

NAME:

DATE:

CLASS:

DBQ FOCUS: Atlantic Slave Trade



Document-Based Question Format

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Documents (The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.) This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents.

Write a response that:

- Has a relevant **thesis** and **supports that thesis with evidence** from the documents.
- Cites evidence from included source perspectives.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the author's points of view.

Historical Context: As all the Kings, Explorers and business financiers had hoped, the Americas were full of opportunities to make money. Gold, silver and other minerals could be mined, and tobacco, sugar and other crops could be grown on plantations. In order to make use of these resources there would have to be a reliable supply of laborers to do the work. The Native American population had dwindled due to disease and war and did not provide enough labor. However, the Europeans had access to another cheap labor market that already existed, the African Slave Trade. While the use of slaves has existed in societies for millennia, it was not until the mid fifteenth century that Europeans began trading and capturing slaves from the African continent, just in time for the discovery of the Americas... Between 1450 and 1870 over ten million humans were taken from Africa.

Question

How does the absence of humanitarian concerns influence the treatment of slaves during the slave trade?

Document 1

Source: Merrick Whitcomb, ed., "The Gold of the Indies — 1559,"
The University of Pennsylvania

Letter about Spain's interactions with its colonies in 1559

From New Spain are obtained gold, silver and other things. One fifth of all profits go to the king. Great quantities of gold and silver used to be out in the open; with all of it gone, now gold and silver have to be mined.

The work is hard and the Spaniards are not willing to do the work, Natives who have become Christians are not allowed to be forced to do the work because the Emperor freed them. So now it is necessary to acquire negro slaves [enslaved Africans], who are brought from the coasts of Africa. Their masters are making them work too hard and giving them too little to eat, they fall sick and the greater part of them die. . . .

Student Analysis

Why do the Spanish colonies believe that the acquisition Africans is a necessity?

Document 2

Source: Offobah Cugoano describes his capture into slavery

I was early snatched away from my native country, with about eighteen or twenty more boys and girls, as we were playing in a field. We lived but a few days' journey from the coast where we were kid-napped, and consigned to Grenada... We were soon led out of the way which we knew, and towards evening, as we came in sight of a town. I was soon conducted to a prison, for three days, where I heard the groans and cries of many, and saw some of my fellow-captives.

But when a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but the 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

Student Analysis

Describe Cugoano's experience as he discusses his capture into slavery.

Document 3

Source: Thomas Wallace Knox *The Boy Travelers on the Congo, 1888*



Student Analysis

According to this image, how are the slaves treated by their African captors?

Document 4

Source: *Living Africans Thrown Overboard the Slave Ship Zong 1781*

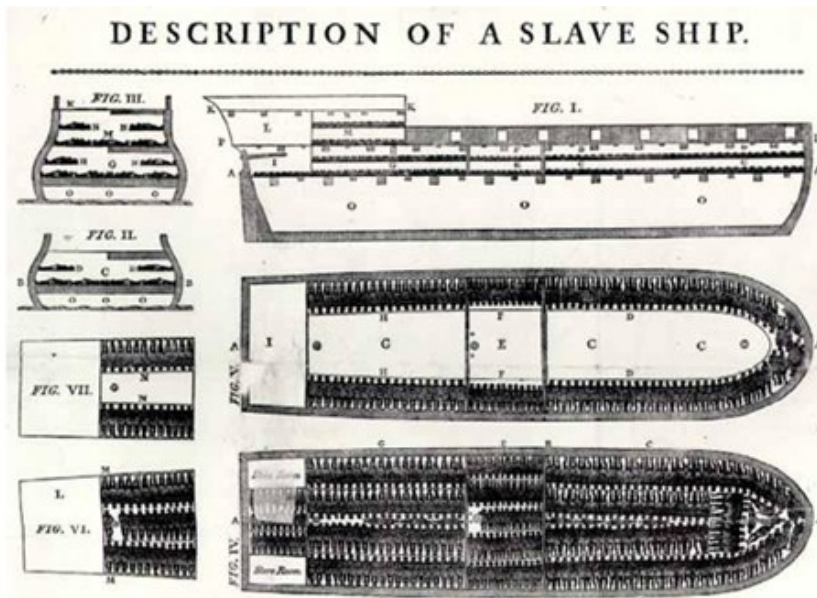


Student Analysis

It is said that the Africa and the New World are bridged from the bones of the Atlantic slave trade. How does this illustration support that notion?

Document 5

Source: *The Slave Ship the Brookes 1789*, Wilberforce House, Kingston upon Hull City Museums and Art Galleries



Student Analysis

Provide your thoughts on the conditions aboard slave ships.

