

THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

This activity contains a series of questions for you to answer along with three readings. We will read the primary sources together in class. Please read the secondary source independently and then answer the 5 questions below **IN RESPONSES OF AT LEAST 4 SENTENCES EACH**.

1. Provide a summary of the Atlantic slave trade in your own words: When did it take place? What locations were involved? What took place? Why did it take place?
2. What does Equiano mean when he says “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.” Why do you think he feels this way? What makes being a victim of the Atlantic slave trade worse than being a slave in Africa?
3. Who do you think is the audience of Equiano’s book? What is the message you think he is trying to send to this audience?
4. Who do you think is the audience of Barton’s book? What is the message you think he is trying to send to this audience?
5. How does *Roots* compare as a filmed depiction of history to *Le Roi Danse* and *The Great*? In what way does watching the miniseries contribute to your understanding of the Atlantic slave trade?

Primary Source #1: Excerpt from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789) chronicles the life of the Igbo sailor, writer, and activist Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797): his childhood in an Igbo village in the Kingdom of Benin; his life as a slave first in Africa and then the New World; his work as a seaman on a British warship, a role that enabled him to earn enough money to purchase his freedom; and, finally, his role as leader of free blacks residing in England. Interesting Narrative nevertheless provides a revealing picture of Africa, slavery, and the Atlantic slave trade in the eighteenth-century, and the book (which went through thirteen editions in thirty years) had an impact on Western culture and on the emerging abolitionist movement. The following excerpt focuses on Equiano’s experience of the “middle passage” to the New World.

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 found 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 recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who 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 loose hair. They told me I was not.

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 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. 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 were cloths 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. 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 in tolerably 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. 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. 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 heighten my apprehensions, and my opinion of the cruelty of the whites.

At last we came in sight of the island of Barbados, 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 Bridge Town. 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 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 clamour with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the 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.

Primary Source #2: Excerpt from “A Description of Guinea” by Jean Barbot (1682)

Jean Barbot was an employee of the French African companies of 1675 and 1681, and between 1678 and 1682 made at least two voyages to the West African Coast and America. His “Description”, written in French and translated into English by the author himself after some years of residence in England or frequent visits there, was written in 1682. The journal from which much of his account is taken begins Oct. 22, 1678, the day on which he sailed from Rochelle.

I have observed, that the great mortality, which so often happens in slave- ships, proceeds as well from taking in too many, as from want of knowing how to manage them aboard.

As to the management of our slaves aboard, we lodge the two sexes apart, by means of a strong partition at the main mast; the forepart is for men, the other behind the mast for the women. If it be in large ships carrying five or six hundred slaves, the deck in such ships ought to be at least five and a half or six foot high, which is very requisite for driving a continual trade of slaves: for the greater height it has, the more airy and convenient it is for such a considerable number of human creatures; and consequently far the more healthy for them, and fitter to look after them. We build a sort of half- decks along the sides with deals and spars provided for that purpose in Europe, that half- deck extending no farther than the sides of our scuttles and so the slaves lie in two rows, one above the other, and as close together as they can be crowded.

The planks, or deals, contract some dampness more or less, either from the deck being so often washed to keep it clean and sweet, or from the rain that gets in now and then through the scuttles or other openings, and even from the very sweat of the slaves; which being so crowded in a low place, is perpetual, and occasions many distempers, or at best great inconveniences dangerous to their health.

It has been observed before, that some slaves fancy they are carried to be eaten, which make them desperate; and others are so on account of their captivity: so that if care be not taken, they will mutiny and destroy the ship's crew in hopes to get away.

To prevent such misfortunes, we use to visit them daily, narrowly searching every corner between decks, to see whether they have not found means, to gather any pieces of iron, or wood, or knives, about the ship, notwithstanding the great care we take not to leave any tools or nails, or other things in the way: which, however, cannot be always so exactly observed, where so many people are in the narrow compass of a ship.

We cause as many of our men as is convenient to lie in the quarter- deck and gun- room, and our principal officers in the great cabin, where we keep all our small arms in a readiness, with sentinels constantly at the doors and avenues to it; being thus ready to disappoint any attempts our slave might make on a sudden.

These precautions contribute very much to keep them in awe; and if all those who carry slaves duly observed them, we should not hear of so many revolts as have happened. Where I was concerned, we always kept our slaves in such order, that we did not perceive the least inclination in any of them to revolt, or mutiny, and lost very few of our number in the voyage.

It is true, we allowed them much more liberty, and used them with more tenderness than most other Europeans would think prudent to do; as, to have them all upon deck every day in good weather; to take their meals twice a- day, at fixed hours, that is, at ten in the morning, and at five at night; which being ended, we made the men go down again between the decks; for the women were almost entirely at their own discretion, to be upon deck as long as they pleased, nay even many of the males had the same liberty by turns, successively; few or none being fettered or kept in shackles, and that only on account of some disturbances, or injuries, offered to their fellow captives, as will unavoidably happen among a numerous crowd of such savage people. Besides, we allowed each of them betwixt their meals a handful of Indian wheat and Mandioca, and now and then short pipes and tobacco to smook upon deck by turns, and some coconuts; and to the women a piece of coarse cloth to cover them, and the same to many of the men, which we took care they did wash from time to time, to prevent vermin, which they are very subject to; and because it looked sweeter and more agreeable. Toward the evening they diverted themselves on the deck, as they thought fit, some conversing together, others dancing, singing, and sporting after their manner, which pleased them highly, and often made us pastime; especially the female sex, who being apart from the males, on the quarterdeck, and many of them young sprightly maidens, full of jollity and good humor, afforded us abundance of recreation.

We messed the slaves twice a day, as I have observed; the first meal was of our large beans boiled, with a certain quantity of Muscovy lard. The other meal was of peas, or of Indian wheat, and sometimes meal of Mandioca...boiled with either lard, or suet, or grease by turns: and sometimes with palm- oil and malaguette or Guinea pepper. I found they had much better stomachs for beans, and it is a proper fattening food for captives.

At each meal we allowed every slave a full coconut shell of water, and from time to time a dram of brandy, to strengthen their stomachs.

Much more might be said relating to the preservation and maintenance of slaves in such voyages, which I leave to the prudence of the officers that govern aboard, if they value their own reputation and their owners advantage; and shall only add these few particulars, that though we ought to be circumspect in watching the slaves narrowly, to prevent or disappoint their ill designs for our own conservation, yet must we not be too severe and haughty with them, but on the contrary, caress and humor them in every reasonable thing. Some commanders, of a morose peevish temper are perpetually beating and curbing them, even without the least offence, and will not suffer any upon deck but when unavoidable to ease themselves does require; under pretense it hinders the work of the ship and sailors and that they are troublesome by their nasty nauseous stench, or their noise; which makes those poor wretches desperate, and besides their falling into distempers thro' melancholy, often is the occasion of their destroying themselves.

Such officers should consider, those unfortunate creatures are men as well as themselves, though of a different color, and pagans; and that they ought to do to others as they would be done by in like circumstances.

Secondary Source: Excerpt from Henry Epps, "The Atlantic Slave Trade"

The vast majority of slaves transported to the New World were Africans from the central and western parts of the continent, sold by Africans to European slave traders who then transported them to the colonies in North and South America. The numbers were so great that Africans who came by way of the slave trade became the most numerous Old-World immigrants in both North and South America before the late eighteenth century.

The South Atlantic economic system centered on making goods and clothing to sell in Europe and increasing the numbers of African slaves brought to the New World. This was crucial to those European countries who, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were vying in creating overseas empires.

The first Africans imported to the English colonies were also called “indentured servants” or “apprentices for life”. By the middle of the seventeenth century, they and their offspring were legally the property of their owners. As property, they were merchandise or units of labor, and were sold at markets with other goods and services.

The Portuguese were the first to engage in the New World slave trade, and others soon followed. Slaves were considered cargo by the ship owners, to be transported to the Americas as quickly and cheaply as possible, there to be sold to labor in coffee, tobacco, cocoa, cotton and sugar plantations, gold and silver mines, rice fields, construction industry, cutting timber for ships, and as house servants.

The Atlantic slave traders, ordered by trade volume, were: the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Spanish, the Dutch, and the Americans. They had established outposts on the African coast where they purchased slaves from local African tribal leaders. Current estimates are that about 12 million were shipped across the Atlantic, although the actual number purchased by the traders is considerably higher.

The slave trade is sometimes called the Maafa by African and African-American scholars, meaning “holocaust” or “great disaster” in Swahili. Some scholars, such as Marimba Ani and Maulana Karenga use the terms African Holocaust or Holocaust of Enslavement. Slavery was one element of a three-part economic cycle—the triangular trade and its Middle Passage—which ultimately involved four continents, four centuries and millions of people.

Slavery was practiced in some parts of Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas before the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade. There is evidence that enslaved people from some African states were exported to other states in Africa, Europe and Asia prior to the European colonization of the Americas. The African slave trade provided a large number of slaves to Europeans.

The Atlantic slave trade was not the only slave trade from Africa, although it was the largest in volume and intensity. As Elikia M'bokolo wrote in *Le Monde diplomatique*: “The African continent was bled of its human resources via all possible routes. Across the Sahara, through the Red Sea, from the Indian Ocean ports and across the Atlantic. At least ten centuries of slavery for the benefit of the Muslim countries (from the ninth to the nineteenth). ... Four million enslaved people exported via the Red Sea, another four million[20] through the Swahili ports of the Indian Ocean, perhaps as many as nine million along the trans-Saharan caravan route, and eleven to twenty million (depending on the author) across the Atlantic Ocean.”

According to the historian John K. Thornton, Europeans usually bought enslaved people who were captured in endemic warfare between African states. There were also Africans who had made a business out of capturing Africans from neighboring ethnic groups or war captives and selling them. People living around the Niger River were transported from these markets to the coast and sold at European trading ports in exchange for muskets (matchlock between 1540–1606 but flintlock from then on) and manufactured goods such as cloth or alcohol. However, the European demand for slaves provided a large new market for the already existing trade. Further, while those held in slavery in their own region of Africa might hope to escape, those shipped away had little chance of returning to Africa.

Cultural History Grade 10
Winter Trimester 2023
Dr. Conn

Atlantic Slave Trade Primary Source Comparison Essay

In this essay, students will compare and evaluate the depictions of the Atlantic slave trade contained in two primary sources in order to try out the skill of primary source analysis and increase their understanding of the early modern Atlantic World. **Below is a sentence-by-sentence template for the essay. You must follow the template exactly.** Students will be evaluated according to our course's 3 outcomes, which in this case take the form of the following categories: Content, Critical Thinking, and Writing. You must cite your sources with in-text parenthetical citations and a Works Cited page using MLA format.

A rough draft of the essay is due Thursday, February 9 at 11:59 PM. You will receive a completion grade.

We will do a peer edit of the drafts in class on Friday, February 10.

I will also be available for one-on-one conferences about your drafts during my extra help hours on Wednesday afternoons (3:45-4:30), during class on Friday the 10th, and most days the remainder of the trimester during Periods 7, 9, 10, or 11 *by appointment* (send me an email in advance to set up a time).

A final draft of the essay is due Friday, February 17 at 11:59 PM. You will receive an evaluative grade.

In addition to following the sentence requirements for the individual paragraphs, you must write at least 2 full pages with 12-point font (Times New Roman or Garamond), double spacing, and 1-inch margins.

Template

Introduction

What was the Atlantic slave trade? [2 sentences]

Who was Jean Barbot? [1 sentence]

Who was Olaudah Equiano [1 sentence]

Thesis statement [To Barbot, a slave ship was X. To Equiano, a slave ship was Y.]

Main Body Paragraph 1: Barbot

How does Barbot depict the slave trade in his text?
What is the main thing he wants his readers to know about it?
What is at least 1 SPECIFIC EXAMPLE of the larger point Barbot is making?
[At least 7 sentences using a mix of direct quotation, paraphrase, and analysis in your own voice]

Main Body Paragraph 2: Equiano

How does Equiano depict the slave trade in his text?
What is the main thing he wants his readers to know about it?
What is at least 1 SPECIFIC EXAMPLE of the larger point Equiano is making?
[At least 7 sentences using a mix of direct quotation, paraphrase, and analysis in your own voice]

Main Body Paragraph 3: Comparison

Why is it a good idea to read both of these texts, rather than just one, if your goal is to understand the Atlantic slave trade?
Imagine that you are putting Barbot on trial for his role in the slave trade and using Equiano as evidence against him. How does Equiano's text expose problems with Barbot's account?
[At least 7 sentences. Not required to use primary source quotation in this paragraph but you can.]

[Turn paper over for the rest of the template.]

Conclusion: Significance

Restatement of thesis statement [1-2 sentences]
Restatement of comparison [1-2 sentences]
Why are these 2 texts worth reading today even though they were written a long time ago?
[3-4 sentences in your own voice]