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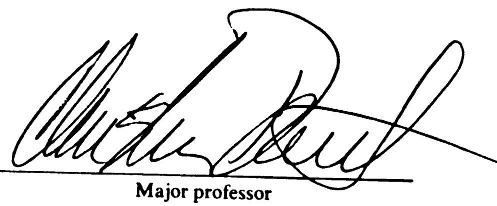

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THE GREAT DIVIDE: ASPECTS OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE IN THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

By

Erik J. W. Hofstee

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ABSTRACT

THE GREAT DIVIDE: THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE IN THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

By

Erik J. W. Hofstee

This work concentrates on previously un- and understudied aspects of the social history of the middle passage in the Atlantic slave trade. I argue that the middle passage has a social history that can be recovered, and that there are identifiable forces that shaped that history. Slavery on a slaving vessel is conceptualized as a particular form of enslavement that was as much a system as land-based slave systems. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence are used.

As a counter-weight to the prevailing historiography, I open my work with a chapter on the experiences of women on the middle passage. The second chapter considers the experiences of children and infants. The third chapter considers the crew of slaving vessels, and includes a large section devoted to black crewmembers. The second part of the dissertation describes a number of the most important forces that shaped the voyage. Resistance and rebellion, mutiny and survival strategies of both crew and slaves are examined in the context of the constrained stage of the slaving vessel and the prevailing systems of control. The conclusion includes a number of suggestions for further research.

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To my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No dissertation is a solo endeavor, and mine is no exception. I have relied on the work and assistance of more people than I can readily acknowledge here. There are too many scholars to whom I owe an intellectual debt – writers on the middle passage, on slavery, on American history, and other fields – to mention here. While I differ with some upon occasion, collectively their research and ideas have created the intellectual foundation upon which this work builds.

I have been blessed with a supportive dissertation committee. The chair of my committee, Professor Christine Daniels is a rigorous scholar with a keen mind and a ready sense of humor. She is also a formidable critic of substance and style. Professor Darlene Clarke-Hine believed in my work, offered wise council, and arranged desperately needed RA positions. Professor Richard Thomas' passion for his work remains an inspiration. Both taught me that caring and writing about the facts are not incompatible. Professor Jim McClintock supported me from the beginning with professional advice and guidance for which I remain grateful. Professor Harrow proved to be an outside reader with penetrating insights. I am grateful to the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State University for the award of a Merit Scholarship which made much of the research in this dissertation possible.

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Some debts can be acknowledged, but never repaid. So it is with my debt to my parents, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. Irene Shim has been more supportive than anyone has a right to expect, and in more ways than I could possibly recount or even recall. Her support during graduate school and after has meant everything to me. Dr. Jeffrey Hodges and Professor Ralph Bauer are both everything friends should be, and more.

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INTRODUCTION

"T'isn't he who has stood and looked on, that can tell you what slavery is, - 'tis he who has endured ... I was black ... but I had the feelings of a man as well as any man"[1]

The quote above rightly cautions against the hubris implicit in supposing that the experiences of those involved in the Atlantic slave trade can be fully understood by historians. But it also makes a case for a serious, comprehensive attempt at recovering the experiences and the structure that gave rise to them. The social history work that exists on the middle passage tends either to be general and border on the sensationalist, or to be case studies that are either very specialized or very brief.[2] Recent writing especially,

[1] Quoted in K. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, Vintage Books, 1964), 430.

[2] For an example of the first, see Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1962). Mannix and Cowley, an amateur historian and a journalist, wrote what has by default become the standard reference work for those seeking information on the social history of the slave trade. Yet it is a deeply flawed book in many respects; it is overly sensationalist, does not provide a balanced view of the trade, and is very poorly referenced. The alternative, M. Burnside's *Spirit of the Passage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) is a coffee table book, thinly referenced, and with little depth. Though better than *Black Cargoes*, it is not an acceptable social history of the middle passage. Yet there are few other alternatives, as the social history of the middle passage is generally regulated to a few pages in books dealing with slavery and the slave trade as a whole. See for examples J.M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1990) or R.L. Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979). There are a number of detailed case studies available, such as Nigel Tattersfield's *The Forgotten Trade Comprising the log of the Daniel and Henry of 1700 and Accounts of the Slave Trade from the Minor ports of England, 1698-1725* (London: J. Cape, 1991), and Suzanne Schwartz's *Slave Captain - The Career of James Irving in the Liverpool Slave Trade* (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1995). But these books are not able to generalize confidently, and do not address the structure of the middle passage. There are several case studies in scholarly articles extant, such as M. Boucher's "The Voyage of a Cape Slaver in 1742," *Historia* 24, 1 (1979), Walter E. Minchinton's "The Voyage of the Snow Africa," *Mariner's Mirror* 37, 3 (1951), Bruce L. Mouser's, "The Voyage of the Good Sloop Dolphin to Africa 1795-96," *American Neptune* 37, 4 (1978) and Michael E. Stevens' "'To Get as Many Slaves as You Can': An 1807 Slaving Voyage," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 87, 3 (1986). These types of articles have fallen out of favour in recent times, partly because of the demographic emphasis on work on the middle passage, and partly because they add little new to the existing body of knowledge, as they cannot generalize outside of their particular topic. There is also an incomplete body of work that seeks to understand a particular aspect of the social history of the middle passage. J.H. Hodson's "The Letter Book of Robert Bostock, A Merchant in the Liverpool Slave Trade, 1789-1792," *Liverpool Bulletin*, 3 (1953), W. N. Boog Watson's "The Guinea Trade and Some of Its Surgeons (with Special Reference to the Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh)," *Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh* 14, 4 (1969) and Stephen D. Behrendt's "Slave-Ship Crews and the Health Care of Slaves," *Unpublished paper, Canadian Association of African Studies Annual Meeting* (Toronto, May 1991) are examples of this type of work. However, these are too limited in scope to satisfy the reader seeking to understand the middle passage as a dynamic system, and to place the experiences of crew and

partly due to a backlash against the tales of horror and morbidity, has not focused on the middle passage other than to quantify and, to a lesser degree, to probe very specialized aspects of the trade. The trend for the past three decades has been to focus on the trade as a whole and on demographics in particular.[3]

Even when described in numbers, the middle passage still speaks to the imagination as do few other historical topics. The Atlantic slave trade was a coerced migration between Africa and the New World that spanned several centuries and condemned at least 11.5 million Africans to the middle passage.[4] Over ten million individuals were delivered into slavery in the New World, and about 1.5 million individuals died on the passage.[5] The massive exodus from Africa took between thirty-five and forty thousand voyages, and employed hundreds of thousands sailors. These, and related statistical questions have formed the mainstay of historical inquiry into the middle passage. Demographic and quantitative questions such as numbers, origins, distribution, time, and the like have been debated in numerous books and articles. The quantitative work reached its pinnacle with the publication of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade data set in late 1999 that compiled information on 27,233 distinct voyages.[6] Although it is in

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slaves within that context. In addition, the sum of these types of studies does not amount to anything approaching a comprehensive social history of the middle passage. The experiences of women slaves, children, and black crew members have received little or no attention, to name but a few glaring omissions.

[3] For a comprehensive overview of the directions scholarship on the Atlantic slave trade has taken up to 1990, see Hebert S. Klein, "Recent Trends in the Study of the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Indian Historical Review* 15, 1-2 (1988-89). Klein recognizes the lacuna in the social history of the trade in his article.

[4] The term "New World" is a problematic one, exclusively reflecting the perspective of the European conquerors, settlers and their descendants. It is, however, a much more manageable phrase than "parts of the North American continent, most of the South American continent, and the slave holding islands." Thus I use it, albeit with reservations. Similarly, I occasionally use the word "owner" to refer to the purchaser of a slave. I use this term to reflect the legal and social relation between the two individuals. I do not imply that the enslaved was "owned" in any other sense.

[5] These are the scholarly consensus figures for the Atlantic slave trade to the Americas after 1600. D. Eltis, David Richardson, Stephen D. Behrendt, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5.

[6] D. Eltis et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (CD-ROM).

many respects incomplete, it is an astounding achievement that will prove invaluable in further writing on the topic. I have used it extensively in this work. It is fair to argue that demography must come before detailed social histories, but there is the risk of bogging down in statistics, especially when new work makes only relatively minor adjustments to previously published work.[7] The middle passage has been extensively measured, but it has been only superficially described, and the dynamics of the voyage are not well understood.

Too great a focus on the statistics of the trade carries with it the danger of losing sight of the individuals caught up in it, and can imply that the experiences were homogenous for all involved. This one-dimensional approach does not do the historical reality of the middle passage justice. For all the quantitative work published, many of the most elementary questions on the social history of the middle passage have yet to be asked, let alone answered. Too little is known about the experiences of the men, women, children, and crew onboard the slavers, and about their interactions with each other, and about the forces shaping those interactions. Unless the experiences of slaves and slavers are recovered and the dynamics of slaving voyages probed, statistics have the potential to sanitize as much as to elucidate. It is too easy to speak glibly of "a 12 % mortality rate" or some other statistical generalization, without understanding the experiences that lay behind the numbers. There is a real risk of trivializing the experiences of slaves and slavers alike by transforming their experiences into mathematical calculations.

The middle passage can be legitimately conceptualized in many different ways. A massive migration, requiring demographic analysis is one. It can also be conceptualized

[7] Eltis, a major contributor to "the numbers game", has called for more attention to be devoted to the social history of the trade, arguing that numbers tend to sanitize the reality of the trade. David Eltis, "The

as a journey of fear and horror, as a cultural highway, as a forge shaping a new collective identity, or as a tendril of the capitalist / mercantilist system, among others. The middle passage was a physical journey, but also a mental journey; a journey away from, but also towards; an act of destruction, but also formative.[8] To study the middle passage in the Atlantic slave trade is to accept contradictions, just as in the study of land-based slavery. But as in land-based slavery, the middle passage was a systemic process, one from which experiences can be distilled, and patterns recognized and accounted for. My work does not advocate any particular interpretation of the middle passage. I am interested in making a preliminary attempt at recovering the experiences of those on board, and in understanding the forces that shaped those experiences.

Partly due to the scholarly emphasis on the quantitative side of the middle passage and partly due to the fragmentary nature of primary sources, the middle passage has often been assumed to have been almost a time of stasis. The experiences of male slaves have too often served as a template for all onboard. Yet the experiences on board were not homogenous, and the experiences of male slaves cannot be extrapolated to all on board. I posit that a slaving vessel was an historical stage as much as any static location was, and that much of the experiences of slaves and crew on the middle passage can be recovered. I argue that the Atlantic needs to be viewed as a geographical location in its own right

'Numbers Game' and Routes to Slavery," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.), 2.

[8] Some work has been devoted to the impact of the middle passage on the personalities of slaves recently arrived in the New World, but it is an area in which much remains to be done. It is an area few historians are willing to venture given the difficulties of measurement, generalizations, and the risks of stereotyping. Early work on slavery and the formation of "slave personalities" have rightly caused grave misgivings about this type of work. Stanley Elkin's *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Public Life* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1959) drew a barrage of criticism. Yet it is safe to hypothesize that the middle passage caused substantive changes among many who suffered through it. A weak article addressing this point is Okon Edet Uya's "The Middle Passage and Personality Change Among Diaspora Africans," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora (2nd ed.)*, Harris (ed.). Orlando Patterson's brief treatment of the subject in *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 151

where individuals acted and reacted within the constraints of their circumstances. As with any historical stage, there was enough room for many different experiences to take place and a variety of responses to unfold. I believe both can be contextualized in a theoretical framework that identifies and explains the forces that caused the middle passage to take a particular form. Furthermore, I believe that recovering these and placing them in the context of New World slavery is important.

The study of Atlantic slavery has concentrated on the experiences and dynamics that took place on land. But by focusing only on land masses as physical locations, – Europe, Africa, and the New World – the peculiar form of slavery on board slaving vessels that effected well over eleven million individuals has been virtually ignored. The microcosm of the slaving vessel was a very real place, one that had its own system. The system showed both similarities to, and distinct differences from, slavery on land. Understanding the social history of the middle passage is as important as understanding any given land-based slave system; it is a prerequisite to understanding Atlantic slavery as the whole that it was.

My study is divided into two main sections - the first, chapters 1 – 3, probes the individual and the collective experiences of those on board and the dynamics underlying them, while the second works towards providing an analytical context for those individual and collective experiences. The first part of my study devotes a chapter apiece to women, children and infants, and crew. I do not deal with male slaves as a separate category in this section, though I do devote attention to them elsewhere in my work. This is because nearly all the scholarly work extant on slaves on the middle passage has taken the perspective of the male slaves. Their experiences have too often been implicitly

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is better, but incomplete.

assumed to be the "average" experience. Yet they made up a minority of the slaves who made the voyage.[9] Rather than perpetuate this perspective, I focus on the women, children and infants, and crew on slavers. By highlighting their experiences, I challenge the prevailing view of the middle passage. Recovering the experiences of women is important in and of itself, but it is also necessary in order to develop a more balanced understanding of the middle passage as a whole. While there were some similarities to the experience of men, the experience of women differed substantially on a number of fundamental levels. Chapter one introduces several ways that this was so, ranging from the simple – for example, the conditions of confinement – to the more subtle – for example, how slavers conceptualized the women under their control. I attempt to establish a framework that delineates the circumstances that caused women's experiences to differ from that of men. I focus on two areas as case studies: i) the rape and sexual abuse of slave women, and ii) the role of women in resistance. This chapter also considers the experiences of pregnant women. Women who had infants with them on board are considered in the next chapter, "Children and Infants."

Virtually nothing is known about how children experienced the middle passage in spite of the large number of children who made the crossing. There is no work extant that considers their terms of confinement, their relationships with other slaves or with the slavers, what was unique about their suffering, and least of all, their perceptions of themselves and their world. The chapter "Children and Infants" addresses these questions among others. Without doubt, this was the most challenging chapter of the dissertation to

[9] Taken over the entire trade. An exact figure is impossible to give as it depends largely on how one defines "man" as opposed to "boy" or "man-boy" (a common manner of referring to youths in the trade). See chapter two "Children and Infants" for more on this. Nor can the number of female slaves be determined with absolute precision. For more on this point and on the ratios of adult males to other slaves on board, see

research and write; the sources were the least forthcoming on the subject and reconstructing a childhood past is problematic at the best of times. Nonetheless certain observations can be made, and the outlines of a common experience can be discerned. Infants and pregnant women were more common on the middle passage than is generally supposed, and this chapter considers both.

I pay as much attention to crew as I do to slaves, as they relied heavily on each other for their public identities and roles, and both were equally important in the shaping of the middle-passage. Slave-ship crew were not a homogeneous mass. The distinction between officers and sailors is particularly important to understanding the middle passage, and the relationship between the two is considered in detail. I also consider the relationship of crew with their peers and with the slaves. Tensions on board a slaver could be intense, both between slaves and crew, and among the crew themselves. Crew had concerns and responsibilities that were not directly related to the slaves under their control, and some of those are also dealt with in this chapter. I devote a large section to black crew – both slave and free – as this too was an aspect of the trade that has not received scholarly investigation.

The second part of my dissertation focuses on the processes and forces that framed the actions and experiences of slaves and crew. I consider the motivations and constraints that underlay collective and individual actions and that determined the day-to-day conditions and routines on board a slaver. Violence and the threat of violence, from both slaves and crew, is the central analytical tool.

The first chapter of this section provides an overview of resistance and rebellion, on the middle passage. Peter Parish has noted that "The two basic conditions which set

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chapter one, "Women."

the pattern for slave control were the fact or the threat of punishment and the general poor prospects of successful and permanent escape."[10] This is all the more true on the middle passage. The violence and the threat of violence – systemic and incidental, overt and implicit, calculated and casual, individual or group directed – was closer to the surface on the middle passage than on land. There was far less of a veneer covering the commodification of human beings; consequently, violence and its close companion, fear, were unmasked to an extent seldom encountered on land. Highly overt forms of coercion, ranging from constant vigilance, to the chaining of slaves, to the threat and use of extremely harsh physical punishments were as fundamental to the organization of a slave-ship. This was counter-balanced by the frequency and overt nature of resistance on the middle passage. Resistance and rebellion are as fundamental to understanding the middle passage as are the facts of violent oppression and individual enslavement. It is the interplay of these forces, along with the need for personal and group survival that ultimately determined the structure of the middle passage. While I describe various expressions of resistance and rebellion, I concentrate on the dynamics underlying the acts; I look beyond the act to the meaning of the deeds, and consider the dialectic this created between the enslaved and the enslaver. I also consider the effects of the constant implicit threat of resistance and rebellion. Mutiny was the most serious expression of slave dissent.

A separate chapter is devoted to mutiny, as it was the concrete and symbolic pinnacle of resistance to oppression on the middle passage. It was, from the perspective of both slave and enslaver, also the most dangerous. It involved open and often organized violence by slaves that threatened both white ascendancy and white lives. It alone was an

[10] Peter J. Parish, *Slavery: History and Historians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 34.

action taken by the slaves that could potentially topple an entire voyage's success. I argue that mutinies and attempted mutinies were far more common than is generally assumed, and that distinct typologies existed in mutiny attempts. There were distinct dynamics to how mutinies developed, and identifiable factors which led to a greatly heightened risk of a mutiny taking place. There were also several factors that determined the likelihood of the success or failure of a mutiny. Violence, implicit or explicit, shaped the world of the Atlantic slave trade, but the violence was not absolute. The final chapter explores how both crew and slaves sought to maximize their survival chances on the middle passage by exploiting what space there was between control and rebellion.

Expressions of both oppression and dissent were tempered by the need for survival on the middle passage. I contend that the first goal of slavers was personal survival, and that the second was to keep as many of their slaves alive as possible. This shaped their actions in particular ways, and caused identifiable patterns to emerge in shipboard routines, and in their interactions with slaves. While most slaves were similarly concerned with personal survival, there were distinct differences in their situation. They generally felt they had less to lose and were consequently more desperate than crew. They were willing to take greater risks than slavers were. Group survival strategies informed crew decisions to a greater extent than they did slave actions. Crew were greatly outnumbered by slaves on the middle passage, and all slaves posed a potential risk to them. Slaves on the other hand, relied more on individual survival strategies as the room they had in which to maneuver was more limited, and generally did not favor collective survival strategies.

No study on a subject as large and of as long duration as the middle passage can hope to be complete. The writer is forced to choose where to lay emphasis, and where to devote less attention. I concentrate on the previously unexplored aspects of the middle passage. My work is not a synthesis of all that is known about the middle passage; for example, I do not concentrate on the details of the foods that slaves were typically fed. Rather, I concentrate on recovering previously ignored experiences and on identifying the forces that gave the middle passage its structure. Nor does my work extend beyond the social history of the middle passage. I am not concerned with the slave trade as a whole.

I do not consider the economics of the trade, or the economic structure that gave rise to it. It is beyond the purview of this work to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the relationship between Atlantic slavery and the economic system that sustained it. The prices of slaves, who benefited, who lost, the role of slavery in the economic structure of the Atlantic world and similar questions have been the subject of countless books and articles.[11] Other than to acknowledge that the social history of the middle passage that is

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[11] Historians have long realized that economics and slavery were inextricably intertwined, and virtually every aspect of the slave trade has been subject to economic analysis. Good starting points are Cedric Robinson's "Capitalism and Slavery: The Historiography." *African Labour History* 1 (1993); Robert W. Fogel's "The Origin and History of Economic Issues in the American Slavery Debate." in *Evidence and Methods (without Consent or Contract)*, R. Fogel and S. Engerman, (eds.) and Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn (eds.), *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Academic Press, 1979). The costs, profits and risks of the trade have been debated in innumerable works, as has the economic structure of the trade. See for example William Darity, Jr., "The Numbers Game and the Profitability of the British Trade in Slaves," *Journal of Economic History* 45, 3 (1985), William Darity, Jr., "Profitability of the British Trade in Slaves Once Again," *Explorations in Economic History* 26, 3 (July 1989), and Joseph E. Inikori, "Market Structure and the Profits of the British African Trade in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 41, 4 (1981). Two representative articles on the economics of the middle passage and the price of slaves in Africa are David Richardson, "The Costs of Survival: the Transport of Slaves in the Middle Passage and the Profitability of the 18th Century British Slave Trade," *Explorations in Economic History*, 24 and David Richardson, "Prices of Slaves in West and West-Central Africa: Toward an Annual Series, 1698-1807," *Bulletin of Economic Research* 43, 1 (1991). The effect of slavery and its demise on regional economics has also been extensively debated. Some studies span continents, others focus on national or local levels. For examples of the former, see Stanley L. Engerman, "The Atlantic Economy of the Eighteenth Century: Some Speculations on Economic Development in Britain, America, Africa and Elsewhere." *Journal of European Economic History* 24, 1 (Spring 1995) and David Eltis, "The Economic Impact of the Ending of the African

my subject relied on the mercantilist / capitalist structure of the time for its structure and existence, I do not address the issue in my work.[12] What is addressed in my work is the outgrowth of that system. I explore the branch – the middle passage –, not the tree. My definition of the middle passage is, however, more inclusive than the conventional definition of the middle passage.

I define the middle passage to be the time from when the slaves were purchased by the individuals responsible for shipping them across the Atlantic ocean to the New World until they had discharged that responsibility either by selling them, or by delivering them to agents responsible for doing so. In the case of a failed voyage, I define the middle passage as having come to an end when the slaves where no longer under the

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Slave Trade to the Americas," *Social and Economic Studies* 37, 1-2 (1988). See also Joseph E. Inikori, "Africa in World History: The Export Slave Trade from Africa and the Emergence of the Atlantic Economic Order," in *General History of Africa. Vol. 5: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, B. A Ogot (ed.). For examples of the later, see David Eltis, "The Economics of African Participation in the Slave Trade," in *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Northrup (ed.), David Richardson, "The Slave Trade, Sugar, and British Economic Growth, 1748-1776," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, 4 (1987), Robert William Fogel, and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989), David W. Galenson, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Barbados Market, 1673-1723," *Journal of Economic History* 42, 3 (1982) and Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore, 1973). Studies have been published assessing the effect of slavery in towns that supported the trade; see for example Melissa Elder's, *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of Eighteenth-Century Lancaster* (Halifax, England: Ryburn, 1992). The abolition of the slave trade and of slavery has similarly been the subject of numerous economic analysis. See for examples David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Robert Edgar Conrad, "Economics and Ideals: The British Anti-Slavery Crusade Reconsidered," *Indiana Historical Review* 15, 1-2 (1988-89). See also Eric Williams' classic *Capitalism and Slavery.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolinian Press, 1994). The works mentioned above by no means form a comprehensive overview of books and articles on the economics of the Atlantic slave trade. They have primarily been selected because they influenced my thinking on the subject, or because they are representative works. New works are constantly being added to an already large body of work.

[12] Several scholars have considered the subject. See for examples Stanley M. Elkins and Eric McKitrick, "Institutions and the Law of Slavery: The Dynamics of Unopposed Capitalism," in *Comparative Issues in Slavery*, Finkelman ed. See also Stanley M. Elkins, and Eric McKitrick, "Institutions and the Law of Slavery in Capitalist and Non-Capitalist Cultures," In *Comparative Issues in Slavery*, Finkelman (ed.). See also D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behaviour in Early English America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). I do *not* argue that this particular economic system was a necessary part for the large-scale organized trade in human beings. It has occurred in many different economic contexts, and at many different times in human history. I do acknowledge that, in the case of Atlantic slavery, it was what caused the ships to sail, the slaves to be bought and sold into the Atlantic system, and what kept the plantations turning.

control of the slavers, and the slavers had given up hope of reestablishing control over them. This definition is broader than the conventional definition that limits the middle passage to either the time spent on board the slaving vessel, or to the duration of the actual Atlantic crossing. These more restrictive definitions omit a large part of the events effecting both slave and slaver not covered elsewhere that are necessary to understand the middle passage as a whole.

I do not, however, investigate any other legs of the slaving journey unless they contribute to an understanding of the middle passage. Nor am I concerned with the experience of slaves and traders prior to the sale of the slaves to those responsible for transporting them away from Africa unless it impacts the middle passage in some way. The origins of the slaves, or how or why they were enslaved and offered for sale in the Atlantic trade are beyond the purview of this work.[13] Nor do I investigate the time slaves spent in the barracoons prior to their purchase by slaving ships' crew, even though this is an area in which there is a great lacuna. I do, however, recognize that the middle passage did not occur in a vacuum. The slaves brought their cultures and life experiences on board with them, and these informed their actions and reactions on board. Similarly, the physical and mental condition of slaves was influenced by their experiences prior to embarkation. Crewmembers too, were the products of their cultural background. The middle passage placed individuals, black and white, in specific situations that forced them to make and act upon personal decisions of a fundamentally moral nature. These decisions were not made in a social, ideological, economic or political vacuum.

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[13] For information on this, see Patrick Manning, "The Slave Trade: A Formal Demography of a Global System," *Social Science History* 14, 2 (1989), 286.

The middle passage by my definition does include time spent by slaves and crew in Africa, whether on the slaving vessel or not. I use the phrase "Atlantic crossing" to refer to the time actually spent sailing between Africa and the port of destination in the New World. Some slave's middle passage was considerably longer than others': the time spent waiting or "cruising" along the coast while the vessel attempted to acquire a full cargo of slaves, the actual Atlantic passage, and the time between arrival and disembarkation could all vary considerably. I do not deal with the inter-African trade or with destinations other than the New World. Nor do I consider inter-New World slave trading.

My work is largely based on primary sources, either by slavers, their ideological opponents, or their financiers. This is complemented by the little written by slaves who made the middle passage that has survived. There is a wealth of qualitative primary documentation available, though it is widely dispersed.[14] Contemporary documents generally pay relatively little attention to individual slaves, but there are enough documents available to compensate for this to some degree. Due to the fragmentary nature of many sources, the social historian must perforce glean information from many different sources. I use narratives, diaries, logbook entries, letters between financiers and captains, legal documents, newspaper articles and other surviving written materials. The abolitionists were active in collecting and disseminating information that was not in the interests of those best placed to know the truth or falsity of it. It was in the abolitionists' interests to present the trade from its most horrific perspective, certainly on occasion with exaggeration. On the other hand, livelihoods and great financial interests were at stake,

[14] The exception is Donnan's monumental collection of primary documents of the slave trade. Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* vols. 1-4 (Washington, D.C.:

prompting suppression and denial of the horrors, and leading to the creation of impossibly benign versions of events. Sources from both abolitionists and proponents of the trade need to be handled with the requisite care, but both can occasionally be useful sources of information on middle passage.

I frequently use quotations from the primary sources to illustrate my points. I have found that it gives an indispensable immediacy to the text. In the case of a social history on the middle passage, I feel it is an academically sound approach, and a moral obligation. It is too easy to lose sight of – sanitize – the reality of the trade by treating it purely as an academic and theoretical exercise. I intend that my work insofar as possible explain, not filter, the voices of those on the middle passage. Often, rather than teasing apart one particular incident, and then using that as a starting point to establish the typical or atypical aspects of the incident, I use several different accounts when considering a given topic. This is for two reasons. First, the accounts themselves are often not rich enough to allow for a detailed analysis. Second, additional accounts provide new voices, which allow a particular point to be better illustrated.

I make extensive use of statistical calculations and numerical data in my work. Yet for my work, statistics and quantitative work are not an end in and of themselves. I only infrequently enter into the debate on the demographics of the Atlantic slave trade. I am not primarily interested in replicating or refining extant work; with one or two exceptions, I have few substantive quarrels with the existing quantitative work. I use statistics in the service of writing a social history rather than to establish new demographic or quantitative findings for their own sake. Quantitative data can be a very

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Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930-35).

useful tool for this. Upon occasion, they allow one to ask questions and to establish patterns that would not otherwise be accessible.

If reliable work has been published, I use those figures. Occasionally I use the work of other scholars, refined by my own calculations. More commonly I calculate my own statistics, as the types of questions I seek answers to have often not been addressed by other scholars. I rely on *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* as a starting point for my calculations.[15] With 27,233 records containing varying amounts of information per voyage, generalizations can often be confidently made. It is true that numbers can easily be as misleading as they can be enlightening.[16] Absolute precision is not possible; the primary data are not complete enough for that. Yet frequently trends can be identified, and it is on these that I have focused. Where my figures and conclusions are tentative, I have made a point of noting that in the text. Perhaps some of my findings may be over or under-stated, and indeed, I offer them as much to encourage debate on the issues I raise as to come to conclusions.

I have chosen a thematic rather than chronological approach for a number of reasons. While there were several substantial changes in the organization of the slave trade over the course of its history, these tended to have little effect on how the middle passage – distinct from the organization of the trade, and the procuring of slaves – was

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[15] D. Eltis, S. Behrendt et. al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.* The publication of the Atlantic slavery dataset promises to allow quantitative and demographic studies on the slave trade to reach unprecedented heights of precision. Scholars such as Eltis, Engerman, Inkori, Richardson, Daget, Cougherty, Behrendt, Postma, and a handful of others are likely to set the tone of this work. But they will be joined by younger scholars who will increasingly analyze the data in new and creative ways. Ingenious probing and manipulation of the information contained in the dataset will also almost certainly allow scholars to ask – and answer – completely new questions about the trade. It is my hope that my work will be a step in that direction.

[16] Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman's *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989) still stands as a warning beacon to those who seek to quantify human experience. See also Herbert Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

experienced by either slaves or crew. Nor was the interaction between slaves and slavers much affected. Very little changed in the mechanics of the actual middle passage over the course of the trade, and there was a "surprising similarity" between the slaving nations.[17] This was partly because the slaves who made the middle passage always made it for the first time, and partly because relatively few innovations in sea-faring technology affected the experiences of slaves or crew. The fact that the middle passage was of relatively short duration – too short for fully articulated adaptation strategies to arise on either side – also played a role. Slaves did not have time enough to form a sophisticated own culture that might have allowed them to adapt to the pressures of their circumstances in a manner more analogous to slaves on land. The room for negotiation on board between enslaver and enslaved was less than on land, partly because of the transient nature of the relationship, and partly because of the physical constraints on a slaving vessel. There was far less time and inclination on both sides to overcome the gap in understanding between oppressors and oppressed, or to establish a negotiated status quo. Both parties relied far more overtly on violence and the threat of violence.

A thematic perspective also allows the experiences of slaves and the contours of the middle passage to be more readily identified than a chronological approach does. This is mainly because the forces shaping the experience of the middle passage – survival strategies, resistance, crew and slave violence, accommodations, the nature of the vessels used – were remarkably consistent over the trade, and over the slaving nations.[18] Very few slaves made the passage in steam ships, and relatively few made the crossing while

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[17] H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton: Princeton U.P, 1978), 228.

[18] Klein, *The Middle Passage*, 228. Mortality declined in the eighteenth century due to increased knowledge about diets and early vaccinations, but it did so for all slaving nations.

the trade was illegal. Chronologically speaking, the illegal trade may have caused the greatest change in how both slaves and slavers experienced the middle passage. I do not separate the illegal trade from the legal trade systematically, but I do note the changes that occurred when relevant. There is as yet no comparative social history of the middle passage during the legal and illegal trades. While the former was of a much longer duration, the latter is in many respects better documented, and offers enough sources to make the project feasible.

I often compare the experiences of the middle passage to those on land. There is a rich scholarship for those interested in land-based slavery, and on one level my comparisons serve as a point of reference. In addition, the noting of similarities and differences serves as a step towards integrating the study of slavery on the middle passage with the various forms slavery took on land. The comparison of slavery as it took place on sea and slavery on land sheds greater light on both. The middle passage was an integral part of the institution of slavery, and needs to be incorporated into the study of African slavery in the New World if the Atlantic slave system is to be understood as a whole.

The most common method of writing a social history that deals with large numbers of people is to attempt to distill a hypothetical "average" experience, with caveats time to time, pointing out that not every representative experience holds for everybody. Describing the extremes of any given system can also be a useful way of delineating it, though one quickly runs the risk that the extremes are taken, implicitly, as representative of the whole, while they are intended to describe the margins of the system. So it is with the Atlantic slave trade. That the trade was barbaric in and of itself,

is beyond dispute. How common extreme acts of barbarism were is not known, and generally not debated. The structure of the trade, however, guaranteed that they could and did take place. They were integral to the trade. As such, I do include them in my work. In a topic as emotion laden as the slave trade this poses special problems. It is necessary to steer a careful course to avoid an uncritically cynical view informed by a contemporary moral outrage. It is equally necessary to avoid the creating of a sterile, theoretical account of the trade from a comfortable twentieth century academic perspective that implicitly denies the incredible magnitude of human suffering caused by the trade. Some of the extreme abuses were irrational, others rational barbarism. The system contained both within itself. They were part of the whole, and were a part that needs to be recovered and examined, as they provide invaluable evidence in the describing of the whole. As I seek to recover the forces that structured the trade, and to understand individual and group experiences and actions within that context, the hypothetical average experience *and* the extremes of the system are relevant to my study.

Just as every slave's middle passage cannot be described, so no single slave's middle passage can be completely described. Voyages differed by vessel, by captain and crew, by length, by weather, by crowding, by luck, and much more. Some experiences were more common – that is to say, shared by a greater number of slaves or crew – than others, but the full diversity of experiences cannot be accurately recovered. Yet within that diversity, patterns did emerge, and several of the forces that determined the experiences of those on board can be identified and described.

As a final note: the magnitude of the middle passage and the suffering it caused is not easily comprehended. The numbers are not easily related to individual human lives.

But as an indication – every character, both letters and numbers, in this dissertation, including the conclusion, all footnotes and this introduction represents 28.4 slaves who made the middle passage. Every word stands for 17.4 slaves who died during the middle passage. Every paragraph equals 35.5 slaving voyages.[19]

[19] The first was calculated by dividing the consensus number of slaves who made the middle passage after 1600 (11.4 million) by every letter in every chapter in the dissertation, including footnotes, numbers and quotes, but excluding the bibliography (401,324). The second was calculated by counting every word the dissertation, only excluding the bibliography (80,398) and dividing the consensus number of slaves who perished on the middle passage (1.4 million) by that number. The final calculation was made by dividing the conservative consensus figure for slaving voyages that arrived in the New World (35,561) by the number of paragraphs (1,003) in this dissertation. Estimates of the number of slave and voyages from David Eltis et al, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, 5.

CHAPTER 1: WOMEN

"Both men and women, without the least distinction"[1]

The title of this chapter, taken from the memoirs of Dutch slaving captain, William Bosman, sums up both the common perception of women's experience on the middle passage, and current historical scholarship on the subject. No extant studies consider the ordeal of women slaves, nor the ways in which gender was constructed, on the middle passage. Historians who have considered women's experiences at all have generally devoted only a few paragraphs - at most a few pages - in their volumes concerning the general trade of Africans to the Americas.[2] Scholars need to consider more fully whether the experience of women on the middle passage was substantially different from that of men, and if so, how.

Preliminary research indicates that the first question must be answered in the affirmative. The second suggests at least two ways in which women's experiences differed from that of men. First, while female slaves shared many circumstances with male slaves, they may have experienced them differently. Second, women slaves had experiences that they did *not* share with men. While a single chapter cannot hope to cover the full spectrum of black women's experiences on the middle passage, it will be a starting point for an examination of the role of gender on the middle passage.

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[1] W. Bosman "A New and Accurate Account of the Coast of Guinea" Reproduced in part in E. Donnan *Document Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. 1, 441.

[2] References to women on the middle passage remain widely scattered in narratives, logbooks, newspaper accounts, journals, letters and the like. All accounts have been written by European (and a few African) men. I know of no extant account of the middle passage written by a slave woman. As a result, the records tend to reconstruct slave women's experiences from a European male's point-of-view. Only the female actions observers saw fit to record in records which have survived, combined with demographic data and scholarly accounts of slave women on land, provide researchers with a starting point from which to launch an investigation. More work on the subject would be a positive development, as would interpretations from different scholars.

Primary documents generally indicate that slavers preferred to buy males to females. Captain William Ellery's instructions to "Buy no girls, and few women; but buy prime boys and young men" are typical in this regard.[3] Much has been written on the proportion of women on vessels making the middle passage, fluctuations in their representation in the trade, and the areas from and to where they tended to be shipped.[4] The consensus figure tends to hover around 65% men and 35% women, or a ratio of slightly fewer than 2 men to every woman. In terms of fluctuations, the number of women decreased by more than fifty percent between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.[5] The large discrepancy between the number of men and women shipped has led to a lengthy discussion between scholars as to the reason(s) why this was so. The debate on whether the number of women in the trans-Atlantic trade was a question of African agency or slaver preferences is far from over. Certainly there was a greater African reluctance to part with female slaves than male slaves, as female slaves were more in demand in the trans-Saharan trade, and were more easily integrated into African society. The Arabic trade consisted largely of women, with relatively few men or children.[6] It is also true, however, that this African preference coincided with that of the slavers

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[3] E. Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 3, 69.

[4] For representative work on the topic, see Philip D. Morgan, "The Cultural Implication of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. Ed.), p. 126-7; D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behaviour in Early English* America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); David Eltis, "The Volume, Age/Sex Ratios, and African Impact of the Slave Trade: Some Refinements of Paul Lovejoy's Review of the Literature.," *The Journal of African History*, 3 (August 1990); David Eltis, "Fluctuations in the Age and Sex of Slaves in the Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Slave Traffic," *Slavery and Abolition* 7, 3 (1986); Joseph E. Inikori, "Export versus Domestic Demand: The Determinants of Sex Ratios in the Transatlantic Slave Trade," *Research in Economic History* 14 (1992); Patrick Manning, "The Slave Trade: A Formal Demography of a Global System," *Social Science History* 14, 2 (1989); Patrick Manning and W. H. S.Griffiths, "Divining the Unprovable: Simulating the Demography of the African Slave Trade," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 19, 2 (Autumn 1988); Daniel Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 57.

[5] They were replaced by a proportionally greater number of children. D. Eltis, S. Behrandt et al. *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34.

themselves.[7]

A quick exploration of the Trans-Atlantic CD ROM dataset, using the records that contain information on both the number of men and women disembarking confirms the approximate ratio given above.[8] It is probable, however, that the consensus figure is substantially incorrect.

Previously published work has not taken the number of infants carried into consideration. Though only a relatively small percentage of records in the Atlantic slavery dataset contain information on infants, the number is large enough to generalize confidently.[9] These voyages show a strong and consistent pattern: if the data on infants disembarking are recorded separately, there is a very pronounced drop in the number of men and women reported disembarking. The effect is more pronounced in men than in women, and is substantial in both cases. An average of 60.28 women disembarked per vessel where there is sufficient information to calculate this.[10] The voyages that report data on infants of both sexes disembarking as well as of women and men disembarking, however, return an average of only 29.97 women disembarking per vessel.[11] Those same voyages reported an

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[6] David Eltis, "Fluctuations", 313.
[7] See M.A. Klein and C.C. Robertson, *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Stanley Engerman and David Eltis, , "Was the Slave Trade Dominated by Men?," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (Autumn 1992); D.W. Galenson, *Traders,* 62; Herbert S. Klein, "Recent Trends in the Study of the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Indian Historical Review* 15, 1-2 (1988-89); and Joseph E. Inikori, "Export versus Domestic Demand." The most recent issues in this debate are briefly addressed in D. Eltis, S. Behrandt et al's booklet accompanying *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade CD ROM.*
[8] The 2653 records indicate that a total of 161,961 women disembarked, and that 308,457 men disembarked, a ratio of slightly more than 1.9 men to every woman. This returns an average of 116.22 men per vessel (and a median of 102), and an average of 60.82 women per vessel (and a median of 51), figures well in line with the consensus figure. I have used disembarkation figures as they are likely more reliable than embarkation figures, and provide more records with which to work. Of course this does not take mortality into account, but this does not effect the ratio of men to women to any great degree.
[9] The dataset contains some information on 27,233 voyages. Of theses, 570 records contain information on male infants disembarking, while 552 records contain the same information on female infants. A total of 548 records contain the information for both sexes.
[10] 2654 voyages contain information on the number of women disembarked, yielding an average of 60.28 women per voyage (161427 women divided by 2654 voyages).
[11] 16244 women divided by 542 voyages.

average of 20.42 female infants disembarking giving a total of 50.39 female slaves per voyage, much closer to the 60.28 women reported disembarking on vessels that did not report infants. An additional average of 39.18 male infants also disembarked on vessels reporting the number of male infants.

It is thus likely that many slavers counted female infants as women, while some slavers counted male infants as women, while others counted them as men, and a few did not include them in the surviving count at all or counted them as children. [12] This contention is subject to testing. If it is correct, one can predict that the average number of men reported disembarking from vessels should be much higher when the number of male infants disembarking are not specified than when both men and male infants are specified. The total of the average number of male infants and the average number of men on the later voyages should, however, be lower than the average number of men reported disembarking when no information on male infants is specified (because some slavers will count male infants as women or not at all). And indeed, both are the case. Over all the voyages that report the number of men disembarking but not the male infants, the average number of men disembarking is 124.27.[13] The voyages containing information on both the number of men slaves disembarking and the number male infants report only 82.72 men disembarking, and 39.18 infants.[14] The hypothesis is therefor confirmed. The number of men reporting disembarking was reduced substantially on voyages that identified male infants (82.72 compared to 124.27), but the total of men and male infants reported disembarking (82.72

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[12] Donnan is the only scholar who has noted that children were occasionally entered as women in slavers' accounts; however, she did not pursue the matter beyond the simple observation. How widespread this practice was is uncertain. E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 289.

[13] 268,663 men divided by 2,162 voyages.

[14] 570 voyages contain sufficient information to make the calculations. For men the totals are 47,153 men divided by 570 voyages. For male infants the totals are 22,332 male infants divided by 570 voyages. This returns an average of 82.72 men and 39.18 male infants.

plus 39.18) is not quite equal to the average of voyages reporting only the number of men: 121.9 compared to 124.27. This is because occasionally male infants were counted as women or not counted at all, as contended. The same calculation does not apply to children, indicating that boys and girls were counted separately, unlike infants, or were equally divided among the men and women in accordance to their sex.[15]

Calculating the ratio of men to women in the records containing information on men, women and infants disembarking, causes the ratio of men to women to change from the 1.9 consensus figure to 1 woman disembarking for 2.79 men disembarking.[16] The 542 accounts that specify both the age and sex of slaves disembarking suggest that far fewer women made the crossing than has up to now been supposed, while the unspecified (and thus probably less reliable) accounts confirm the generally accepted ratio. This offers solid grounds for revising estimates of the proportion of very young slaves carried upward, and the number of adult women downward.

It is important to note that I do not claim that my dataset is representative for the entire trade; the sample size is too small for that. It is not representative is several respects, the most important of which is likely to be the median date (1812) of the voyages leaving Africa. This is late in the trade, and we know that the number of children, and possibly infants, increased as the trade continued. Nearly all the voyages disembarked their slaves in the Caribbean, and most of those in Havana. The vessels in the sample also tended to be smaller than the average vessels in the trade, and are mainly Spanish and American vessels, though smaller numbers of several other nations are also included. In addition, there is not enough information available to determine whether the ports of embarkation are typical of

[15] Unfortunately the Trans-Atlantic CD ROM dataset does not contain enough relevant records to test this with any degree of accuracy.

the trade. It is also possible to argue that vessels carrying a larger number of infants would be more likely to specify them than vessels carrying fewer infants, though this is speculative. Even given all the above caveats, the effect described will almost certainly hold to some degree for the entire trade. The caveats will almost certainly nuance, but not negate the argument made above, or the calculations below. This is because it is a near statistical certainty that most voyages carried at least some infants. This is corroborated by the high average number of infants reported per vessel when they were recorded, as well as the fact that more than 96% of voyages that report infants on board, report infants of both sexes.[17] If infants on board were an exception rather than the norm, the average number of infants carried would be much lower, as would the incidence of carrying infants of both sexes on board simultaneously. In addition, the records that do specify the number of infants disembarking tend very strongly to contain far more complete information on other aspects of the voyage, suggesting that the records themselves are more reliable.[18] It is almost certain that the number of infants carried would have varied by national carrier, period of embarkation (the number of children carried more than tripled between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries), port of embarkation and perhaps port of disembarkation. But again, this will probably lower the average number of infants carried, and nuance, but not negate the effect shown in the calculations below.

Taken over the entire trade, the tables below illustrate the current estimates, and

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[16] 45,462 men to 16,244 women.

[17] 20.28 female infants and 39.89 male infants, for a total of 59.6 infants per vessel.

[18] If one calculates the average number of infants disembarking from vessels that specify male and female infants disembarking, as well as the number of boys and girls disembarking (488 voyages) the figures show that the average slaver disembarked 63.33 infants and 39.65 children for a total of 102.98 young slaves. Vessels that do not specify infants but do specify girls and boys (1,942 cases) disembarked an average of 65.08 children. This is 37.9 fewer young slaves than those that do specify infants. While not perfect evidence – the difference in sample sizes means that the later sample includes information from more nationalities and time periods, but also less complete records – it does suggest that infants were not

estimates based on the voyages reporting infants separately.

	Total no. to calc. average	Average per voyage	Estimated total voyages[3]	Trade total	Ratio male to female
Men (ave. of 2663 voyages)[1]	308,457	115.83	36,000	4,169,880	1.91
Women (ave. of 2663)[1]	161,691	60.72	36,000	2,185,920	Ratio male to female
Girls (ave. of 2,465)[2]	56,594	22.96	36,000	826,560	1.81
Boys (ave. of 2,576)[2]	91,364	35.47	36,000	1,276,920	Women as % of total
Male infants	Not specified : included		in the totals	above	38.7%
Female infants	Not specified : included		in the totals	above	Men as % of total
	Total / ship	234.98[4]	Total	8,459,280[4]	49.3%

Table 1.1. Current Estimates of Slave Ratios

[1] The averages are calculated over all voyages reporting the number of men and women disembarked, but not infants.

[2] Based on the average of all voyages reporting the number of girls and boys disembarked respectively.

[3] The estimated total number of voyages is a rounded figure based on the one provided by the editors of the Trans-Atlantic slavery dataset (p. 5).

[4] The totals do not match the consensus figure of an average of 281.1 disembarkations per vessel and of a total of approximately 10.5 million slaves disembarked due to smaller number of slaves carried than average in this subset, and the smaller than average size of the vessels. This has to do with the representativeness of the data sets, discussed above. This should not effect the *ratios* presented either here or below substantially.

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automatically included in the count with boys and girls.

	Total no. to calc. average	Average per voyage	Estimated total voyages[4]	Trade total	Ratio male to female
Men (average of 542 voyages)[1]	45,462	83.88	36,000	3,019,680	2.8
Women (ave. of 542)[1]	16,244	29.97	36,000	1,078,920	Ratio male to female
Girls (ave. of 2,465)[2]	56,594	22.96	36,000	826,560	2.17
Boys (ave. of 2,576)[2]	91,364	35.47	36,000	1,276,920	Women as % of total
Male infants (ave. of 570)[3]	22,332	39.18	36,000	1,410,480	12.94
Female infants (ave. of 552)[3]	11,149	20.2	36,000	727,200	Men as % of total
	Total / ship	231.66[5]	Total	8,339,760[5]	36.2%

Table 1.2. New Estimates of Slave Ratios, Including Infant Data

[1] The averages are calculated over all voyages reporting the number of men and women disembarked, but not infants.
[2] Based on the average of all voyages reporting the number of girls and boys disembarked respectively.
[3] Based on the average of all voyages reporting the number of female infants and male infants disembarked respectively.
[4] The estimated total number of voyages is a rounded figure based on the one provided by the editors of the Trans-Atlantic slavery dataset (p. 5)
[5] The totals do not match the consensus figure of an average of 281.1 disembarkations per vessel and of a total of approximately 10.5 million slaves disembarked due to smaller number of slaves carried than average in this subset, and the smaller than average size of the vessels. This has to do with the representativeness of the data sets, discussed above. This should not effect the *ratios* presented either here or below substantially.

The consequences of the above findings are potentially very important. Fewer adult women than had previously been assumed made the middle passage, as did relatively fewer adult men. Even if the average figures for the number of infants carried on vessels that do not specify infants upon disembarkation is considerably lower than on those that do specify the numbers of infants disembarked, the consequences for the demography of the trade will still be very large.[19] Even if the number of infants carried on vessels not specifying infants

[19] While the exact numbers for various carriers, places of embarkation and disembarkation, and time periods still needs to be worked out, some predictions can already be made. The question of African agency

are estimated at half that of the number of vessels that do specify the number of infants, the ratio of men to women remains above one women to every 2.25 men, as opposed to the (approximate) one to 1.9 currently accepted. And as argued above, it is a statistical impossibility that all or most vessels not reporting infants separately did not carry infants. Nonetheless, the absolute number of women who made the middle passage was very substantial, and as such demands academic attention.

The attitude and views that slavers' crews had of slave women were conditioned by a number of factors. These include the contemporary construction of Africa and Africans in the Western mind and the prior experiences they or their colleagues had had in shipping human bodies across the Atlantic on a slaving vessel. In other words, shipboard culture and the violent structure of slave dealing, as well as crew experiences outside slave trading affected their treatment of slave women. Seventeenth and eighteenth century constructions of race and femininity, as well as their view of the poor, weak and dispossessed were central to their treatment of both male and female slaves.

European perceptions of the black female body contributed to slavers response to them. With variations on the theme, the argument would generally amount to the following: African women were not 'the same' as European women. They were cruder, physically stronger, more "earthy", and less sensitive.[20] Given these unfavourable but sexually alluring

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and the trans-Saharan trade will become even more pertinent, and the question of why so few women entered the trade will acquire a new urgency, as will related demographic questions. The composition of slaving vessels is also changed substantially, raising several new questions. For example, how does the lower number of adults on board effect crowding? Crowding is often measured as the ratio of tons per slave, and it is clear that adults require more space than infants or children. Another possible area of inquiry is whether the lowered number of adult males (and females) had a discernible impact on resistance on board. In terms of the New World, questions about African cultural survivals come to mind. If more infants and fewer adult women arrived in the New World, one would expect survival of African cultural traditions to be less, particularly among African groups that were particularly susceptible to this revised demography.

[20] Barbara Bush, "The Eye of the Beholder: Contemporary European Images of the Black Woman" in *Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

comparisons, white men could not be expected to use the same mores with black women as with white women. Actions that would be immoral and criminal directed at white women would not necessarily be so if directed at black (slave) women. John Newton, an ex-slaving captain turned abolitionist, explicitly contradicted this form of reasoning in an abolitionist tract, stating that "some hard-hearted pleader may suggest that [abusive] treatment would indeed be cruel in Europe; but the African women are negroes, savages, who have no idea of the nicer sensations which obtain among civilized people." Newton, however "dare[d] to contradict them in the strongest terms" stating that "with regard to the women, in Sherbro, where I was most acquainted, I have seen many instances of modesty, and even delicacy, which would not disgrace an English woman."[21] Of course, even Newton was unwilling to defend the rights of African women based on their own culture, by defending it as of equal worth with English culture. Instead, he used the same race-based measure of worth as his opponents did, but argued that their measurements, and therefore their premises, were inaccurate.

