

## The Roots of Slavery

### Materials:

- Examples of early slavery as a universal institution (China, Arab Muslims, Europeans, Africans)
- Copies of Document Illustrations A and B
- Copies of dramatized audio/dialog materials – “Capture” and “Middle Passage”
- Copies of maps A, B, and C
- Copies of slave ship diagram
- British were central to the Atlantic Slave Trade: review background information

### Plan of Instruction:

1. Today we are going to study the universal history of slavery throughout the world. How many of you know about slavery in the American Colonies? Did you think that slavery originated in the American colonies?

Did you know that some blacks kidnapped and sold other blacks to the slave trade?

2. Read background information on slavery as a universal institution.

- Hand out copies of Document Illustrations A and B
- Hand out copies of Maps A, B, and C
- Lead Discussion on background of universal slavery

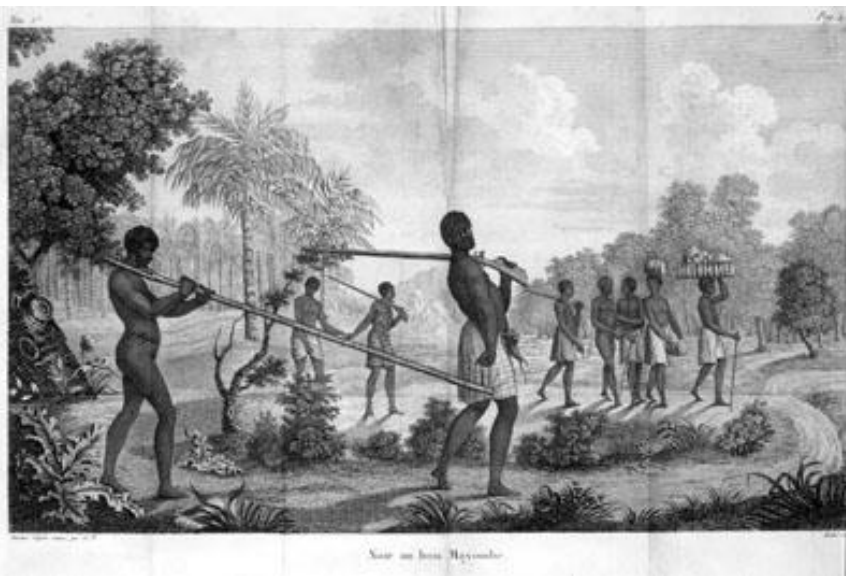
### Lecture: Background Information on Slavery

Slavery is a universal institution - older than the first human records. It flourished throughout the world. China was the greatest merchant of human beings and in the Shang Dynasty (1600 – 1046 BC) enslaved five percent of their population. In the Roman Empire (27 BC to 476 AD), slaves in city of Rome were half of the population. Arab Muslims captured and enslaved Africans, and later they enslaved Christians. Europeans enslaved other Europeans, and long before the Europeans arrived, Africans enslaved other Africans.

“It is essential to understand that the slave trade is not only a product of evil Europeans but also corrupt Africans. Africans became victimizers and victims as tribes like the Aja of West Africa became the victims of other tribes like the Dahomey and Oyo who captured and sold them to the European slave traders. The Aja people, located on the slave coast, were either prisoner of war or caught in the fields, and

marched to the coast to be traded for money and guns. Families would even sell their family members to pay a debt or to survive financially.” (*Tyranny of Experts* by William Easterly)

Many tribes were equally ruthless as the slave trade developed between 1650 and 1860, bringing slaves from Senegal, Sierra Leone, the Slave Coast, the Congo, and Angola to the coast to be sold. The Atlantic slave trade greatly expanded during this time, and the gun became the deciding factor in the power of the tribes involved in the slave trade.



### 3. Whole Class Discussion



- What clues can you find concerning who these people might be?
- What are the roles that each individual person played?
- What do you think the reasons are that Africans captured other Africans for the slave trade?
- How did some tribes benefit from the slave trade?

