

Quobna Ottobah Cugoano

Excerpts from *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*

After I was ordered out, the horrors I soon saw and felt, cannot be well described; I saw many of my miserable countrymen chained two and two, some hand-cuffed, and some with their hands tied behind.

When a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men.

Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner. And when we found ourselves at last taken away, death was more preferable than life.

A plan was concerted amongst us, that we might burn and blow up the ship, and to perish all together in the flames. It was common for the dirty filthy sailors to take African women and lie upon their bodies but the men were chained and pent up in holes. It was the women and boys which were to burn the ship. Though that was prevented, the discovery was likewise a cruel bloody scene.

Olaudah Equiano

Excerpts from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano: or Gustavus Vassa, the African*

When I looked round the ship and saw a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate, and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.

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 any thing.

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 refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely.

I had never experienced any thing of this kind before. I would have jumped over the side, but I could not, the crew used to watch us very closely 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.

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. The air soon became unfit for respiration and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died.

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.

This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.

One day, when we had a smooth sea, and a moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen, who were chained together, preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings, and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow also followed their example.

I believe many more would soon have done the same, if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew. Two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and afterwards flogged him unmercifully, for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery.