situation preferable to a field hand, as I was better fed, better clothed, and not obliged to rise at the ringing bell, but about an half hour after. I have often laid and heard the crack of the whip, and the screams of the slave”

Source 6:

Slave named Gordon showing whip scars on his back (1863)



Source 9: Francis Frederic – ‘Fifty Years of Slavery’ (1863)

The dinner consists generally of black-eyed peas soup, as it is called. About a quart of peas is boiled in a large pan, and a small piece of meat, just to flavour the soup, is put into the pan.

The dinner hour is about two or three o'clock; the soup being served out to the men and women in bowls; but the children feed like pigs out of troughs, and being supplied sparingly, invariably fight and quarrel with one another over their meals.