The image of lesser worth and greater crudity of black women, of course, did not render black women's bodies sexually unattractive. On the contrary, interracial sex had the added attraction of forbidden fruit.[22] On land, laws forbidding sexual relations between whites and blacks were passed, in part, to control this intimate interaction between the races.[23] On land, scholars have proposed categories of white stereotypes projected onto

[21] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750-1754 (With Newton's 'Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade')*, Bernard Martin & Spurrell, M. (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 105-6.
[22] Sailors also exploited women on the coast of Africa. "Women, likewise, contribute largely to the loss of our seamen. When they are on shore, they often, from their known thoughtless imprudence, involve themselves, on this account, in quarrels with the natives, and, if not killed on the spot, are frequently poisoned." J. Newton, *The Journal*, 101.
[23] In Virginia, for example, interracial sex was outlawed in 1676; in Maryland, in 1692. Such laws, of course, were often ignored. W. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (N.C.: Univ. of N.C. Press, 1986) 24.

black women. Among these is the "Jezebel" a sexually wanton female slave.[24] On the middle passage this image was intensified, as the women were more vulnerable, more degraded and more commodified. Of course, as slavers acted on their stereotypes, the myths of crudeness and wantonness were sustained and intensified. As long as black slave women could not defend their honour (as Europeans conceived it) as white women did, they would inevitably bear the blame for it. The middle passage took advantage of, and contributed substantially to this process. The transient nature of the voyage and the lack of restraints on the crew increased their vulnerability.

In some ways, women shared men's circumstances on the middle passage, although they may have experienced them differently. Women, like men were subject to the various cruelties and indignities of the purchasing process. Both sexes were, for example, often branded with a hot iron before boarding the slaving vessel to prevent the crew from committing fraud with their human cargoes, and so disadvantage their financiers. One slaver noted that "a burning iron, with the arms or name of the companies, lyes in the fire" but also claimed "we yet take all possible care that they are not burned too hard, especially the women, who are more tender than the men."[25] Even if this statement were true, it may not have mattered much. While being branded was certainly physically excruciating, its psychological effect would be similar to other slave selection procedures. Terror and the imposition of physical pain, like other dehumanising practices, all emphasise an individual's reduction to a commodity. It emphasized to the slave that she (or he) held no value as an individual.

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[24] See for example, Deborah Gray-White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (Reprint: New York: Norton, 1999).
[25] W. Bosman, *A New and Accurate Account of the Coast of Guinea....* Reprinted in Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 1, 442.

Examining naked slaves publicly accomplished the same goal. Before their purchase, slaves were examined, "even to the smallest member, and that naked too, both men and women, without the least distinction or modesty."[26] Involuntary nakedness certainly causes psychological vulnerability. Combined with an intrusive examination "to the smallest member" in front of other people, the process emphasises the complete lack of importance of the individuality and humanity of the person concerned.[27] Other evaluation processes had a similar effect. For example, the age of newly-acquired women was often estimated by examining the firmness of their breasts.[28] The sexual overtones are clear.

African women must have felt infuriated, desecrated, and violated by this process. John Newton noted that they were often taken aboard "naked, trembling, terrified, perhaps almost exhausted with cold, fatigue and hunger." Despite their condition, they were "exposed to the wanton rudeness of white savages. The poor creatures cannot understand the language they hear, but the looks and manners of the speakers are sufficiently intelligible. In imagination, the prey is divided, upon the spot and only reserved till opportunity offers."[29] Many primary sources contain references to sexual abuse of African women during the slavers' examination process, full of innuendo. Slaving captain John Barbot, for example, noted that it was "most diverting" to watch the surgeon examine "those parts which are not to be named", and that the women on board "afforded us an abundance of recreation."[30,31]

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[26] W. Bosman, *A New and Accurate Account ...*" In Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930-35), 441.
[27]The traders were quite explicit about what they were buying: Atkins writes that from the factories the slaves were "sold in open Market on shore, and examined by us in like manner, as our Brother Trade do Beasts in Smithfield; the Countenance, and Stature, a good Set of Teeth, Pliancy in their Limbs, and Joints, and being free of Venereal Taint ...." Quoted in James Walvin, *Slavery and the Slave Trade* (U. of Mississippi, 1983), p. 51.
[28] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1990), 236.
[29] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader,* 105.
[30] Reprinted in Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 1, 463.
[31]Some evidence suggests that in some ships the examinations of the "smallest member" went on aboard the vessel too. Captain Phillips, for example, wrote in 1693 that "the distemper which they call the yaws, is

While the evaluation experience and subsequent nakedness was without question humiliating for both sexes, the complete disregard for modesty may have been experienced differently by women than by men. These practices doubtless were conducted as they were, not only to evaluate slaves, but also to emphasise the purchasers' dominance.[32] While many individuals sold to Atlantic slavers had already experienced slavery for various lengths of time, and had suffered on their way to the coast, they were not necessarily inured to the rituals of pain and humiliation. From the slaves' perspective, both male and female, the violence of the purchasing process probably lay less in the physical affront than in the damage done to the their self-respect. The cavalier manner in which their humanity was disregarded constituted the heart of the violence. Much of this humiliation may have been directed inward, and not placed on the slavers, where it belonged. Feelings of shame, guilt, low self-esteem and depression, combined with either suppressed violence or apathy, were typical.[33] The selection procedures are sure to have had a profound psychological impact.

The examination process also had the effect of impressing on women the powerlessness of African men vis a vis their enslavers. Women were not only forced to submit to humiliation, but also forced to witness the inability of their male counterparts to interfere in any way. These practices were emasculating to male slaves, and part of an effort to break the spirits of the both male and female slaves while simultaneously emphasising

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very common here, and discovers itself by almost the same symptoms as the *Lues Venerea* or clap does with us; therefor our surgeon is forc'd to examine the privies of both men and women with the nicest scrutiny, which is a great slavery, but what can't be omitted." Reproduced in George F. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (Wesport, Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1970).

[32] I suspect that many slavers must have understood, at some level, the psychological ramifications of their policy. Their behaviour also doubtless reflected slave-trading tradition, practicality and a complete lack of respect for the individual being traded.

[33] A comparison to armed forces is useful here. Militaries seek to reduce their recruits to functional units by employing tactics of fear, humiliation and degradation, and by attempting to eradicate individual differences in innumerable ways. All are a part of an attempt to coerce unthinking obedience. Slavers may have done the same, whether their methods were a deliberate decision, or a process that evolved through practice.

slaver dominance.[34] It is not possible to establish whether the methods used were deliberately intended to have that effect, or a whether it simply evolved through practice.

Women and men also shared many circumstances when a slave ship put to sea, but may have experienced them differently. Several sources, for example, indicate the practice of involuntary nakedness for both male and female slaves continued during the Atlantic journey. Many slaves embarked stripped "of all they have on their backs; so that they come aboard stark-naked, as well women as men." They were then "obliged to continue [naked] if the master of the Ship is not so charitable (which he commonly is) as to bestow something on them to cover their nakedness."[35] Others, "[b]efore they enter[ed] the canoes" had been subject to similar treatment. "[T]heir former Black masters" had already stripped "them of every rag they have, without distinction of men or women." On "orderly" slaving vessels, however, "each of them as they come aboard is allowed a piece of canvas, to wrap around their waist, which is very acceptable to these poor wretches."[36]

The crude piece of canvas was provided only in *orderly* ships. One can deduce, therefore, that not all slaves received cloth and thus had to make the entire middle passage naked. Without question this affronted the slave's dignity, and for some the humiliation was excruciating. As late as 1830, Peter Leonard, who worked at suppressing the illegal slave trade in the British vessel, *Dryad,* boarded ships where among all the slaves "there was scarcely sufficient covering for the nakedness of half a dozen persons." They nonetheless

[34] This aspect of slavers' invasions on the persons of female slaves is analogous to the rape of black women on land. Hine recognizes the rape of black women as "an attack on the black men's property rights on black women." The notion of "property rights" of black men is problematic, especially in terms of the middle passage, as the ethnic composition of a slaving vessel could vary widely. However, the idea that the molestation and degradation of black women was a de facto attack on black men too, is a sound one. Darlene Clark Hine and David Barry Gaspar, eds., *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 24.
[35] W. Bosman, "*A New and Accurate Account.*" In Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 442.
[36] J. Barbot, "*A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea....*" In Donnan *Documents*, vol. 1,

"particularly the boys and girls" had "evinced by their actions a natural and unaffected sense of modesty." [37] Some slavers' accounts indicate that women were particularly embarrassed. John Atkins, a proponent of the trade wrote in his *Voyage to Guinea* that "the women retain a modesty, for tho' stripped of that poor clouth which covers their privies they will keep squatted all day long on board to hide them."[38]

Some slavers presented practical reasons for transporting the slaves naked, but the reasons were often inconsistent. Many slavers argued that nakedness on board was more hygienic, as slavers could then "avoid vermin." Stein, the only historian to consider the matter, concurs.[39] Certainly an overview of the primary sources suggests that hygiene was the foremost consideration, or at least justification, for slaves' nakedness during the middle passage. Danish trader Paul Isert, however, commenting on French ships, suggests that slaves' propensity for suicide explains their lack of clothing. "For this reason on French ships they are not even allowed a narrow strip of loincloth for fear they will hang themselves by it, which has in fact happened."[40] It is doubtful whether this is a common reason, however; men were more frequently naked than women, but as far as we know no more

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[37] Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa in His Majesty's Dryad, and in the Service of That Station for the Suppression of the SlaveTrade in the Years 1830, 1831, and 1832* (Nendeln: Kraus, 1973), 107.

[38] Quoted in C. Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 57.

[39] Robert Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 102. He claims that on French vessels only men went naked, while women covered themselves with a small piece of cloth. However, if hygiene were the only reason slaves were forced to travel naked, it does not make sense to have allowed some slaves to retain some clothing. Other sources directly or indirectly (by noting the filth of coverings) corroborate Stein's interpretation. But some ships' masters allowed slaves who came on board clothed to retain their clothing. William Page, a British sailor, said in 1845 that "Most of them were generally entirely without any article of clothes or covering, though at times they had strips of cloths around their loins, and some had handkerchiefs tied around them."

[40] Paul Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 176.

likely to commit suicide.[41] There are, moreover, many references to ships that state "most" or "nearly all" slaves had no covering, but some did, which would not have prevented slaves from committing suicide. Richard Ligon of Barbados presented another reason to keep slaves naked when he wrote in 1657 "the Planters buy them out of the ship, where they find them stark naked, and therefor cannot be deceived in any outward infirmity."[42] All of these accounts confirm, from the slavers' perspective, the social acceptability and economic desirability of slaves travelling naked. From the perspective of the slaves, however, the ritual of humiliation experienced on the coast of Africa was repeated for the benefit of their new purchasers.

During the middle passage, the sexes were segregated on virtually all ships. As John Atkins noted "this is a Rule always observed, to keep the Males apart from the Women and Children, and to handcuff the former."[43] Reasons given for this segregation of the sexes varied. Another slaver, Captain T. Phillips, explained that it prevented "quarrels and wranglings among them", as well as the spread of venereal disease. Nonetheless, communication was occasionally possible between the sexes. Phillips's frustration was evident in his remark that, although the men and women were separated "by partitions and bulk-heads" they could not be kept apart; "do what we can, they will come together."[44] On some, possibly most vessels, segregation was maintained at meal times. In Phillip's vessel, men were "all fed upon the main deck and the forecastle, that we may have them under the command of our arms from the quarter-deck, in case of any disturbance." The women,

[41] So it was on the *Albion*, where "we allowed . . . to the women, a piece of coarse cloth to cover them." George F. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (Wesport, Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1970), 84.
[42] D.W. Galenson, *Traders,* 85.
[43] Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 2, 281.
[44] T. Phillips, "A Journal of a Voyage made in the *Hannibal*" In George F. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1927), 61.

however, "eat upon the quarter-deck with us, and the boys and girls upon the poop."[45] No slave ship, however, seems to have made any distinction between the space allowed to individual men and women on board.

Primary sources suggest that men and women differed in the relative freedom they had on board. This reflected individual captains' policies. Generally, women had greater liberty of movement on board than men. Often women (and children) were not coupled by irons while on board at all; only in exceptional circumstances were they chained while at sea. A report to the House of Lords about the slave trade recounts that "The men are put in Irons, in which Situation they remain during the whole Middle Passage, unless they are sick, but not the Boys and Women", which reflects the most common situation.[46] Humanitarian concerns, however, did not necessarily prompt the slavers to remove the irons. Captain T. Conneau, for example, wrote that "the longer a slave is kept in irons, the more he deteriorates," and that "the sole object of a slaver is to land his cargo in perfect healthy order."[47]

Due to the fragmentary and subjective evidence, it is difficult to establish what percentage of slavers adopted this relatively liberal approach. It may have been a minority, as John Barbot inadvertently conceded when he noted that on his ship, he allowed the slaves "much more liberty" than "other Europeans would think prudent." He continued "many of the males had the same liberty [as the women] by turns, successively; few or none being

[45] El. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 407.
[46] Report of the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council, 2 vols., London, 1789. Excerpted in E. Donnan *Documents*, vol. 2, 598. See also T. Conneau *A Slaver's Logbook*, 85-86, Dow *Slave Ships*, 177, Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 282, and vol. 2, 353.
[47] T. Conneau *A Slaver's Logbook*, 85-86. Conneau's account is among the less reliable sources. He wrote his book out of pecuniary motives, and it is a sensationalist work that is biased in favour of the trade. But the form of reasoning he uses to justify the trade (and mechanics of the trade) is in and of itself revealing.

fetter'd or kept in shackles, and that only on account of some disturbances."[48]

In some ways, women manifested different reactions to enslavement than did men. They were, according to slaving accounts, for example, more likely to suffer mental breakdowns. These were occasionally, but not always, linked with suicide attempts. Alexander Falconbridge, for example, reported that frequently, "the negroes, on being purchased by the Europeans, become raving mad . . . particularly the women." He described a scene he had witnessed one day in the port of Bonny. A "middle aged stout woman, who had been brought down from a fair the preceding day" was "chained to the post of a black trader's door, in a state of furious insanity." At the same time, "a young negroe woman . . . who had lost her senses soon after she was purchased" was chained to the deck of a slaver in the Bonny River. Falconbridge had purchased such women himself. He had once been compelled "to confine a female negroe, of about twenty-three years of age, on her becoming a lunatic. She was afterwards sold during one of her lucid intervals."[49] That the woman was sold "during one of her lucid intervals", indicates that it is likely that mental breakdowns occurred more often than was reported, and also, that there was a sliding scale of "insanity." Even if a slave were well enough to be sold, she or he might have been mentally unstable.

Indeed, a number of slavers arrived at their destinations with female slaves among their cargo who were listed as mentally disturbed; they usually sold last, along with other 'refuse slaves'. One such woman delivered to Jamaica long remained unsold because she was "betweene mad & Foole soe that noe body would give any thing for her or accept her."

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[48] J. Barbot, in E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 462. There are also several accounts extant that clearly indicate that the women were ironed throughout the voyage.
[49] Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 32. The term 'mad' is problematic - I have taken it to mean a stress-induced mental breakdown, but the question needs working out.

Local planters were concerned that she might set fire to their plantations.[50]

A few scholars have noticed the phenomenon of insane women slaves on land and have offered possible explanations. Barbara Bush, for example, deals with the matter in a few lines. She believes that slave women "opted out by becoming raving mad."[51] Peter Wood has suggested that some insanity noted on land may have been pretence on the part of the slaves, a bluff that slavers "called, perhaps more often than it occurred."[52] No evidence, however, suggests that mental breakdowns on the middle passage were voluntarily chosen, and much suggests they were not. There was very little to gain by pretending insanity on shipboard, as conditions would not be improved and the question of a reduced workload was irrelevant. John Blassingame, on the other hand, has argued that the pressures of slavery, even on land, could cause mental breakdowns, especially when a slave was separated from her loved ones or in cases of extreme physical abuse.[53] The strain and dangers imposed by the middle passage was far worse than that of land-based slavery, and provided a fertile ground for mental breakdowns. [54]

Insanity was reported far more often among female slaves than male slaves. [55] This may, of course, simply reflect a sexist bias in recognising its symptoms. Or it may correctly reflect the relative frequency of mental breakdowns between the sexes. In the absence of

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[50] D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves,* 80.
[51] Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 56.
[52] Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 285-6
[53] John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 298.
[54] Another possible reason for insanity on slaving vessels was thirst. Buxton, in 1840, recorded an instance of a woman who went mad by drinking seawater. T.F. Buxton, *African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 147-8.
[55] Men also broke down under the mental stress of slavery. In 1702, for example, the Dutch ship *Koning van Portugal* returned 2 slaves, a man and a woman, for having gone "crazy." J.M. Postma, *The Dutch,* 242. He also mentions a slaving captain who abandoned five of his slaves on an island because of physical and mental handicaps.

other evidence, it is probably safe to assume that there was indeed a sex-based difference in the manifestations of insanity. The middle passage certainly posed an enormous mental strain on the African slaves. These range from the loss of one's homeland, friends, and family to the inhuman treatment aboard slavers, the bad physical condition of many slaves, the general ineffectiveness of one's own actions, and uncertainty as to what the future held. Hopelessness and despair must have been rampant. The factors above, of course, exclude any other personal losses for an individual slave, which would have been different in each case.

Although slavers' crews reported the "dramatic" aspects of women's lives (nakedness, madness and the like), we know very little about the daily lives of women slaves on the middle passage. What can be reconstructed is made up of fragments written for other purposes than to record the lives of women. These fragments must be seen in the context of a slaving vessel. These vessels were filthy, noisome and unhealthy. The crew, always potentially violent, inculcated fear into their desperate captives. Even seasickness could kill. John Falconbridge, a surgeon, offered a truism when he stated that "the hardships and inconveniencies suffered by the negroes during the passage, are scarcely to be enumerated or conceived."[56]

Certain tantalising tidbits, however, suggest that female slaves developed female societies, with their own hierarchy, aboard slavers. One old woman slave, who could not be sold, for example, had been cast into the sea to drown by her African owner. The crew of the *Katherine* rescued her. This old woman subsequently took it upon herself to reassure the other female slaves "who used always to be the most troublesome to us, on account of the

[56] A.M. Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two Voyages,* 23. Falconbridge noted that slaves "are far more violently affected by the sea-sickness, than Europeans", and that it "frequently terminates in death, especially among

noise and clamour they made." On this voyage, instead, the female slaves "were kept in such Order and Decorum by this woman, that [the captain] had never the like in any voyage before."[57] Such descriptions provide hints about women's ship-board life. What accounted for the "noise and clamour" of the women? Why did it occur; how typical was it?

Many sources suggest that as with the male slaves, not all was harmonious among women. John Falconbridge recounted that sometimes "The women are furnished with beads for the purpose of affording them some diversion. But this end is generally defeated by the squabbles which are occasioned, in consequence of their stealing them from each other."[58] Given the prevailing conditions on board slavers, of course, a short fuse among both slaves and slavers is not surprising. Other sources suggest that "squabbles" of various degrees of seriousness occurred regularly among both men and women. These could escalate to serious violence. For the most part the hierarchies and interactions between women slaves on board are lost.

Violence cannot be taken as the most prevalent type of interaction among women slaves. Much that did not give rise to explicit comment by the slavers was more common. For example, the formation of shipboard friendships that resulted in ties that lasted a lifetime and could be as close as familial ties, was not commented on by slavers. There must have been many unrecorded acts of selflessness, support and comfort. Moments of hope too, were not recorded. Yet we know they must have occurred. How often and to what effect is forever lost.

Other experiences, however, women by definition did not share with men. There are numerous references in primary sources, for example, to pregnant slave women aboard

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the women."

[57] W. Snelgrave "A New Account," in E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 351.

ships. Many slave ships provided (woefully inadequate) special accommodation for pregnant women on board. According to Barbot, Portuguese slave ships, for example, crowded most of the women between decks, except "those that are with child" who were crowded "in the great cabin."[59]

Women who gave birth during the middle passage were almost always pregnant before they were purchased by white slavers. Even including the time a vessel may have spent 'cruising' the coast of Africa in search of a full cargo of slaves, women would not have had enough time to become pregnant and deliver a child on board. The only plausible exception to this may have been if a woman had become pregnant in the 'barracoons' while her owner waited for a ship. While this was not impossible, it is unlikely to have been true often, as extreme psychological stress, malnutrition and physical stress would have reduced fecundity.[60] Falconbridge observed that some women were "so far advanced in their pregnancy, as to be delivered during their journey from the fairs to the coast; and I have frequently seen instances of deliveries on board ship."[61] Slavers, however, evidently did not seek out pregnant women to purchase.[62]

Both life on board and the journey to the coast, were physically and mentally demanding on a pregnant woman, and these were the most likely times for female slaves to be pregnant. The condition of a woman during her first trimester was most important in

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[58] Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade,* 23.
[59] J. Barbot and J. Casseneuve, "An Abstract of a Voyage to Congo River" in E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 459.
[60] See Rhoda Reddock, "Women and Slavery in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective," *Latin American Perspectives* 12, 1 (1985): esp. 67-8 and Barbara Bush, *Slave Women*, 137 on slave fecundity. While her argument on "emotional amenhorroea" is unlikely to have held for many slave women on land, it is likely to have more value when transferred to the middle passage.
[61] A. Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade,* 13.
[62] As pregnancy is usually only visible from the fifth month, it is probable that some women made the entire passage while pregnant without the slavers' knowledge. Slavers did, however, buy women they knew were pregnant. I have not located any source that contrasts the prices of pregnant women with those who were not, which might shed further light on the motivations of slavers when purchasing women they knew

determining the survival chances of a fetus.[63] A large number of miscarriages and high infant mortality rates are virtually certain. Miscarriages on slavers were too common to be remarked upon, unless they led to the mother's death. During the voyage of the vessel James in 1675, for example, a slave woman "[m]iscarryed and the Child dead within her and Rotten and dyed 2 days after delivery."[64]

Given the conditions aboard a typical slaver, it is remarkable that some mothers carried their babies to term. On land, for example, high slave infant mortality often resulted from nutritional defects.[65] On the middle passage, nutrition was doubtless very much worse. In the absence of adequate nutrition, a fetus will draw from its mother's reserves, thus further weakening her. Yet some women did, under these conditions, manage to carry their children to term. The mortality of both mother and child must have reached astronomical heights on board slavers. Unhygienic conditions must have caused infection rates to skyrocket, while both mother and baby would have had compromised immune systems. No literature addresses the subject of pregnant women or those with newborn infants on the middle passage. Births often occurred, however, and many were recorded. Such incidents are generally not related with the sense that they were unusual, whether the baby lived or died. The Rhode Island slaver *Hope*, for example, had boarded more than one hundred slaves in Africa, "besides one born afterwards on the passage."[66] Royal Navy vessels that

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to be pregnant. The lack of such sources is, however, also revealing.

[63] John Campbell, "Work, Pregnancy, and Infant Mortality among Southern Slaves." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14 (Spring, 1984), 808. By 1807 this knowledge was common enough to have been taken up in *The Planter's and Mariner's Medical Companion*.

[64] See "An Acc'tt of the Mortallity of Slaves Aboord the Shipp "James"." Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 1, 206.

[65] Kenneth F. Kiple, and Kiple, Virginia H., "Slave Child Mortality: Some Nutritional Answers to a Perennial Puzzle." *Journal of Social History* 10, 3 (March 1977), esp. 287-88. For details on infant mortality in Jamaica under slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica*. (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 101.

[66] Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 353. The case is recounted in detail on pages 334-358.

suppressed the illegal trade reported many births. They may have been more common in the illegal trade, although almost certainly not to the extent that the increased reports indicate. The increase probably represents the impact the cruelties of the trade had on members of the Royal Navy, rather than an increase in births. When Peter Leonard's vessel, for example, captured the slaver *Primeira,* he wrote that the slaves included "four infants at the breast, one of whom was born since the period of capture, whose mother, unhappy creature, sickly and emaciated, was suckling it on deck, with hardly a rag to cover either herself or her offspring."[67]

Slavers may have been more inclined to accept pregnant women who they expected to deliver their child after the vessel was safely at its destination. If the birth were postponed till after the mother's sale, the new owner would have assumed the risks associated with delivery. This was, of course, not always possible. When the *Elizabeth* docked in Caracas on March 11, 1737, she had smallpox on board, and was quarantined. While she waited for permission to land, the agent reported that "one of the finest women had been delivered of a mulatto boy and were both well."[68] This reference is particularly interesting as it indicates that the child had a white father. The passage was too short for the father to have been a member of the crew, so the woman in question must have had a sexual encounter with a white man in Africa.

Of course, the middle passage also provides horrific examples of the treatment of newly-delivered women. These were often written by abolitionists, in an effort to show the horrors of the trade. Without corroborating evidence, it is difficult to determine whether these incidents actually occurred, or whether reality was exaggerated in the interests of the

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[67] Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage,* 104.
[68] Quoted in C. Palmer, *Human Cargoes,* 114.

abolitionist cause. In the case of women who gave birth on the middle passage, abolitionists often mentioned extreme instances of cruelty. Captain Hayes of the Royal Navy described slave women brought on board the *Dryad* from a captured slaver in 1831 who "were just brought from a situation between decks, ... where the scalding perspiration was running from one to the other, covered also with their own filth, and were [was] is no uncommon occurrence for women to be bringing forth children" while "men [were] dying by their side, with, full in their view, living and dead bodies chained together."[69] It was, of course, standard practice to segregate men and women and dead bodies were usually removed immediately for fear of the spread of disease, which makes the quote suspect. On the other hand, Falconbridge, an ex-slaving surgeon who became an active abolitionist, noted that on one occasion, he did see "a pregnant woman give birth to a baby while still shackled to a corpse that our drunken overseer had neglected to remove."[70]

The relationship between mother and child on the middle passage may have been a particularly mutually dependent one. Female slaves were sometimes reported to have "died of grief" after their new-borns died.[71] The captain of the James noted in 1676 the fate of a young mother and her child "bought by myselfe" who, being "very fond of her Child Carrying her up and downe wore her to nothing by which means fell into a feavour and dyed."[72] It is possible that having an infant might have increased a mother's chance of survival. A baby gave an enslaved woman a responsibility and something active to do, and may have provided her with a determination to live in order to protect the infant. The

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[69] T.F. Buxton, *African Slave Trade,* 155. This was an extreme case; the rhetoric was no doubt due to his shock at the conditions he found.
[70] T. Brady and Evan Jones, *The Fight Against Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1975), 83.
[71] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 242. On 258, when discussing women's mortality rate, he opines that "Women must have had a big share in the care of the young, which may also have resulted in a greater sense of purpose." This is the only mention I have seen of the question, but it is certainly an idea that deserves investigation. If true, it can certainly be extrapolated to the care of newborn infants.

reverse was probably also true – if a baby were to die, the chances of the mother dying as well might have been increased.

Another experience that slave women did not (commonly) share with slave men was the possibility of suffering sexual abuse and rape. A number of scholars have examined the issue of rape in plantation settings, but none have done so for the middle passage.[73] Women can only be characterised as profoundly sexually vulnerable aboard a slaving vessel, where rape, as elsewhere, was a multi-faceted phenomenon. To understand such rapes, one must balance questions of sex, dominance, and the mores of the day, both on board, and in terms of the construction of the black female slave body.[74] Rape on a slaving vessel emphasised in the most intimate way possible the subjugation of the victim to her oppressor. It impressed upon the slave woman that to her captors, and quite probably for the rest of her life, she was regarded simply property, without the right to honour. By the legal ideals of a slave system, she would internalise or at least accept this. Rape, in the context of slavery in general and the middle passage in particular, is a systematic and overt denial to the victim of the most basic of self-determination. On the middle passage it was part of a forcible learning process about what western slavery meant to an enslaved woman, and one that continued under land-based slavery. Rape and its threat were in many ways the functional equivalent for women of the horrific physical punishments inflicted on men. Both kept victims and observers in a constant state of fear and uncertainty, and both expressed the slaver's power

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[72] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 207.
[73] For example, Thelma Jennings, "'Us Colored Women had to Go Through Plenty': Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women," *Journal of Women's History* 1, 3 (Winter 1990).
[74] The question of domination is complex. Domination was not limited to that of white men vis a vis black women, but of white people over black people, of whiteness over blackness. That this was the case during the middle passage is confirmed by comments such as those of Ottabah Cugoana, who years after his middle passage, wrote bitterly about "the dirty filthy sailors" who would "take the African women and lie upon their bodies." Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments of the Evil of Slavery* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1787), 10. The crew did not need to consciously use rape as a tool of racial dominance for it to

to control the slave's body. Slavery in general, and rape in particular, both made this point in the most unambiguous manner possible. Rape, however, was an even more intense and personal violation than physical punishment. And, of course, women were subject to both.[75] Consensual and even mutually caring sexual relations between black and white people, of course, existed, possibly even when the woman concerned was a slave. Such relationships, albeit exceptionally, did take place on land.[76]

Such relations, however, were not possible between slaver and slave on a slaving ship. The power imbalances on a slaving vessel were too great for any sexual relationship not to be, in some way, coerced. The passage was too transient and too overtly based on the commodification of slave women to allow a consensual relationship to develop. Not all rapes were identical, of course, even on the middle passage. They differed by vessel and by individual in the explicitness of the threat of violence, the level of violence used, and the level of resistance offered. Individual slave women also made choices regarding self-preservation vis a vis overt resistance. Nonetheless, the context of the middle passage ensured that all sexual relations between slave women and crew were necessarily rape. There were other important differences between the sexual exploitation of black women on land on sea. On slave ships, men did not have to contend with white women's resentment. There were no white women (or white 'society') on board, and the sexual relationships on the middle passage were so transient as to pose no threat to white 'society.' On a slaving vessel, moreover, control over a woman's reproductive capacity was not an issue of

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function as such.

[75] Foulcault has pointed out that the body is the ultimate locus of power; this provides an excellent conceptual framework in which to study rape and physical punishment on the middle passage, and indeed, slavery itself. M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (New York: Pantheon, 1997).

[76] Sexual exploitation on land was far more common than relationships based on mutual caring, but the latter was possible. See for example, B. Bush, *Slave Women,* 115.

contention, as it could be on land.[77]

It is, of course, easy to condemn slavers for the sexual exploitation of enslaved women. But in order to understand the phenomenon, it must be placed in its historical and cultural context. Many of the female slaves aboard a slave ship had been slaves in Africa before being sold to white traders, where they could not expect to retain control over their sexuality either. The sexual exploitation on the middle passage will have come as no surprise to many of them, although it was made more terrifying by the uncertainty of their future, terrible conditions, and the added dimension of race.[78] To African slave women and girls who were sold into the Arabic trade (which accounted for as many slaves as did the Atlantic trade), the prospects in this regard were at least equally bad.[79]

Rapes on slavers were also intimately connected to perceptions about black women and their bodies. Darlene Clark Hine, writing about black women on land, notes the existence of a "constructed view of black sexuality." She argues that "This construct, which was designed to justify [the master's] own sexual passion toward her, also blamed the female slave for the sexual exploitation at the hands of her master."[80] This argument also applies to female slaves on the middle passage, and the crew of the vessel. On Dutch vessels the female slave quarter was often referred to as the "hoeregat" (whore-hole), a term that

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[77] See for example D. Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14 (Summer, 1989), 41.

[78] See for example Robert Harms, "Sustaining the System: Trading Towns Along the Middle Zaire," in *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 1983). Slave women in Africa often did not have a choice in reproductive matters. See also Darlene Clark Hine and David Barry Gaspar, eds., *More Than Chattel*, 24.

[79] This was reflected in the number of women slaves available to the Atlantic trade, and the price of young female slaves in the interior of Africa. D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*, 109-110. The same humiliating examination procedure was performed on them, and according to a contemporary viewer, before leaving, they were "stripped naked and marched through the town, people laughing." John Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 52, 57.

[80] Darlene Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1997), 28.

clearly has a double meaning.[81] The word simultaneously degrades women slaves and makes them complicit in their own rape. Conditions aboard slavers also contributed to the intensification of the perception of black women as "different" from white women. The nakedness and absolute lack of privacy left little with which to construe an image of chasteness; the isolation of a ship on the Atlantic did not have the benefit of the social controls – inadequate as they were – which all forms of land-based slavery had to some degree. Nor did the slave women have time to learn about their circumstances and oppressors which might have helped them formulate a response. The women were more vulnerable, both physically and socially, and less able to resist effectively.

In fact, the denigration of the (black) rape victim may have been more necessary on the middle passage than on land. The slaver needed to vindicate the justness of the trade and his complicity in it, as well as his lust, honour and race. The extreme weakness of his "opponent" made this all the more necessary. It seems a contradictory requirement; the victim was debased by the oppressor, and the oppressor re-confirmed his virtue through his debasement of the victim. But it was essential to blame the victim. If the oppressor conceded a common humanity to his victim, he would have to take responsibility for his acts. The rape of slave women can thus be understood as a vindication of the crew in their role as slavers. By raping (dominating) slave women, either with or without overt resistance, they affirm their power and simultaneously "prove" to themselves and, supposedly, their victims the slave's inferiority, with the corollary that they therefore deserve the treatment they receive. Rape served slavers as a physical resolution for a mental dilemma. This process did not need to be conscious for it to have the effect described.

It is difficult to determine the number of rapes on slaving vessels. Certainly many

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[81] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch,* 243.

fewer incidents were reported than occurred. The reason for this omission is twofold: first, rape was not exceptional enough to elicit much comment; second, it was in no one's interest to do so. Even if captains or ranking officers who were not involved in a rape wished to complain about the matter, they would have been in danger of angering their superiors and alienating their contemporaries. The merchants who financed the voyages were often kept in the dark, as they would fear for the value of their cargoes occurred on board the vessel. Sympathetic crew members would have feared their captains and the derision of other crew. Captains' power, slave ships' isolation, and the need to be employed were sufficient mechanisms to create a "conspiracy of silence." Second, rapes were often also relatively private affairs. It is highly doubtful whether any given captain – whether or not he allowed the practice – knew exactly how many rapes occurred on his vessel.

Despite the fact that the evidence resists quantification, therefore, it still suggests that sexual exploitation was extremely common. Offhand references to the matter, a near universal lack of protest against it, and the number of extreme cases discussed in surviving accounts despite reasons for not documenting them, combine to suggest that the sexual abuse of at least some women slaves was the rule rather than the exception. John Newton confirmed that rape was "commonly" and "generally prevalent."[82] Ottobah Cugoano, one of the few Africans to have written about the middle passage, agrees. He believes that it was "common" for sailors to abuse slave women.[83] The commonness of sexual abuse may account in part, for the lack of evidence regarding incidents of abuse that did not physically damage the victim.[84, 85]

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[82] J. Newton, quoted in J. Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 100.
[83] Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments,* 10.
[84]As Newton noted, "the enormities frequently committed in an African ship … were considered *there*, only as a matter of course." John Newton, *The Journal,* 105.

While rape was common on slaving vessels, it is not possible to establish what percentage of women on a given slaving vessel were generally raped. It will certainly almost always not have been all.[86] It was probably the young, the pretty and the most vulnerable who suffered rape the most.[87] All women on board slaving vessels nonetheless suffered from the constant fear of being raped, and terror is a potent form of violence.[88]

Slaving captains and merchants were hardly ever concerned with African women's modesty or chastity after they had been sexually abused, but rather with their value. Insofar as rape lessened women's economic value, it became a cause for concern. Most financiers understood that some abuse, especially sexual abuse, would occur on slave ships. Typically, a financier's instructions were simply to treat slaves, including women, "as well as circumstances allow[ed]." In 1705, for example, merchant Thomas Stark instructed his captain, John Westmore, to "take care that the Boatswaine and other officers keep the Ship cleane and them and no other of your Men abuse the Negroes."[89] Other financiers

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[85] As an aside – owners were generally the individuals responsible for the names of slave vessels, and the English slave trade transported women slaves on vessels called *Bachelor's Delight* and the *Jolly Bachelor*. Though it is doubtful whether the owners had the slave women in mind when naming the vessel (or not changing a vessel's name), the insensitivity is telling. Countless female slaves made the crossing on vessels called the *Venus*; at least fifty-six transatlantic slaving voyages were made on slavers by that name. The *African Queen* was another common name for slaving vessels.

[86] The Atlantic Slavery database, however, indicates that the average slaver had just over 30 crew members. Not all of these will have been rapists, but on many ships the adult women will not have outnumbered the men by much, if at all. This is calculated on the basis of 10702 voyages on which the number of crew at the outset of the voyage are known. Combined, there were 322095 crewmembers employed which returns an average of 30.09 crew members per voyage.

[87] It is not possible to be certain whether was in fact the case. Rape is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and there are too few primary sources specific enough to allow confident generalization with regard to the slave trade. Major M'Gregor, a special justice in the Bahamas is an example of a source supporting the notion. He wrote "I shall not shock your feelings by entering into the details of the abominable conduct of the captain and the crew of this vessel during the passage towards some of the youthful and best-looking on board" with regard to a case that came before him. Quoted in T.F. Buxton, *African Slave Trade,* 169. Crew often had a choice of slave women, and the circumstances on a slaver almost certainly caused some members to become rapists who would not have been so in other circumstances; peer pressure was probably intense. Whether this effected their choice of victims is unclear.

[88] Darlene Clark Hine compares the rape of black women to the lynching of black men as a tool of terror in "Rape and the Inner Lives."

[89] Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 4, 76.

mentioned sexual abuse specifically, as did the merchant who underwrote Captain Herpin's voyage in French slaver *Aurore*. Herpin was ordered "to take great care of the health of the negroes, to prevent lewdness between the negresses and the negroes and the crew."[90]

The psychological consequences of the experience of being raped must have differed in each case. While all women who were raped suffered to some degree, they differed in their resilience and ability to reconcile themselves to their experiences. Feelings of guilt, shame, and the certainty of not being able to obtain any form of redress may have led women to hide this part of their lives. How women who suffered sexual abuse and were traumatised by it came to terms with their experiences is an unanswerable question. This was all the more true if a slave woman became pregnant from a non-consensual relationship. Feelings of distrust, vulnerability, suspicion, anger, and perhaps even guilt was some of the baggage that rape burdened its victims with, beyond the "normal" consequences of the experience of the middle passage.

Power is a relational concept and therefore its exercise is, to some degree, always negotiated. The oppressed are often left with some measure of agency and some room to manoeuvre. The immediate power of slavers, however, over the fates of their captives was enormous—much greater than that of their future masters.[91] Female slaves, while not in a position to reject the sexual advances of their captors unequivocally, did have the ability - at great risk - to negotiate a portion of their fate. How much room they had to negotiate

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[90] Quoted in James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 296.

[91] There are many reasons for this. There was no specific slave law on the seas and the middle passage was a closed society with far fewer societal mores to restrict crew. The cultural differences between oppressor and oppressed were greater than on land, and the relationship was a transient one. There was less incentive for the crew to recognize the slaves' individuality and no need for them to bargain over the conditions of work or confinement. The slave trade from Africa was, in the aggregate, a more brutal system than land-based slave exploitation, and those that partook in it were often more hardened than their counterparts on land. The differences between slavery on land and sea are addressed in the introduction and in various

depended on numerous factors, including whether the ship's captain had a policy regarding sexual contact and how seriously it was taken, the rank of the perpetrator, the financiers' strictures on not having women physically damaged, and the willingness of the individual abuser to resort to greater physical violence.

The risk accompanying resistance varied from vessel to vessel, and among abusers. Perhaps the most difficult decision a woman slave faced was deciding whether or not to resist. Not choosing to resist overtly might lead to self-blame, disgust and even hatred, but resisting could be a very risky course of action. As Leonard, who was engaged in the suppression of the trade in the early 1830s, writes of a vessel taken by the brig *Plumber* "[o]ne of the female slaves ... had long and indignantly repulsed the disgusting advances of the master of the schooner." The master finally "finding himself foiled in his execrable attempts on her person, became furious with disappointment, and murdered his unfortunate and unoffending victim with most savage cruelty."[92] For a small minority of slave women, death was preferable to rape. Others chose to acquiesce for a variety of reasons, foremost among them survival.[93]

How typical acquiescence was is impossible to recover, as less violent cases of rape were least likely to be reported. But they were certainly more common than those cases that resulted in severe physical injury or death. This does not suggest that slave women were complicit with their abuser, but that a slave woman might hope for some amelioration of her

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places in this work.

[92] Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage,* 141-2.

[93] In the context of slavery on land, Dadzie has noted that male historians tend to underestimate the trauma of rape, and assume too quickly that women "took readily to prostituting their bodies", while men "looked impotently on." This is a wise caution, but it should not stop questions being asked about the individual decisions slave women on the middle passage were often forced to make. It is no way a condemnation or judgment to consider the full range of coping strategies that women used to survive a potentially life threatening situation. Stella Dadzie, "Searching for the Invisible Woman: Slavery and Resistance in Jamaica," *Race and Class* 32, 2 (October-December 1990), 25.

situation by acceding to her captors' advances. First, she might escape greater physical violence or death. Further, she might hope for protection from the advances of other crew members, or better living conditions.[94]

Some slave women, however, may have overestimated the benefits they might receive from crew members with whom they were sexually involved.[95] Falconbridge stated that some slave women took "the inconstancy of their paramours so much to heart as to leap overboard and to drown themselves."[96] No doubt these were exceptional cases, but it remains an interesting and complex observation; the women may have expected more from their captors than they would give, perhaps even a permanent relationship.[97]

For all practical purposes, however, the last word on the treatment of slave women (and men) lay, not with crew members, but with the captain of the slaving vessel. His will and example determined what was acceptable on a vessel, and what was not. As John Newton wrote, the character of a ship "depends much upon the disposition and attention of the captain." Although "several commanders of African ships were prudent, respectable

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[94] Patterson believes that a woman's chances of survival were "Improved by their more spacious accommodation in the hull of the ships, by the fact that they were not chained", and also by the fact that since the crew exploited them sexually, they may also have "ensured the better treatment of whatever woman or women had taken their fancy." He may be partly right about the first point, though there is no evidence to suggest that the very small amount of extra space they (sometimes) had effected mortality. See Charles Garland and Herbert S. Klein et al, "The Allotment of Space for Slaves Aboard Eighteenth-Century British Slave Ships," *William and Mary Quarterly* 42, 2 (1985), 238-248. He is probably right about the second point. However, he is likely mistaken about the third; the (hypothetical) increased survival chances of those women who were sexually exploited on board could not have been sufficient to effect the statistics for all women. Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery,* 99.
[95] Dadzie has convincingly argued that the amount of benefit a slave (on land) could expect from allowing sexual access is probably over-rated by historians. Her point is even more valid for the middle passage. Stella Dadzie, "Searching for the Invisible," 25-6.
[96] A. Falconbridge, quoted in J. Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers,* 100.
[97] Hine and Gaspar point out that concubinage on land did not necessarily lead to manumission. This is all the more true of concubinage on sea. Relationships varied in length from single contacts to the duration of the voyage. To the crew, and to present-day observers, it seems an absurdly naïve for slave women to hope for a lasting relationship, perhaps one which would lift them out of their plight. But if the process of obtaining "consent" were undertaken with enough seeming concern for the woman concerned, and with enough promises, it might have seemed to some women to offer a glimmer of hope. Darlene Clark Hine and David Barry Gaspar, eds., *More Than Chattel,* 25.

men" who "maintained a proper discipline and regularity in their vessels," there were also "too many of a different character." Speaking specifically about sexual exploitation, he stated that in "some ships, perhaps the most, the licence allowed in this particular, was almost unlimited. Moral turpitude was seldom considered." Instead officers and men "who took care to do the ship's business, might, in other respects, do what they pleased."[98] Officers in particular were likely to rape female slaves and employ overt violence. James Arnold, in sworn testimony, claimed that Captain Williams of the brig *Ruby* usually sent for a woman slave "especially a young one" near the beginning of a voyage. He forced these women "to come to his cabin that he might lie with them. Sometimes they would refuse to comply with his desires and would be severely beaten by him."[99]

Captains could abuse a slave virtually with impunity. Crew were answerable to their captain or ranking officers for the harm they did slaves, but captains were answerable only to their financiers, who were generally far away, and unlikely to learn of any abuse. Most reported cases of extreme sexual abuse are, not surprisingly, attributed to captains or other officers. Falconbridge, for example, while commenting on sexual abuse of women slaves in general, noted "The officers are permitted to indulge their passions among them at pleasure and sometimes are guilty of such brutal excesses as disgrace human nature."[100] His observation that officers were usually responsible for extreme acts of sexual abuse is accurate. This does not mean that common sailors never harmed the women they abused. It does, however indicate that they almost certainly did so less frequently than their superiors.

The cases of extreme of sexual abuse – "brutal excesses" – that officers were

[98] John Newton, *The Journal,* 102.
[99] James Arnold's testimony in the Report to the House of Lords on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, London, 1789. Reprinted in G. Dow, *Slave Ships*, 175.
[100] A. Falconbridge, "Account of the Slave Trade", reprinted in Dow, 145.

usually responsible for can be divided into two broad categories. The first is aberrant sexual behavior; the second is violence so extreme that the woman's life was endangered. High and low-ranking officers could be guilty of aberrant sexual behavior. In 1753, Newton stated that, while he and other officers were off the deck a midshipman, William Cooney, "seduced a woman slave down into the room and lay with her brutelike in view of the whole quarter deck, for which I put him in irons. I hope this has been the first affair of the kind on board and I am determined to keep them quiet if possible. If anything happens to the woman I shall impute it to him, for she was big with child. Her number is 83."[101] Although Newton explicitly forbade sexual contacts between his crew and the slaves, he did not appear surprised that such an incident took place. He was not certain that other rapes had not occurred, which implies both that his restrictions were unpopular, and that the policing them was very difficult. Whether he intended to keep his junior officers quiet if possible, or the actual "affair[s]" themselves is not clear. In this instance the perpetrator was put in chains, but whether it was for the rape, for very publicly disobeying an order, or because Cooney's victim was a heavily pregnant woman subject to considerable physical harm, is unclear.

In another case, a slaving captain had chosen a slave woman "as his favourite and kept her in his cabin." One day, however, "when she was playing with his son, she accidentally tore his shirt. When the captain learned of it, he whipped her unmercifully with the cat and beat her up with his fists until she threw herself from him against the pumps and in doing so injured her head so severely that she died three days after."[102] A French slaving captain, Liot, had a pattern of violent abuse towards female slaves; he endangered their lives, and reduced their market value on arrival in the New World. On one voyage, both

[101] J. Newton, *The Journal,* 75.
[102] From James Arnold's testimony in the Report to the House of Lords on the Abolition of the Slave Trade,

were combined in one slave. He "mistreated a very pretty negress, broke two of her teeth, and put her in a state of languish that she could only be sold for a very low price at Saint Domingue where she died two weeks later."[103] An ordinary crewmember could not commit such an act of violence without adverse consequences. While such extremes on the part of officers are not representative of all women's experiences, they do illustrate what the system made possible. Recovering both "typical" experiences and extreme behaviours are vital to the writing of an African-American history that strives for completeness.

On some slave ships, sailors had official approval to have sexual relations with slaves. Falconbridge stated that "On board some ships the common sailors are allowed to have intercourse with such of the black women whose consent they can procure," although even then, physical harm was not tolerated. [104] In the world of slave transportation, the value of a sailor's life could be less than that of a slave; a slave's death represented a financial loss to captain and financier, while the death of a sailor did not. Falconbridge does not elaborate on the process of procuring "consent" from the slave women, but no sailor, of course, could secure any consent that would not be coerced. Newton was explicit about this point. He writes that "[w]here resistance or refusal, would be utterly in vain, even the solicitation of consent is seldom thought of" and continued, "the licence allowed in this particular, was almost unlimited."[105]

Even if sailors were not given permission to abuse women slaves, ships' officers

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London, 1789. Reprinted in G. Dow, *Slave Ships*, p. 175.
[103] R.L. Stein, *The French Slave,* 101. Stein suggests that Liot's actions were reported due to "personal contempt for Liot, along with the desire to justify a poor trade." Of course there is no way to measure the psychological damage that both sailors and officers inflicted.

[104] Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade,* 23-4.
[105] John Newton, *The Journal*, 102. Both Newton and Falconbridge became abolitionists later in life. Given the corroborating evidence, this need not shake our faith in their assertions about the sexual vulnerability of slave women.

could not oversee the actions of all the crew throughout the middle passage.[106] The logbook of the ship *Mary*, which had a prohibition on sexually abusing women slaves, makes the point. On May 6, 1796, the captain wrote "This morning found our Women Slave Appartments had been attempted to have been opened by some of the Ship's crew, the Locks being Spoiled and sundered."[107] The chances of crewmen getting caught were not very large: fear and language barriers would have inhibited the victims from complaining.

Finally, women's roles in slave insurrections differed substantially from that of men. Contemporary scholars do not agree on the degree of assertion West African women were permitted in their own societies vis a vis men during the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.[108] Eighteenth-century European writers, however, frequently suggested that women slaves were less dangerous than men. John Newton wrote that "From the women, there is no danger of insurrection, and they are carefully kept from the men; I mean from the

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[106] Even if forbidden to do so, the temptation for crew members to sexually abuse the women was great. Williams reports a remark made by Newton in this respect. Newton, explicit about his monogamous relationship with his wife, observed that he "had a number of women under his absolute command; and knowing the danger of his situation on that account, he absolved to abstain from flesh in his food, and to drink nothing stronger than water, during the voyage." He hoped "that, by abstemiousness, he might subdue every improper emotion; and that, upon his setting sail, the sight of a certain point of land was the signal for his beginning a rule which he was enabled to keep." In Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), p. 509. It is not possible to verify this account, but it nonetheless illustrates the point that temptation was a fact of life on board a slaving vessel, even for the well intentioned.

[107] On this vessel action was undertaken for such breaches of discipline; in a separate incident 10 days later officer, Moore, was stripped of rank and privileges by Captain Nathan Sterry, being deemed "no longer [a] fit companion for the Cabin." However, such sanctions against officers are rare finds in the primary literature. In Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 3, 374.

