

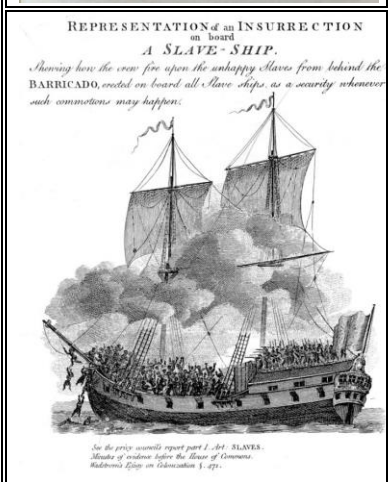
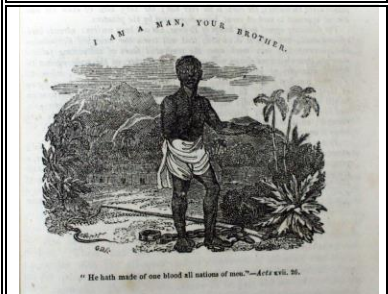
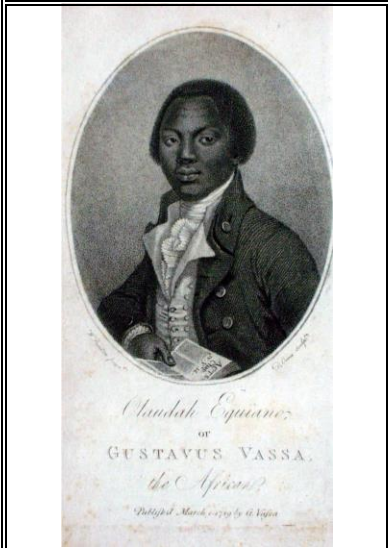
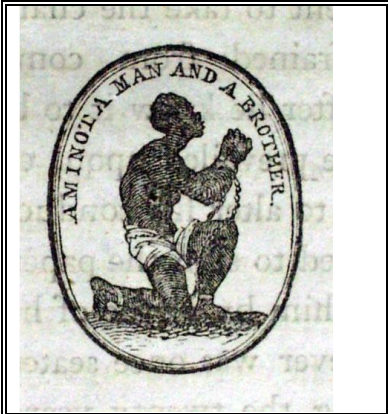
Notes

Slave sales did not just happen on the arrival of the slave ships in the West Indies. They could also happen if an estate was sold or escheated. This could lead to the heartbreaking situation of families being separated. Since slaves were not officially permitted to marry, they were not recognised as husband and wife. Children of a good working age could also be sold separately as they were worth a considerable amount of money. As can be seen from this source, it was not uncommon for children as young as six to be separated from their family. Once taken to a different plantation, it was unlikely that they would have been able to maintain contact.

Think about:

The age of the slaves being sold, how the family members felt, why was this seen as okay.

Name



Changing Perspectives: A selection of material from Durham University Library

16 February 2008

[48]

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

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[49]

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

Vol. I. D

stopped

Notes

As already seen, cruelty towards slaves was commonplace. Indeed, from the mid-seventeenth century, the harsh treatment of slaves was made official as each slave region started to produce a 'slave code'. Although the codes differed from place to place, they shared many characteristics. Slavery was made a permanent condition, and it was hereditary (passed down via the mother); slaves were not allowed to enter into any contracts or own any property; they could not leave their owner's property without permission; they could not bring any legal action against whites; and they could not marry. Any slave found guilty of breaking the slave code could be whipped, branded, imprisoned or put to death. The treatment of slaves was so harsh that it has been estimated that up to one-third of all slaves died as a result of over-work or the punishments used to enforce the work regime. This speech was made by Philip Francis, MP for Bletchingley, in the debate on a bill to abolish slavery in 1791. Although there was much popular support for the abolitionists, the Bill was still defeated.

Think about what happened to the young slave girl, the master who punished her and the argument he used in his defence. What do you think?

Punishment of a young slave

(58)

merely by the loss of his place, and by being obliged to pay the value of the Slave. He stated another instance of a girl, of fourteen, who was dreadfully whipt for coming too late to her work in the morning—fell down motionless after it, and was then dragged along the ground, by the legs, to an hospital, where she died. The murderer, though tried, was acquitted by a jury of his peers, from the idea, that it was impossible a Master should destroy his own property. That this was a notorious fact, mentioned in the Jamaica Gazette, which had even happened, *since* the question of Abolition had been started.

The only argument used against such cruelties, was, The Master's interest in the Slave: but he urged the common cruelty to horses, in which their drivers equally have an interest, as a proof that this is no security. He had never heard an instance of a West-India Master that was punished for putting his Negro to death. The propagation of them was checked, because it was thought more profitable, and less troublesome, to buy a full grown Negro, than to rear a child. Mr. Francis repeated, that his interest might have inclined him to the other side of the question; but he did not chuse to compromise between his Interest and his Duty; for, if he abandoned his Duty, he should not have been happy in this world, nor deserved not hoped to be happy in the next.

Notes

In this extract, Equiano recounts how he and his sister were kidnapped when they were children and marched off to the coast. He served with two families before being put on a slave ship sailing to the West Indies. On his arrival, Equiano was bought by a Royal Navy Captain called Pascal who renamed him Gustavus Vassa.

Think about what happened, how must Equiano have felt, why would it have been frightening for Equiano and his sister.

The evidence of John Barnes, Governor of Senegal from 1763 to 1766

Witness Examined—JOHN BARNES, Esq.
Governor of Senegal from 1763 to 1766. Thirteen 1789.
years in Africa, (p. 21). Negro government with which he was acquainted, in general, a kind of mixed P. 5.
monarchy.
There have been slaves in all Africa, as far back P. 6.
as he has heard of; they become so by capture in
war (not a great proportion, p. 8.), by conviction for
theft, murder, adultery, witchcraft; also for debt.
Has been told of many by gambling. Polygamy
universally allowed. Witchcraft frequently charged;
the trial always full and fair, before the elders of
the town. Understood principals were put to death,
rest of the family made slaves. Does not believe
it possible, that crimes should have been imputed,
from the fairness and openness of the trial. Persons
convicted generally sold for the benefit of the party
injured.

A . Never

Never heard of princes going to war, or breaking
up villages, to make slaves. Make war there as in
other countries. If prisoners cannot ransom them-
selves, must be sold.
Never knew of kidnapping by blacks; is con-
fident it would not pass unpunished.
People in the country possess slaves; some an in-
credible number. Believes they have not any power
over their lives, except prisoners of war in the act
of capture.
Great numbers brought by slave-merchants from
interiour parts. Much trade in slaves to North
Barbary and Egypt. Neighbourhood of coasts and
rivers extremely populous. War is very little de-
structive (as he always understood from the natives,
p. 18.)

Extract taken from *Abridgement of the Minutes of Evidence taken before a Committee considering the Slave Trade, 1789.*

Notes

This account given by Alexander Campbell to the Select Committee of the Privy Council on the Slave Trade paints a warm picture of slave life. Not only is their working life far from harsh but they are well dressed and disposed to feasting. It will be of little surprise therefore, to learn that Campbell was a plantation owner owning 14 estates and many hundred slaves.

Think about whether Campbell is telling the truth, why would he not tell the truth, how far does this meet your idea of what life was like on the plantation.

Life on the plantations

139. A gang of negroes consists of tradesmen, boilers, field-negroes, &c. The crop is from January or February, to June or July, according as the estate is slaved; if underhanded they begin soon. Then some tradesmen work at their trades, others help to take off the crop. In 180 or 200 negroes, there are commonly 50 cutters and tiers, 20 or 25 carters and mule boys, about the works and mill from 30 to 40; about the works from 15 to 20, watchmen, &c. about 15. These, from 12 to 15 years old, weed canes, children from 10 to 12 pick grass. The rest are superannuated, sick, or infants. When crop is over, in Grenada, they have 2 or 3 days to clear and put in order their gardens. After that they all weed ratoon and plants till the middle of August, when many of the strongest (40, more or less) go to holing, the rest still weeding. When the land is holed, and the dung carted out by mules they, carry it to the holes

1790. Negroes are naturally fond of gay dress, and tho' Part II. allowed sufficient working day cloaths, they buy fine cloaths for Sundays. It is very common, in Grenada and the Ceded Islands, to see field-negroes in white dimity jackets and breeches, and fine Holland shirts; and the women in muslins, and 4 or 5 India muslin Handkerchiefs on their heads, at 8 or 10 sh. each. He has often seen slaves give feasts to P. 146. 100 or 200 other slaves, with every rarity and wines, which he could not have given for £ 60 ster. and they very often borrow their master's plate and linen to entertain their friends. These feasts are very frequent amongst the slaves. When large hogs are killed by the plantation-negroes, they are commonly sold to the rest, in small quantities.

Negroes with families, or single ones, who wish for houses, are assisted by their masters to build them. They are commonly from 25 to 30 feet long, from 12 to 15 feet broad, the sides and tops covered with wild cane, and thatched with cane-tops. They are warmer, drier, and esteemed healthier, than if boarded. At one end there is a hog-pen outside, and at the other a hen-rooft.

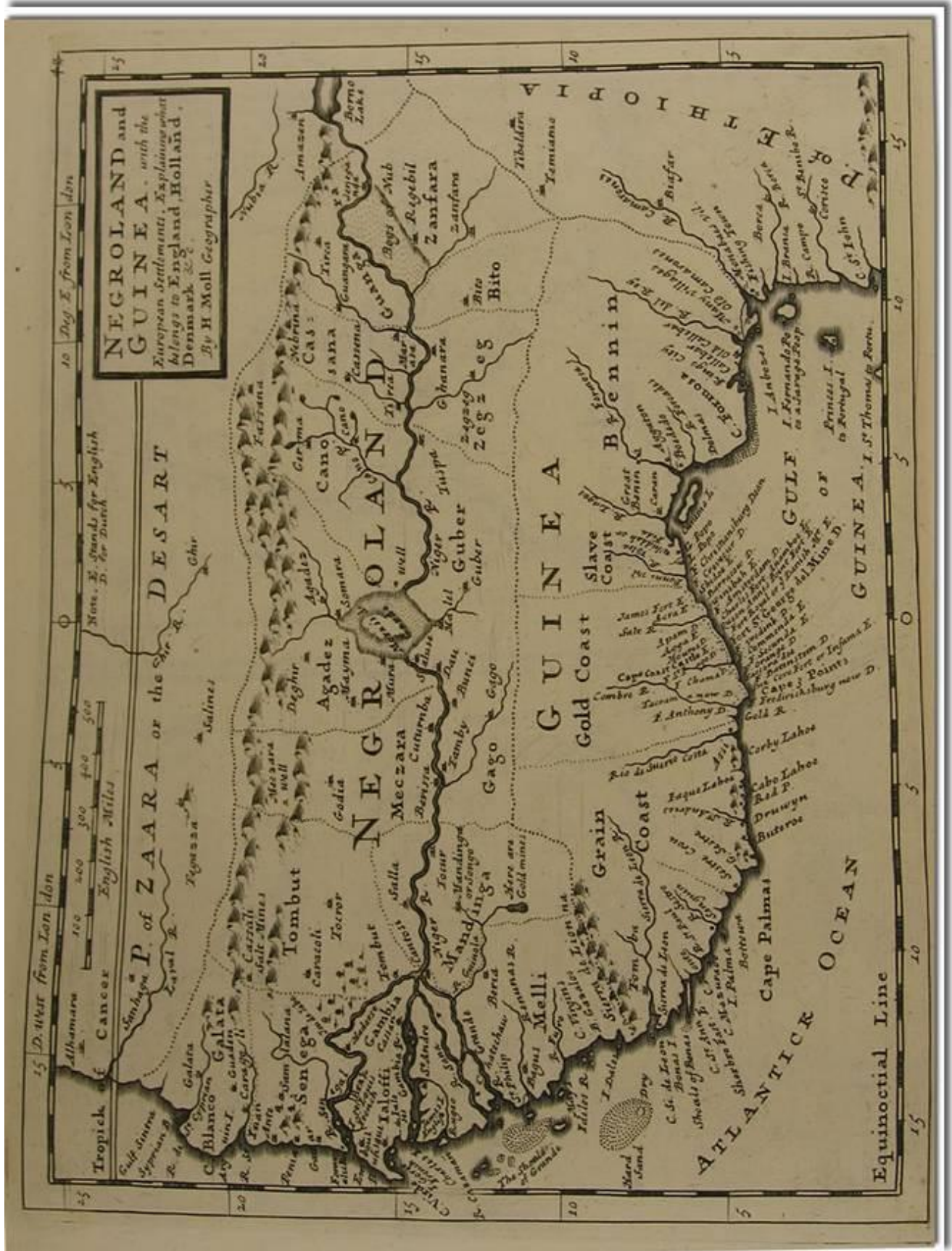
Knows no where a greater proportion of able, experienced, medical men, than in the W. Indies. There are about 40 in Grenada, where they are allowed 7sh. 6d. cur. for each slave, young and old, and paid besides for fractures and operations, and 20sh. cur. per head for inoculation. Sick slaves are immediately sent into the hospital, where 2 nurses always attend to nurse and give them physick. The Doctor, if not resident, always visits them thrice a week and oftener, if necessary, and the owner or manager, and chief nurse, examine all the sick every morning. The hospitals are conveniently divided. P. 147. There is one on every estate, obliged by law to be properly kept. Wine and every necessary is generally found for the sick. Believes the plantation hospitals, in Grenada, are generally as well attended as those in England. If the least sore appears on a negro's

Notes

From the early seventeenth century, Senegal was under the control of the French who used it as a trading post and as a naval base. During the French Wars (1756-1763) the French ceded their possession to the British who remained in control until 1779 when the French regained its posts. It stayed in French hands until 1809 when the British re-occupied Senegal. The British were there until 1817 when it was retaken by the French. Senegal remained under French control until 1958 when it became an independent republic. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Senegal was one of the countries on the West African coast exploited by the Europeans for slaves. Even Barnes admitted that it furnished between 1000 and 1400 slaves each year.

Think about the reasons Barnes gives for the enslavement of Africans, his profession and whether this makes him a reliable witness or not, does it tie in with what else you know about slavery.

Map showing the location of the slave coast



Notes

Thomas Trotter was the surgeon on board the *Brookes*, the ship used to show how slaves were stowed for the duration of the Middle Passage. In this extract, Trotter draws attention not only to the terrible physical conditions suffered by the slaves but to the mental anguish they suffered from their horrendous ordeal.

Think about what it must have been like on board the *Brookes*, do you think Trotter is telling the truth, would he exaggerate.

The view of a slave ship surgeon, Thomas Trotter

P. 84. Slaves in the passage are so crowded below, that it is impossible to walk through them, without treading on them; those who are out of irons, are locked spoonways (in the technical phrase) to one another; it is the first mate's duty to see them stowed in this way every morning; those who do not get quickly into their places, are compelled by the cat. In this situation, when the ship had much motion, they were often miserably bruised. In the passage, when the scuttles must be shut, the gratings are not sufficient for airing the rooms; he never himself could breathe freely, unless immediately under the hatchway. Never saw ventilators used in these ships; a wind-fail

AFRICA. TROTTER. 37

fail was often tried on the coast, but he remembers 1790. none used in the passage. Has seen the slaves draw-Part II. ing their breath with all those laborious and anxious efforts for life, which is observed in expiring animals, subjected by experiment to foul air, or in the exhausted receiver of an air pump; has also seen them, when the tarpawlings have inadvertently been thrown over the gratings, attempting to heave them up, crying out, "Kickeraboo, kickeraboo," i. e. "We are dying;" on removing the tarpawlings and gratings, they would fly to the hatchway with all the signs of terror, and dread of suffocation; many whom he has seen in a dying state, have recovered, by being brought thither, or on the deck; others were irrecoverably lost, by suffocation, having had no previous signs of indisposition. P. 85.

Slaves, on being brought on board, shew signs of extreme distress and despair, from a feeling of their situation, and regret at being torn from friends and connections; many retain those impressions for a long time; in proof of which, the slaves being often heard in the night, making an howling melancholy noise, expressive of extreme anguish; he repeatedly ordered the woman, who had been his interpreter, to inquire the cause; she discovered it to be owing to their having dreamed they were in their own country, and finding themselves when awake, in the hold of a slave ship. This exquisite sensibility was particularly observable among the women, many of whom, on such occasions, he found in hysterical fits.

They sailed after dark in the night, when the slaves P. 86. were secured below, to prevent their shewing signs of discontent at leaving the coast; he thinks this the reason, because every ship that left the road while the Brooks was there, left it in the night; has heard the custom is general.

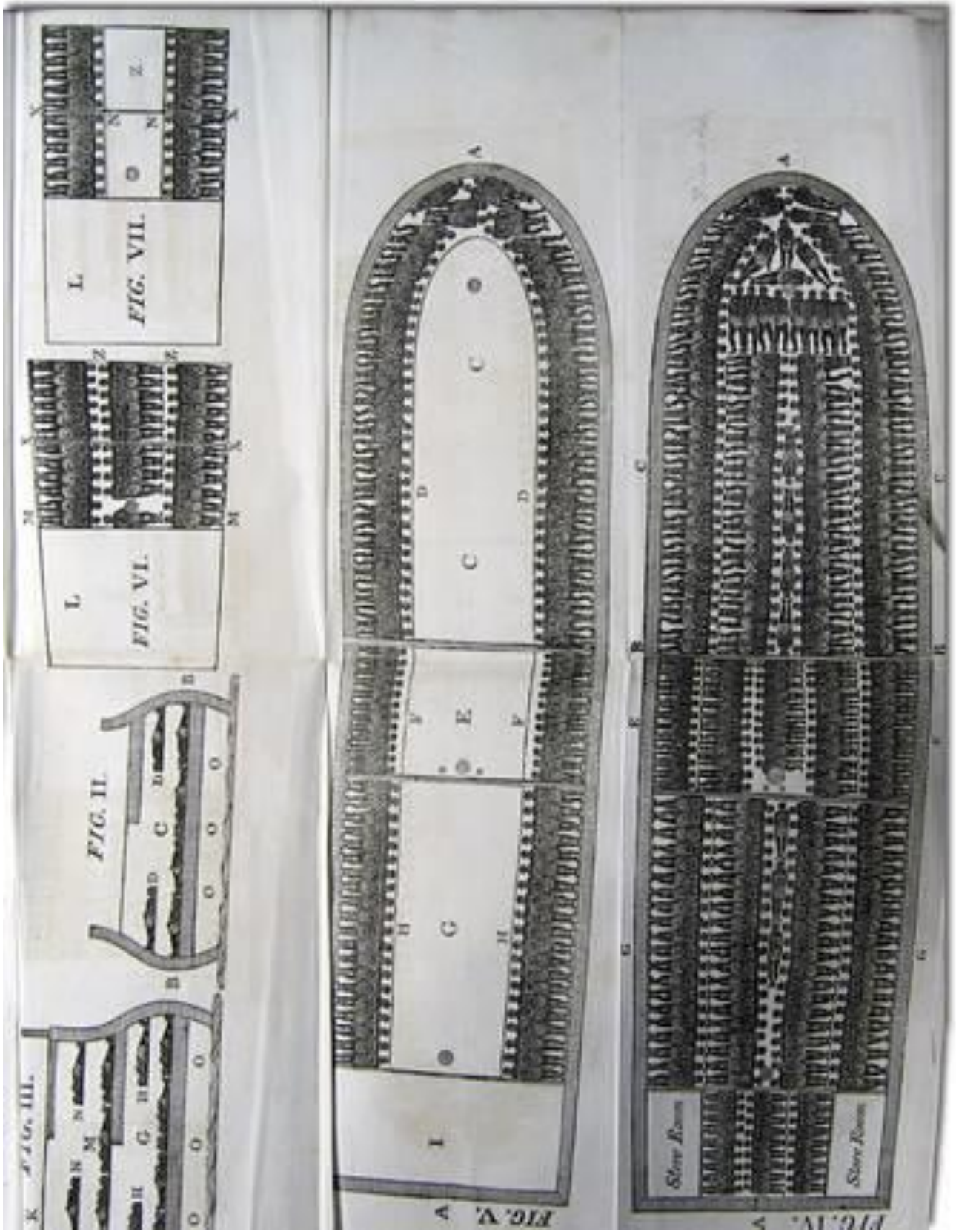
Thinks they bought upwards of 600 slaves, and lost about 70 in the voyage.

As to insurrections among the slaves; a number of the strongest men in their ship had one night sawed

Notes

This map, showing the west coast of Africa, was published in 1736. It shows quite clearly how this part of Africa was seen as a place to be exploited for its grain, its gold and its people.

Think about what it tells us about European attitudes to Africa in the 18th century.



Notes

This infamous image shows the slave ship *Brookes* which had been built in Liverpool in 1781. Between 1781 and 1804 it operated as a slave ship, sailing from the Gold Coast to the West Indies. It could accommodate over 450 slaves. The plan, showing how slaves could be stowed aboard, was produced by the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade to demonstrate the inhuman conditions in which slaves were kept on the Middle Passage. Copies of the illustration were distributed and it has become one of the iconic images relating to the slave trade. Accompanying the image was a description explaining how the Committee allocated space to each slave based on the provisions of Dolben's Act. It is worth noting that although using the Committee's calculations it is possible to fit 454 slaves on board the ship, on one journey the *Brookes* carried over 600 slaves.

Think about how the image compares to what it actually feels like.