4. Listen to dramatization audio/dialog materials for Capture of Olaudah Equiano & Quobna Ottobah Cugoano

**Olaudah Equiano Capture:** [http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/asset79017\\_1374-abolition.html](http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/asset79017_1374-abolition.html)

“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. My sister and I were separated, and I ended up in the hands of a slave dealer who supplied the Atlantic slave ships. Six months later I found myself on board a slave ship.” *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (From the Abolition Project, East of England Broadband Network)

**Quobna Ottobah Cugoano Capture:** [http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/asset79014\\_1374-abolition.html](http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/asset79014_1374-abolition.html)

“With some of the children of my uncle's relations, I was too bold in going into the woods to gather fruit and catch birds...One day several ruffians came upon us suddenly, we had wronged their lord, and we must go and answer it before him...Some of us tried in vain to run away, but pistols and cutlasses were soon introduced, threatening, that if we tried to move, we should all lie dead on the spot. One of them pretended to be more friendly than the rest and said that he would speak to their lord to get us clear, and desired that we should follow him; we were then immediately divided into different parties and driven after him. We were soon led out of the way which we knew...into slavery.”

*Wicked Traffic of Slavery* (1787)

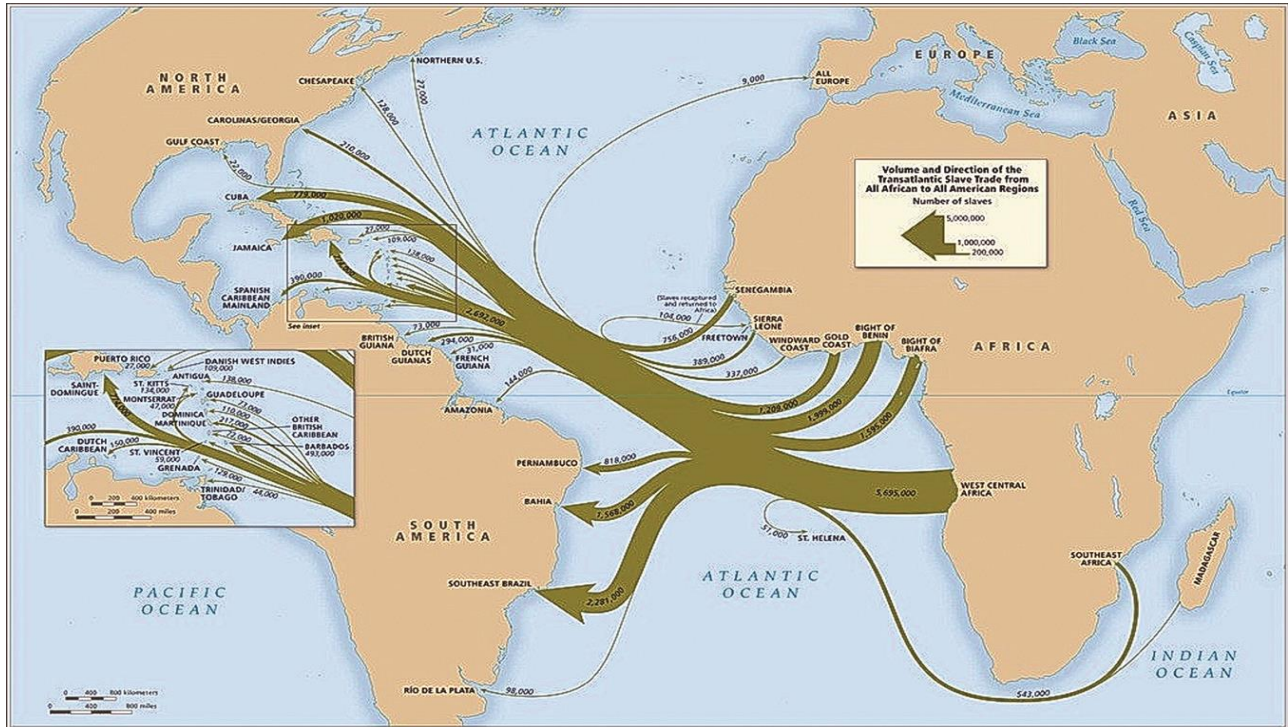
- How were the experiences for Oladuah and Quobna similar?
- How were their experiences different?
- What clues are given about their captors?
- Where were they sold?
- Do you think it is more effective to have an actor read the passage or for you to read it?
- What does the slave port map, **A**, show you about the countries and ports in Africa?
- Compare and study maps **B** and **C**. What do they tell you about where these slaves were sent?
- The British were central to the Atlantic Slave Trade. How did they use their slaves.

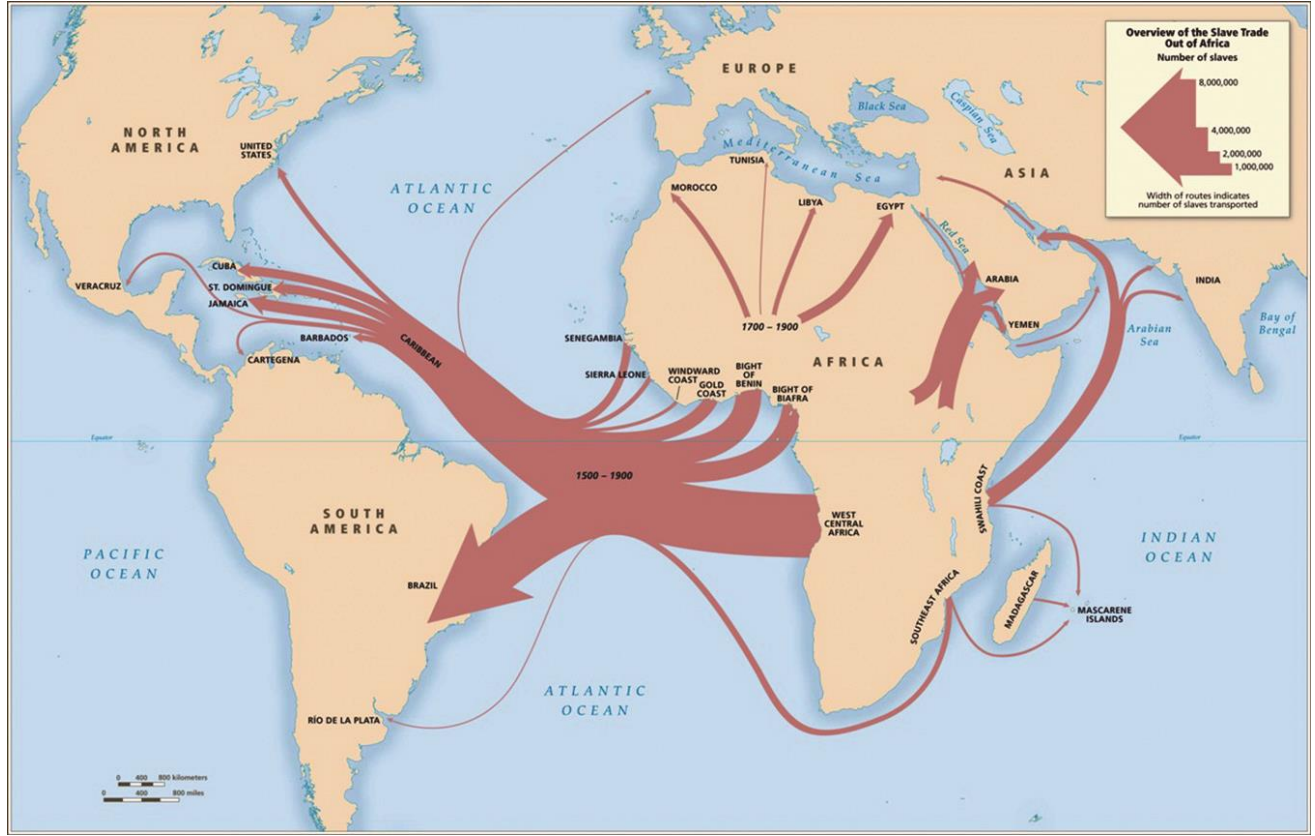


**A**



**B**





**C**

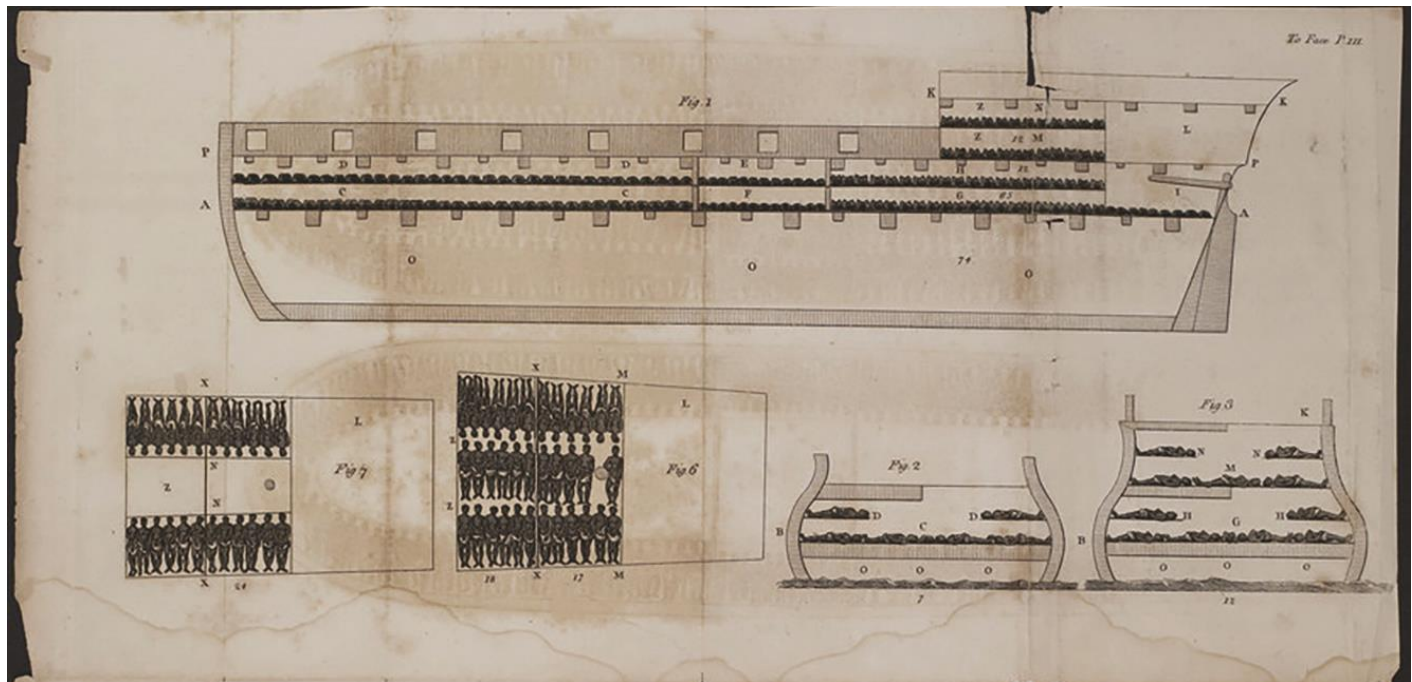
**Oludah Equiano – Middle Passage** <http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/audio77080-abolition.html>