[108] There is a large and complex literature on the question. There is little agreement for any given society, and even less on broader generalisations. Writers on slavery are similarly divided. Claire Robertson and Martin Klein have argued that in much of Africa women were the victims of "an ideology which assumed female inferiority", and were subjected to "submissive socialization." They contend that "In many [African] societies women were and are taught to obey men unquestioningly." C.C. Robertson & M.A Klein., *Women and Slavery*, 6. Drawing from the writings of Oluadah Equiano, Bush argues that Ibo women had a tradition of combat. She insists, without further evidence, that "The Iboes were generally the ringleaders of shipboard insurrections at Bonny and [that] the women took as active part as the men." B. Bush, *Slave Women,* 68. Terborg-Penn argues that in some African societies women had a tradition of military training and offers the example of women soldiers in Dahomy. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Women and Slavery in the African Diaspora: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Historical Analysis," *Sage: A Scholarly journal on Black Women* 3, 2 (Fall 1986), 192.

black men."[109] This attitude was widely shared among slavers despite women's involvement in a number of violent uprisings on slavers. On some vessels, for example, the men were "all under command of . . . arms from the quarter-deck, in case of any disturbance", during meal times (a time of heightened risk for resistance attempts) while women in general were not so closely guarded.[110]

Numerous accounts indicate that women slaves participated in many resistance activities aboard slavers, from passive resistance to outright mutiny, but that men dominated organised violent resistance. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, writing about the resistance of women slaves on land, put it in terms that apply equally to shipboard conditions. She suggests that "It is probably safe to say that there is no form of insurrectionary struggle in which some women have not engaged ... it is also true that historically, as in the contemporary world, women are less likely to assume political and military leadership."[111] When the question of leadership or planning resistance on slaving vessels was addressed in contemporary accounts, a single man or a group of men were almost invariably identified as the culprits.

On the other hand, female slaves often supported men in their efforts to rebel collectively. Women, like men, took advantage of specific circumstances, to support rebellions. Women slaves, for example, were generally less strictly confined than men. They were less frequently ironed or chained, and less heavily guarded. Some slavers were very aware of the possibilities this afforded. Samuel Waldo, for example, owner of the *Affrica*, cautioned his captain to beware of both women and children slaves aboard his vessel, and

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[109] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader,* 105.
[110] Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 1, 407.
[111] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Strategies and Forms of Resistance: Focus on Slave Women in the United States," in *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-American History*, Gary Y. Okihiro

noted "For your safety as well as mine You'll have the needfull Guard over your Slaves." He continued "putt not too much confidence in the Women nor Children least they happen to be Instrumental to your being surprised which may be Fatall."[112] Numerous accounts indicate that women used their greater liberty on board in various ways. John Atkins described an insurrection attempt led by a male slave named Tomba, who "had combined with three or four of the stoutest of his Country-men to kill the Ship's Company, and attempt their escape." The plot had nearly succeeded, thanks to the work of a "Women-Slave, who, being more at large, was to watch [for] the proper Opportunity. She brought him word one night that there were no more than five white Men aboard the Deck, and they asleep, bringing him a Hammer at the same time."[113] This attempt failed, but the advantages the woman's greater liberty afforded her, enabled her both to act as an informant and to secure and deliver a weapon.

The same roles for female slaves – that of informants and procurers of weapons – surfaced time and again in insurrections. A mutiny on board the *Thomas*, for example, in which female slaves passed males the weapons they used to take control of the ship, was initially successful.[114] A rare successful mutiny on the *Virginie* in 1841, which resulted in the death of the entire crew revealed the same pattern. "The women", owing to "the incommodious size of the vessel, had been placed in the apartment containing the arms, which they managed to convey unperceived to the men, who rushed upon deck well

(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 146.

[112] Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, Suffolk Court Files, no. 46527. Reproduced in E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 45.

[113] J. Atkins "A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and West-Indies", reproduced in part in E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 266.

[114] The surviving crew members staged a successful counter-mutiny when the slaves were incapacitated by the rum that they had seized. Related in D'Auvergne E.B., *Human Livestock: An Account of the Share of the English-Speaking Peoples in the Development, Maintenance and Suppression of Slavery and the Slave Trade* (London: Greyson & Greyson, 1933), 71.

prepared, and soon overwhelmed their weak and unprincipled opponents."[115] While the crew's short-sightedness in placing the women in the arms room was exceptional, the women's method of taking advantage of the opportunity was not.

On occasion, however, the women's segregation from the male slaves led to defeat. Sometimes, female slaves did not know that the men were rebelling. After Captain Bell successfully suppressed a mutiny on his ship, for example, he wrote to the vessels owner that "The women" had "no hand in the rebellion" as they had had "no time to consult about it." Otherwise, he noted "in all probability your property here at this time would have been but small."[116] During other mutinies, slave women, even without warning, supported the men in their violent efforts. Captain Conneau described one such, noting that "the women in the cabin, seconding their fellow male prisoners, rose in a body on the man at the helm, who, with his knife wounded several and silenced them."[117]

On the other hand, women also are often named as the betrayers of violent resistance on land and at sea. This characterisation has been the subject of controversy among contemporary historians.[118] As on land, the preliminary evidence suggests that women did betray plots more frequently than men, especially in view of their relatively fewer numbers. Ottobah Cugoana, for example, relates that there was a plot among the men and boy slaves to "burn and blow up the ship, and to perish all together in the flames" but that "we were betrayed by one of our own country-woman, who slept with the head-man of the ship."[119] Of course, in this case the woman in question may quite reasonably have decided that she

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[115] P. Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, 108.
[116] Letter of John Bell to John Fletcher, 1776. E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 323.
[117] T. Conneau, *Slaver's Logbook*, 208.
[118] For dissenting points of view, see Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) and B. Bush, *Slave Women*. There is no work that considers the matter for resistance on sea.
[119] O. Cugoana, "Thoughts and Sentiments" in J. Pope-Hennessy, 100.

had no desire to die rather than to be a slave. Nonetheless, clearly not everyone on board was to be equally trusted with vital information.

The harshest punishments aboard slavers were reserved for failed mutineers, and women's sex often did not ameliorate these punishments. Women, when full participants in resistance or mutinies, were subject to the full penalties for failure. This was as true for the extremes of punishment as it was for more standard punishments.[120] William Page, a British sailor on the American vessel *Kentucky*, described the punishments meted out for a failed mutiny attempt. These were very severe, and included a "flogging" which was "administered to six women and twenty men by means of a stick about 2 feet long, with four or five strands of raw hide secured to the end of it (the hide was dry and hard and about 2 feet long)" as well as "a piece of the hide of a sea-horse; this was a strip about 4 feet long, from half an inch to an inch wide, as thick as one's finger or thicker, and hard as whalebone, but more flexible." He added "All the women flogged died at this time died."[121]

Women slaves in general were less valuable then men, although this differential probably did not often play a role in whether they received capital punishments more often than did men for similar offences. Occasionally at least, the different financial values of male and female slaves did play a role, as John Atkins's account of Captain Harding of the slaver *Robert* indicates. In 1721, Harding put down an insurrection by five slaves that cost the lives of three crew members. He thereupon weighed "the Stoutness and Worth of the two Slaves" and decided to "whip and scarify them only." The other three rebels, however,

[120] Extreme punishments tend to be disproportionately represented in the primary literature, as their cruelty made them remarkable and more likely to be recorded than standard punishments. They also resulted in more deaths, also likely to be recorded. But the severity of a "normal" whipping should not be underestimated.
[121] R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 41. This example is not typical in terms of the numbers of slaves who lost their lives - forty six slaves, including a woman, were executed; this excludes the women referred to

"Abettors, but not Actors, nor of strength for it, he sentenced to cruel Deaths; by making them first eat the Heart and Liver of one of them killed. The Woman he hoisted up by the Thumbs, whipp'd, and slashed her with Knives before the other Slaves till she died."[122] This punishment was not typical, but it confirms that financial considerations did, at least occasionally, play a role in determining who was to be executed.[123]

On the other hand, women slaves engaged in individual acts of resistance at least as often as their male counterparts.[124] Suicide was one such activity. An entry in the logbook of the Rhode Island slaver *Othello* was typical. It recounted the deaths of "Two Women" who were "Lost Overboard Out the Vessel in the Ni[gh]t By Neglect of [the] Mate Not Locking them up." The captain did not seem to have regarded the deaths as unusual or remarkable; indeed, women evidently committed suicide as often as men did.[125]

Slavers were nearly always less tolerant of both individual and collective resistance than plantation owners.[126] There was also less scope for individual resistance on a slaving vessel. As women were more likely to use this type of resistance, it would be wrong to believe that they were more accepting of their plight aboard a slaver than were men because

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above. Several men recovered from the flogging.
[122]Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 2, 266.
[123] There is little reason to doubt the veracity of the account. Atkins was a Royal Navy surgeon, and a comparison of the details of his voyage and that of Harding (DuBois Atlantic slavery dataset, entry no. 16303) confirms his account on all major points. Captain Harding slaved in the same year (1721), at the same place where Atkins' vessel was (Sierra Leone), and came from the port (Bristol) that Atkins indicated.
[124] Resistance to sexual abuse is another example.
[125] Reprinted in Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 3, 235. The literature abounds with accounts of women committing suicide. While jumping overboard was the most common, deliberate starvation was not unusual. Falconbridge recounts an incident in which a woman "too sensible of her woes" stated her intention not to eat or drink until she died, and did so. A. Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade,* 31.
[126] There are several reasons for this, foremost among them the fact that the slaves greatly outnumbered the crew on a slaver, and that there was no possibility of outside aid while at sea. White authority needed to be more absolute on slavers, and thus any undermining of that authority was a dangerous precedent. For more on this, see chapter 4, "Resistance and Rebellion."

they engaged in fewer violent uprisings on board than the men did.[127] Women slaves adapted their resistance to their particular circumstances as did men slaves during the middle passage.

In sum, the experience of women slaves had much in common with that of the men on the middle passage – their commodified status as slaves was no different from that of men, and they were subject to the same general physical environment of the slaving vessel. In many respects, however, they went through a completely different experience. That which they had in common with men they often experienced differently – the struggle to survive, and the form their resistance tended to take, for example. They also had experiences that men did not have. Their confinement conditions often differed from those of the men. They were far more commonly subject to rape and sexual abuse. They could be pregnant and deliver children while onboard, neither uncommon in the trade. They were also responsible for the care of infants, and often, the younger children on the vessel, the subject of the following chapter.

[127] For a representative discussion of the types of resistance in which women tended to engage on land, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Strategies and Forms of Resistance," 153. For details on the nature of resistance on board slaving vessels and how resistance contributed to the shaping of the slaving voyage, see chapter 4, "Resistance and Rebellion."

CHAPTER 2: CHILDREN AND INFANTS

"I recollect ... when I came on board ship."[1]

Children shared many of the same experiences with the adults on the middle passage, but in many respects their experiences differed from those of adults. It is wrong to ask whether children understood what was happening to them. The historian's challenge is to try to recover the experience of children on the children's own terms, and in that context, explain how they understood and integrated what was happening to them into their lives. They need to ask themselves not *whether* children of a given age consciously experienced the middle passage, but rather *how* they experienced it.[2]

It is remarkable that so little attention has been paid to the experience of child slaves on the middle passage. Other than some demographic work, no academic attention has been paid to the history and experience of children on board slaving vessels.[3] It

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[1] Testimony by Augustino, who was about twelve when he made the passage. R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 38.

[2] A poignant example of the fact that the children were aware of what was happening around them, though they may have interpreted it differently is provided by Leonard, who describes the return to Africa of slaves retrieved from a captured (illegal) slaver. He wrote that "A large canoe ... brought ... the children. These were singing on board the schooner, in anticipation of the boat's return, and continued their song all the way on shore, laughing and clapping their hands. But the men and women, after they reached the yard, when the momentary gratification of setting foot on land once more had passed away, looked sullen and dissatisfied, but not dejected. It struck me that on landing they expected to be allowed to go wherever they pleased, and were consequently disappointed and angry...." The adults were concerned with the future, while the children were happy in the present. Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa in His Majesty's Ship Dryad, and of the Service on That Station for the Suppression of the Slave Trade in the Years 1830, 1831, and 1832* (Nendeln: Kraus, 1973), 106.

[3] To a degree, this is understandable. Primary sources seldom mention children specifically, and then usually only fleetingly. The data that does exist is usually record keeping, either by the slavers or by the authorities at the various ports of destination. A great many must be searched before a sufficient amount is collected to allow generalizations. This makes archival research by any individual very time-consuming. For demographic work, see David Richardson and Paul Lovejoy, "Competing Markets for Male and Female Slaves: Prices in the Interior of West Africa, 1780-1850," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, 2 (Spring 1995), 280, 286; Stanley L. Engerman & David Eltis, "Was the Slave Trade Dominated by Men?" *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (Autumn 1992), 245; David Eltis, "The Volume, Age/Sex Ratios, and African Impact of the Slave Trade: Some Refinements of Paul Lovejoy's Review of the Literature." *The Journal of African History*, 3 (August 1990); David Eltis, "Fluctuations in the Age and Sex of Slaves in the Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Slave Traffic," *Slavery*

leaves a major lacuna in the history of the Atlantic slave trade, and that of the middle passage. A higher proportion of children left Africa than left Europe, and more children than women made the middle passage.[4] If one considers the difference in emotional response most adults have when considering the sufferings of children as opposed to the sufferings of adults, the lacuna becomes even more puzzling.[5]

In spite of the increasing sophistication of the published results regarding the demographic composition of the trade, this chapter remains more a chapter of questions than answers. As yet there is no conversation between scholars regarding the experiences of children on the middle passage; this chapter is an attempt to start such a conversation. Statistics are vital in framing the discussion, but they need to be considerably supplemented by other data if the experiences of children on the middle passage are to be recovered. Without question the trade can be seen as a continued and structural exercise in child abuse, but it is necessary to move beyond that single-interpretation explanation, and to document the content of the experience more fully.

The terms "child" and "childhood" are malleable, subject to individual and cultural interpretation. An attempt to impose a definition of "child" that will hold for the

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and Abolition 7, 3 (1986); D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behaviour in Early English America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton: Princeton U.P, 1978). D. Eltis, S. Behrendt et. al's., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999) is an indispensable reference work. C. Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981) and J.M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1990) both devote a few pages to children.

[4] Philip D. Morgan, "The Cultural Implication of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.), 123.

[5] This emotional aspect was not lost on the abolitionist cause. One of their more graphic images of the slave trade was that of a young boy, lacking the strength to rescue himself, drowning in the latrine buckets on a slaver after falling in. Symbolically, however, it is a powerful image, equating the value of a living, abused child with that of a tub of human faeces, in which the unloved child departs from this world. It features in Equiano's narrative (though almost certainly an imagined event), as well as Alexander Falconbridge's *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (New York: AMS Press, 1973). It is reported seriously in

entire period of the Atlantic slave trade, across carriers of all nations, is a fruitless task. This is all the more true when one considers that there is a world of difference between children aged 3-5, 5-9, 9-12, and 12-15, for example. Primary documents sometimes distinguished between men, men-boys and boys among the males, and women, women-girls and girls among the females. An infant was usually a suckling child, but the dividing line between infant and child was flexible. When slavers kept records of children, the definition of "child" they used varied from time to time, by nation and by individual. For example, the Royal African Company defined children as individuals ten years old or younger in the period 1660-1730, though other slavers who attempted age estimates used a different age to define a child. Height was also a common criterion – the British and French adopted a length of about four feet, four inches to distinguish adults from children. Some slavers used sexual maturity as a criterion to identify children.[6]

The sources identifying children must be acknowledged to be imprecise, subjective and, unfortunately, largely incomplete. While this is inconvenient, the lack of precision may be more problematic for scholars interested in determining exact demographic or quantitative insights than it is for scholars attempting to reconstruct the social history of the trade. For social historians it is more important to know that the average age of slaves making the middle passage was approximately eighteen for women and seventeen for men.[7] It is important to know that at times, about a quarter of the slaves who made the crossing were fifteen or younger.[8] One is between the age of 5 and 15 for ten years, but between the age of 15 and 35 for twenty years. When seen is this light, it is

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Pascoe Grenfell Hill's *Fifty Days On Board a Slaving Vessel in the Mozambique Channel in April and May 1843* (London: John Murray, 1844), 77.

[6] The examples given here are drawn from D. Eltis, S. Behrendt et. al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,* 10.

[7] See C. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 121.

clear that the Atlantic slave trade effected a greater proportion of children compared to adults than it might appear at first glance. However one defines "child," and for whatever historical purpose, the Atlantic slave trade and the middle passage were inflicted heavily on the young.

Age, height and sexual maturity measured only the physical characteristics of an individual. They did not take into account the previous experiences of the person. Many of the individuals taken on board a slaving vessel were children by physical or chronological definitions but had had first-hand experiences of the hardships of life that easily rivaled those of most adults. Many had, even before boarding the slaving vessel, suffered more and seen more suffering than many adults do in their entire lives. The life experiences, the necessity of relying on themselves in order to survive, and the lack of opportunity to do and grow up as 'normal' children did, ensured that many child-slaves had prematurely and irrevocably left their childhood behind them. These youngsters were a singular blend of the child and the adult, with aspects of each being contained in the same individual. In terms of age, they were children. In other respects they were not even remotely children.