Document 6

Source: Walsh, Robert, *Notices of Brazil in 1828 and 1829* (1831).

The height sometimes between decks was only eighteen inches, so that the unfortunate beings could not turn round or even on their sides, the elevation being less than the breadth of their shoulders; and here they are usually chained to the decks by the neck and legs. In such a place the sense of misery and suffocation is so great that the Negroes... are driven to a frenzy.

Student Analysis

Why would captive Africans become disoriented and mentally unstable during the middle passage?

Document 7

Source: James Ramsay, *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784):

The ordinary punishments of slaves, for the common crimes of neglect, absence from work, eating the sugar cane, theft, are cart whipping, beating with a stick, sometimes to the breaking of bones, the chain, an iron crook about the neck... a ring about the ankle, and confinement in the dungeon. There have been instances of slitting of ears, breaking of limbs, so as to make amputation necessary, beating out of eyes, and castration...

In short, in the place of decency, sympathy, morality, and religion; slavery produces cruelty and oppression. It is true, that the unfeeling application of the ordinary punishments ruins the constitution, and shortens the life of many a poor wretch

Student Analysis

How are physical inflictions and terrorism used to control Africans?

Document 8

Source: *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* 1789

Another negro man was half hanged, and then burnt, for attempting to poison a cruel overseer. Thus, by repeated cruelties, are the wretched first urged to despair, and then murdered, because they still retain so much of human nature about them as to wish to put an end to their misery, and retaliate on their tyrants. These overseers are indeed for the most part persons of the worst character of any denomination of men in the West Indies.

Unfortunately, many humane gentlemen, but not residing on their estates, are obliged to leave the management of them in the hands of these human butchers, who cut and mangle the slaves in a shocking manner on the most trifling occasions, and altogether treat them in every respect like brutes .

Student Analysis

How is descent dealt with on plantations?

Document 9

Source: John Barbot, "A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea," in Thomas Astley and John Churchill, eds., Collection of Voyages and Travels (London, 1732).

As the slaves come down to Fida from the inland country, they are put into a booth, or prison, built for that purpose, near the beach, all of them together; and when the Europeans are to receive them, every part of every one of them, to the smallest member, men and women being all stark naked... each of the others, which have passed as good, is marked on the breast, with a red-hot iron, imprinting the mark of the French, English, or Dutch companies, that so each nation may distinguish their own.

Student Analysis

What specific act marks how an African's freedom is ultimately symbolically lost?

Document 10

Source: Alexander Falconbridge, An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa (London, 1788).

Alexander Falconbridge describes the reaction of enslaved Africans to their sale.

When the ships arrive in the West Indies ... Previously the sick or refuse slaves, of which there are frequently many, are usually conveyed on shore and sold at a tavern, by vendue or public auction. These in general are purchased...upon speculation, at so low a price as five or six dollars a head... Sometimes the captains march their slaves through the town at which they intend to dispose of them, and then place them in rows where they are examined and purchased.

The mode of selling them by scramble having fallen under my observation the oftenest, I shall be more particular in describing it. Being some years ago, at one of the islands in the West Indies, I was witness to a sale by scramble, where about 250 Negroes were sold. Upon this occasion all the Negroes scrambled for bear an equal price; which is agreed upon between the captains and the purchasers before the sale begins. On a day appointed, the Negroes were landed and placed together in a large yard belonging to the merchants to whom the ship was consigned. As soon as the hour agreed on arrived, the doors of the yard were suddenly thrown open and in rushed a considerable number of purchasers, with all the ferocity of brutes. Some instantly seized such of the Negroes as they could conveniently lay hold of with their hands. Others being prepared with several handkerchiefs tied together, encircled as many as they were able. While others, by means of a rope, effected the same purpose.

Various deceptions are used in the disposal of sick slaves and many of these must excite in every humane mind the liveliest sensations of horror. I have been well informed that a Liverpool captain boasted of his having cheated some Jews by the following stratagem. A lot of slaves afflicted with the flux, being about to be landed for sale, he directed the ship's surgeons to stop the anus of each of them with oakum. Thus prepared they were landed and taken to the accustomed place of sale, where, being unable to stand but for a very short time, they were usually permitted to sit. The buyers, when they examined them, oblige them to stand up in order to see if there be any discharge; and when they do not perceive this appearance they consider it as a symptom of recovery. In the present instance, such an appearance being prevented, the bargain was struck and the slaves were accordingly sold. But it was not long before discovery ensued...

Student Analysis

Upon arrival to the New World how are the sick or undesirable slaves treated?

Describe how a sale by scramble is conducted.

Why would the ship captain have intentionally covered up the diseased reality of the slaves in his control?