

Atlantic Crossing

Historians claim that Europeans purchased and transported around eleven million Africans, although many believe it to be greater. Between 1660-1807 Britain transported up to 3.7 million slaves. The voyage from Africa to the Americas could take over two months. European crews packed African captives into the holds of ships. During the journey the slaves endured appalling conditions. Over-crowding, poor ventilation, unhygienic sanitary conditions and insufficient food and water led to the virulent spread of diseases. Around 450,000 Africans died onboard British ships.

The ship's crew were also susceptible to death, particularly from diseases picked up on the African coast. Higher-ranking officers sometimes mistreated their own crew. Equiano, a captive from Ibbassee, recalls witnessing a sailor being flogged to death.

Slave rebellions occurred on one in every ten ships. As a result slave ships were heavily manned and armed. The high cost of such preventative measures reduced the number of slaves that the Europeans shipped by as much as 10%: the equivalent of 1,000,000 Africans.

Enslaved people were packed into the hulls of ships as tightly as possible, with no room to move or shift positions. The temperature and air quality down in the hull of slave ships was so stifling that many people died from heat exhaustion. On average, 25% of the people embarked on slave ships did not survive the Atlantic crossing. Their bodies suffered the indignity of being thrown overboard without any burial rites. Dying or dead slaves stayed chained to the living until it was time to bring the living up on deck for fresh air and exercise.

Olaudah Equiano published his autobiography in 1789 as *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African*. It told how he was kidnapped from his home in West Africa, of his experiences as an enslaved person, how he freed himself, and his remarkable travels thereafter. This book was widely read and sold in huge numbers.

Both Equiano and Cugoana travelled throughout Britain giving lectures and publicising their writing.

2. Brookes Ship

Diagram of a slave ship Caption Diagram showing cross-sections of a trans-Atlantic slave ship. The drawing illustrates how space on board could be optimised to accommodate a The image of the Liverpool slave ship, the Brookes, was first published by the Plymouth Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in January 1789. The London committee had it carefully redrawn to ensure accuracy. It shows 482 slaves packed into the ship, although on some voyages the Brookes actually carried as many as 740 captives.

Over 7000 were printed as posters and appeared in homes and inns throughout the country. The image is shocking and immediately effective in conveying the inhumanity of slavery. It had a huge impact in the 18th century, when images of any sort were much less common than they are today. s many slaves as possible. Location unknown, circa 1800