“At last, when the ship we were in, had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel...The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome...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 perspiration, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought a sickness among the slave, of which many died – thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers.” *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oludah Equiano* (From the Abolition Project, East of England Broadband Network)

**Ouobna Ottabah Cugoano – Middle Passage** [http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/asset79015\\_1374-abolition.html](http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/asset79015_1374-abolition.html)

“There was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men...Death was preferable to life, and a plan was made to blow up the ship and perish altogether in the flames; but we were betrayed...” Ottobah Cugoano, *Wicked Traffic of Slavery* (1787)

- What descriptions did each slave write that disturbed you?
- What was the purpose of putting so many people so close together in the ship?
- Do you think it is more effective to have an actor read the passage or for you to read it?
- How were each of their experiences similar and different?



Slave Ship Diagram

## 5. Lecture: British Were Central to the Atlantic Slave Trade

In 1493, Columbus stopped off in the Canary Islands and carried back to Hispaniola a gift of sugar cane. Sugar cane was already a cash crop in Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. Now, the British brought it to Barbados, which had near-perfect environmental conditions for it. The sugar colonies were Britain's



most valuable colonies, and by 1700, Barbados was the most important, more important than the American Colonies. At first, the British brought servants to grow this labor-intensive crop, then relied upon and lost the indigenous labor force to European diseases, so it became necessary to find another replaceable labor force. The first African slaves were bought and transported from West Africa to the West Indies to work in the sugar cane fields and cultivate other crops such as coffee, cocoa, indigo, and tobacco.

The British were central to the Atlantic Slave Trade; they may not have started it, but they perfected it, carrying more Africans to the West Indies than any other nation. The slave trade depended on capturing slaves from inland tribes and transporting them to the coast. The tribes would sell them to the slave traders and take them to the West Indies and later to the American colonies. Dozens of ports, thousands of ships, tens of thousands of sailors brought this human cargo to Barbados, and other sugar colonies.

This became known as the Triangular Slave Trade, which “is a simplified term for the trading patterns developed among the American Colonies, the West Indies, the coast of Africa, and the British Isles... One triangle began with New England merchants transporting flour, meat, and other provisions to the West Indies, whose commitment to staple crops required them to import food. The West Indies exchanged food for sugar, which New Englanders carried and exchanged for manufactured goods brought back to the colonies. Another triangle took the New Englanders first to the coast of Africa, where simple manufactured goods from America exchanged products for slaves. The slaves were then transported over the terrible Middle Passage to the West Indies and traded for rum and molasses sold at home.”  
*(The Reader’s Companion to American History, by Eric Foner & John A. Garraty)*

Sugar cane and slavery went together. The Chesapeake planters, in the American Colonies, noticed how black slavery in the West Indies appeared to be a better long-term investment than indentured servitude. So, the replaceable workforce in the American Colonies shifted from indentured servitude, and convicts to open slavery. After 1680, the flow of indentured servants began to be diminished, being replaced by African slavery.

#### 6. Debrief:

- Is slavery a universal institution? Explain.
- Look at map **B**. Where were the largest numbers of Africans sent in the Americas? Why?
- What role did the British have in helping to introduce slavery to the American colonies?
- Why is it important to know about the history of Olaudah Equiano and Ouobna Ottobah Cugoano?





Olaudah Equiano (1745 – 1797)

7. Lesson Extension: This lesson identifies the importance of understanding that slavery did not originate within the American Colonies; it is a universal institution. Blacks captured blacks, and sold them to Europeans who in turn, sold them to a number of countries to a life of enslavement. The British were very central in this Atlantic Slave Trade, but warring tribes in Africa also played a role in the Atlantic Slave Trade. Below are just two examples of support on the role of blacks in the slave trade.

Resources:

<https://www.theroot.com/did-black-people-own-slaves-1790895436>

<https://listverse.com/2017/06/06/top-10-black-slaveowners/>