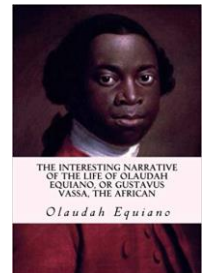


# THE MIDDLE PASSAGE THROUGH PRIMARY SOURCES

## ***Document #1 – Olaudah Equiano's Capture***

Olaudah Equiano was captured by African slave raiders in Nigeria when he was 11 years old. He survived the many horrors of the Middle Passage to write an autobiography and become a leader in the movement to end slavery

“Generally when the grown people in the neighbourhood were gone far in the fields to labour, the children assembled together in some of the neighbours' 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 neighbour 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 travelling 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 the 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 torn 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 I did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth.”



## *Document #2 - Elmina Castle, Ghana*

Elmina Castle was built by the Portuguese in 1482 as a trading post and military fort. As the Triangular Trade developed, it became one of hundreds of trading posts/forts built by European and African merchants and traders. Elmina's role in the slave trade was as a place where captured Africans were kept inside of cells prior to being traded to European merchants. This was also a place where European ship captains would meet with African rulers/merchants/traders and exchange manufactured goods for captured Africans. After the hundred mile march and transportation from where they were captured, enslaved Africans would be kept at these forts and trading posts for as short of a time as a few weeks to as long as 6 months.



Outside view of Elmina Castle with cannons and cannonballs



Inside view of the castle. This is the market place where European ship captains traded with African slave traders.



Known as the "Door of No Return," this exit led purchased slaves out of the castle. From this exit they would board canoes to take them to slave ships anchored in the harbor.



A male holding cell for captured Africans.





## **Document #4- Olaudah Equiano Boards the Slave Ship**

This is a passage from Equiano's autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. It describes his experience during the Middle Passage.

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. ....

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 or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their faces expressing dejection and sorrow.....I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a smell in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the horrible 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 any thing.....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 (part of the ship), and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced any thing 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. 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 shewn 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.....

But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so repulsive, 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, that disease spread easily. 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 caused constant perspiration, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of unbearable smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the ungodly greed, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the weight 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. 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 chains.

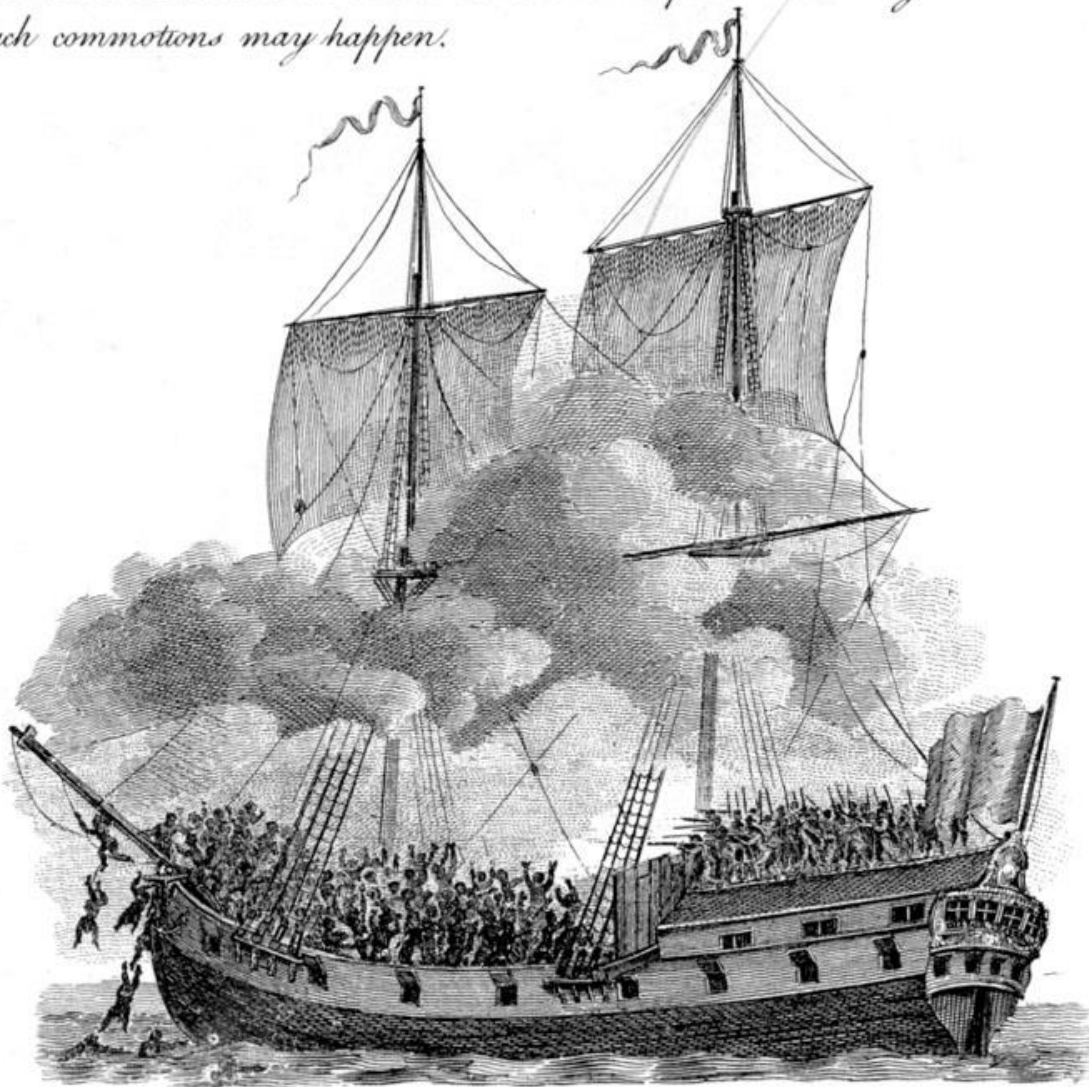
One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was allowed to be out of irons, 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. 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.

## Document #5 – Mutiny Aboard a Slave Ship

On the thousands of voyages made by slave ships, historians estimate that 10% experienced some sort of slave revolt. While insurrection was common and constantly planned, successful rebellions were rare.

### REPRESENTATION of an INSURRECTION on board A SLAVE - SHIP.

*Shewing how the crew fire upon the unhappy Slaves from behind the BARRICADO, erected on board all Slave ships, as a security whenever such commotions may happen.*



*See the privy council's report part I. Art: SLAVES.  
Minutes of evidence before the House of Commons.  
Wadstrom's Essay on Colonization §. 471.*