Given all the confusion that an attempt at finding a workable universal definition of "child" inevitably brings, the approach I have adopted is a simple one. If the primary documentation referred to the individual(s) as a child, I have accepted that. If further specification regarding the age of the individual was present, that allowed greater precision in contextualizing the individual's experiences. Usually, however, that was not the case. For infants, I have used a similar approach. If the primary sources refer to an

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[8] For example, in the Dutch trade in the mid to end seventeenth century. J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 230. See also Engerman and Eltis, "Was the Slave Trade", 245.

individual as an infant, I accept that. If the source does not, but the description leads me to suspect that the child is either still nursing, or up to about two years of age, then I consider the child an infant.

The question of how many children and infants were transported in the trade is closely related to whether slavers actively sought out children and infants. Instructions such as the one issued to Captain William Barry were common. He was ordered to "let your endeavours be to buy none to exceed the years of 25 or under 10 if possible."[9] Sometimes slavers had to settle for what they could get, and this may on occasion have meant buying more young slaves than they might have wanted. But the main reason for slavers purchasing large numbers of children was that there was a demand for them, and thus they actively sought them out.[10] Some contemporary accounts explicitly directed captains to buy young slaves, as the instructions to Captain Pollipus Hammond in 1746 did. He was instructed to "get most of them mere Boys and Girl, some Men, let them be Young, No very small Children."[11] The "very small Children" referred to were likely to have been infants, who were more common in the trade than has hitherto been supposed.[12] Hammond's instructions were not universal by any means, but nor were they exceptional. Some vessels even appear to have specialized in young slaves. Without any suggesting that it was in any way unusual, Captain Newton recorded that he "Exchanged with Captain Williams No.60, 61; 2 small boys (3 ft 8 inches) for a girl (4 foot 3 in) and

[9] E. Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930-35), 327.
[10] See David Engerman and Stanley L. Eltis, "Fluctuations in Sex and Age Ratios in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1664-1864," *Journal of Economic History* 46, 2 (1993), 318 for possible reasons why New World purchasers sometimes preferred children. The numbers carried fluctuated by over time, region and particularly, transportation costs.
[11] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 138.
[12] See the calculations on infants below.

No. 80, a small boy (3 ft 8 inches) for a woman, he being only for small slaves."[13] The pertinent phrase here is of course, "he being only for small slaves." This specialization was certainly not typical, but how atypical is not clear.

The scholarly debate on the proportion of children carried on slaving vessels has not reached a consensus. In part this is because of the variation in the proportion of children carried over time (it tended to rise over the trade, and to decline with higher transportation costs), and partly because of the nature of the sources.[14] In 1990 David Eltis argued that "between a quarter and a third were children, defined as individuals below 14 or 15 years of age."[15] If he excludes infants from this total, he is likely to be substantially correct, though possibly on the low side.

In 1993, in collaboration with Stanley Engerman, Eltis published the following synopsis of child ratios – the figures include infants – taken over the entire Atlantic slave trade:

1663-1700	0.122
1701-1809	0.227
1810-1869	0.461

Table 2.1. David Eltis and Stanley Engerman's Proportion Children Carried[16]

[13] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750-1754 (With Newton's 'Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade')*, Bernard Martin and M. Spurrell (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 41.
[14] For the relation between the price of slaves, the cost of transporting slaves, and the number of children transported, see D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*, 63-64, 97-114.
[15] David Eltis, "The Volume, Age/Sex Ratios," 489.
[16] David Eltis & Stanley L. Engerman, "Fluctuations in Sex and Age," 311. This is the most sophisticated article on child ratios yet published, and attempts to establish whether the fluctuations reflected African agency or New World preferences. It does, however, not control for infants carried, possible mis-assigning of children (usually as women, sometimes divided by sex among the women and men), or for the nationality of the slaver (although controlling for port of embarkation may ameliorate this to some degree). Especially the first is likely to have caused the number of children in the trade to be underestimated. No scholars have as yet taken this into consideration in their calculations. See chapter 1, Women for more on this. For more recent work on the demographics of the Atlantic slave trade, see David Eltis and David Richardson, "West Africa and the Transatlantic Slave Trade: New Evidence of Long-Run Trends," *Slavery*

The rise in the number of young slaves, even more than the substantial numbers carried, is the most striking of this overview. This may have had as much to do with the greater recording and inclusion of infants in the figures and a greater tendency to count children as a separate category (rather than including them with the women, or the men and women, according to sex), as an actual rise in the number of children transported. Neither of these factors is controlled for in Eltis and Engerman's work.

A review of the much larger Atlantic slavery dataset yields a somewhat different picture. Excluding infants yields the following results for all voyages that allow the calculations to be made.

1663-1700	0.113
1701-1809	0.218
1810-1869	0.295

Table 2.2. Proportion Children, Excluding Infants[17]

When the same calculations are made using only voyages for which the number of infants disembarking is recorded, the figures change substantially, as shown in Table 2.3. below.

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and Abolition (June 1997, Spec. ed.), 29.

[17] For 1663-1700, taken over 263 voyages 5584 boys disembarked, 2570 girls disembarked, and 71812 slaves disembarked in total. For 1701-1809, taken over 1647 voyages 52997 boys disembarked, 33307 girls disembarked, and 407307 slaves disembarked in total. For 1810-1869, taken over 732 voyages, 32284 boys disembarked, 20468 girls disembarked, and 178854 slaves disembarked in total. Over the entire trade, 2642 voyages contained enough information to make the calculations specified above. This calculation does not control for region of embarkation, limiting its usefulness in comparisons with Eltis and Engerman's work.

1663-1700	0.113*
1701-1809	0.363
1810-1870	0.493

Table 2.3. Proportion Children, Including Infants[18]

*No voyages reported infants separately.

What is to be made of this? The records in the Atlantic slavery dataset that contain any information on children or infants is on average derived from more sources than the average journey in the dataset – 3.66 sources per record compared with 2.59. There are 3088 records (11.4%) that contain some information on children or infants (indications that a certain number boarded, disembarked, died, and or other information). This information is, however, nearly always incomplete. In only 2.71 percent of all voyages was any information recorded at all on the age groupings of the slaves at embarkation.[19] Even in these cases the reliability is questionable. Information recorded at disembarkation was probably more accurate, and is certainly more complete. Some information is recorded about the age groupings of slaves at disembarkation in 9.89 percent of the voyages included in the dataset.[20] The average date of departure from Africa for voyages that contain some information on the age of the slaves on board is slightly later than the

[18] For 1663-1700, no voyages preserve information on the number of infants disembarking. For 1701-1809, taken over 224 voyages 2147 boys disembarked (20% reported no boys disembarking), 1384 girls disembarked (25% reported no girls disembarking), 8730 infants disembarked, and 33723 slaves disembarked in total. For 1810-1869, taken over 732 voyages, 10025 boys disembarked (2% reported no boys disembarking), 6559 girls disembarked (3% reported no girls disembarking), and 41349 slaves disembarked in total. Over the entire trade, 574 voyages contained sufficient information to make the calculations specified above. The region of embarkation is not controlled for.

[19] 739 records out of 27,233

[20] 2,694 records out of 27,233. In a similar vein, the dataset contains 698 cases where data is available to calculate the proportion of children to adults on board at embarkation, but 2644 cases where the same data

average date of departure taken over the entire trade (1774.35 compared to 1772). There are several reasons for this: British vessels recorded the age and sex of slaves from captured slavers the illegal trade, slavers may have become more meticulous in recording the age of slaves as their numbers rose late in the trade, and recent records tended to survive better than older records. Records that provide some information on the age groupings of slaves also contain considerably more complete information on other aspects of the voyage, and are thus likely to be more reliable.

Voyages that recorded any data on boys at disembarkation reported disembarking an average of 35.46 boys out of an average of 243.94 total slaves disembarked.[21] For girls, the same calculation returns an average of 22.95 girls disembarking out of an average of 249.39 total slaves. [22] This cannot be confidently extrapolated to the entire trade – there are too much missing data to do so, and the dataset from which the numbers are calculated are not representative of all voyages.[23] They do, however, give an indication of the demographic composition of voyages that reported any children on board. Of course, the number of children on any vessel could vary enormously, even within any given nationality. For example, the English vessel *Maria* disembarked 73 slaves in 1791, all of them children, while another English vessel, *Kitty,* disembarked 440 (or 442?) slaves, of which only 5 were children.[24]

can be calculated at disembarkation.

[21] 91,364 boys disembarking from 2,576 voyages. The same 2,576 voyages reported 628,400 slaves disembarking in total. This calculation and the one on girls excludes infants.

[22] 56,594 girls disembarking from 2,465 voyages. The same 2,465 voyages reported 614,754 slaves disembarking in total.

[23] Though the dataset from which these calculations are made is larger and more representative of the trade than the dataset from which the calculations on infants, below, are made.

[24] *Maria* disembarked 24 girls and 49 boys. The vessel also had 20 adult slaves on board, but all of them died before disembarkation, as did one girl. The sources are not clear whether Kitty disembarked 440 or 442 slaves. However, this hardly matters to the extremely high ratio of adults to children.

There are considerable differences in the proportion of children reported disembarking by slavers of different nationalities. Dividing the proportion of children reported disembarking into 3 categories as follows: Low < 0.15, Medium 0.15 to 0.29, High => 0.30, yields the following table.

	Low	Medium	High
English 933 cases (48% of all voyages in dataset)	48% (447)	35% (326)	17% (160)
French 621 cases (26% of dataset)	16% (110)	39% (264)	45% (307)
Spanish 484 cases (18% of dataset)	1% (6)	13% (64)	86% (414)
United States 178 cases (7% of dataset)	6% (10)	21% (37)	74% (131)
Portuguese 130 cases (5% of dataset)	8% (10)	23% (30)	69% (90)
Danish 108 cases (4% of dataset)	22% (24)	45% (49)	32% (35)
Overall 2644 (100% of dataset)	25% (613)	30% (806)	46% (1225)

Table 2.4. Proportion of Children Reported Disembarking by Nationality

Slavers kept sketchy records on the number of children they carried at the best of times. As a general rule, the younger the children were, the worse the record keeping was. In addition to the problems of definition discussed above, they did not always include children as a separate category of slaves to be recorded. For example, James Houstoun, after working for the Royal African Company in Africa, sailed as a surgeon on the slaver *Chandos* in 1722. He made the complaint to his superiors that his captain, with whom he found much fault, had entered "several Children ... in the Company's books for Women, that were not Ten years of Age."[25] How typical this practice was varied by captain and nationality, and cannot be accurately recovered. Occasionally all the children

[25] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 289. Donnan, in her monumental collection of primary documents, is the only scholar who has noted the habit of some slavers of sometimes entering children as women in slavers' accounts; how widespread this practice was is uncertain. See also chapter 1, Women.

were counted with the women, and sometimes the male children were counted with the men, and female children were counted as women. Children, and especially infants, tended to be counted as separate categories more frequently later in the trade. A possible explanation for the large discrepancies in the number of children reported carried between nations in Table 2.4 may be partly related to the manner in which children were (or were not) counted. The record keeping on infants was worse yet than on children.

The only data available on infants in the Atlantic dataset is that of disembarkation at the first port of disembarkation (for both male and female infants).[26] The dataset contains 548 voyages that contain information on the number of male and female infants disembarking. It is important to note these voyages in the dataset are not representative of the entire Atlantic slave trade in several respects.[27] The figures below thus cannot be extrapolated to the entire trade. These voyages are, however, the only ones for which any record keeping on the number of male and female infants disembarking exists. They must therefore form the starting point for any discussion on the number of infants carried in the Atlantic slave trade.

The available data suggests that many more infants made the middle passage than has been previously supposed. They also suggest that the lack of attention to infants on the middle passage cannot be justified by claiming a (virtual) absence of infants in the trade. The lack of scholarship on infants on slaving vessels implies that this reflected

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[26] Mortality calculations are thus not possible.

[27] Only 2.04% (558) of voyages collected in the Atlantic slavery dataset contain the number of female infants on board and 2.09% (570) contain the number of boys on board. The average date of departure from Africa was 1809 (1812 was the median date, and 1763 the earliest), which was very late in the trade. This was a time when the proportion of young slaves to adults on vessels was known to be very high. There is as yet no work focusing on infants, but their numbers almost certainly also rose sharply. Spanish and American vessels are disproportionaly represented in the data set (62% and 26% of the dataset respectively), and those of other nationalities are greatly underrepresented. Nearly all the voyages delivered their slaves in the Caribbean, and Havana, Cuba received the vast majority.

historical reality. This was not the case. The available data makes a strong argument for the necessity of more work on infants.

Taken over all the voyages that reported the number of infants disembarking, the average number of male infants disembarking per vessel was a surprisingly high 39.89. The average number of female infants reported disembarking per vessel in the same collection of 548 voyages is 20.28 per vessel.[28] To place this in context: 543 voyages contain information on male and female infants disembarked, adult slaves disembarked, female slaves disembarked and total number of slaves disembarked. The ratio of total slaves disembarked to all infants disembarked in the dataset is 1 infant to every 2.48 non-infant slaves and 1 infant to every 1.88 adult slaves.[29] In the sample of 543 voyages, the total of male and female infants actually considerably outnumbered the total of adult women slaves, with 0.5 women disembarking for every infant.[30]

As with children, the maximum and minimum numbers of infants per vessel fluctuated considerably. For example, of the vessels that reported any infants disembarking, the Spanish slaver *Alerta* reported delivering 286 infants to Havana, while

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[28] It is possible that the number of infants disembarking may be slightly overstated, as some ports of disembarkation charged a lower tax on infants than on children or adult slaves. In the Portuguese trade, nursing children were landed tax-free, while young children were taxed at half the rate of adults. See H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage*, 35 - 37.

[29] All calculations are based on the same 543 voyages. The total number of infants disembarked is 32,825 (21,736 males and 11,089 females). The total number of all slaves disembarked is 114,264 of whom 61,738 were adults, and of the adults, 16,276 were women. The remainder were children, both male and female. 114,264 total slaves, subtracting 32,825 infants gives a ratio of 1 infant to every 2.48 non-infant slaves.

[30] There is an unusually low ratio women to men in the sample: 1 adult woman disembarking for 2.79 adult men disembarking. The ratio for women to men disembarking calculated over the 2,654 voyages that do contain information on the number of men and women disembarking is one women to every 1.91 men disembarking (308,457 men to 161,594 women). But is important to note that only a very small minority of these 2,654 voyages contain information on the number of children and infants disembarking. Girls and infants, and occasionally even boys, were sometimes counted as women, so it is likely that the number of women are overstated in the larger sample, in spite of its size. See chapter 1, "Women" for the calculations that support this contention.

the American slaver the *Morning Star* disembarked only three infants.[31] However, the high average number of infants reported when any information is recorded, and the fact that nearly all the voyages that contain information on either male or female infants indicate that infants of both sexes were on board (more than 96%) suggest that many more infants were carried than were recorded in the disembarkation records. This is confirmed by the fact that the ratio of male infants to female infants reflects slaver preferences (as discussed below).

Only two slaving nations that contain sufficient information to allow a calculation of the average number of male and female infants disembarking by nation are the United States and Spain. There was a large difference between the two, with Spanish vessels carrying considerably more infants per vessel on average (47.33 male and 24.48 female infants per voyage) than the United States (25.24 male and 11.09 female infants per voyage).[32] There is not sufficient vessel tonnage data available to determine if this is due to larger Spanish vessels. But by approaching the matter indirectly, it appears that larger vessels are very likely to have accounted for most of the difference. In the same sample used to calculate the average number of infants above, Spanish slavers disembarked an average of 123.57 adults per voyage, while the American slavers disembarked only 74.11 adults per voyage.[33] Thus the Spanish vessels reported disembarking 1.72 adults for every infant, while American vessels reported 2.03 adults per infant. The ratios are

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[31] The *Alerta* was a highly unusual slaving voyage: the vessel disembarked 190 boys, 28 girls, 250 male infants and 36 female infants, but only 102 adults. This spread suggests strongly that the extremely young average age of the slaves was a deliberate choice on the part of the slaver, especially considering the degree to which males outnumber females in all categories, a typical slaver preference. The *Morning Star* disembarked 7 boys, 3 girls and 69 adults in addition to the three infants.

[32] Over 341 voyages, Spain delivered 16,138 male infants and 8,347 female infants. The United States slavers delivered 3,533 male infants and 1,552 female infants in 140 voyages.

[33] This is based on the inputed number of adults disembarked. Spanish slavers disembarked 82,636 adults over 341 voyages, while American slavers disembarked only 10,376 adults over 140 voyages.

considerably closer than the absolute numbers, strongly suggesting that the Spanish vessels were considerably larger.

In the aggregate, the data suggests that many more infants made the voyage than has previously been assumed, and possibly slightly more children made the passage. The lack of accurate record keeping, especially with regard to infants and the (less common) mis-assignment of children as women, or women and men according to sex were the cause. If the age of infants is taken into account, the average age of the victims of the slave trade will almost certainly need to be revised downward considerably.

In spite of the large number of children and infants transported, it does not appear that slavers were often forced to fill otherwise incomplete cargoes by purchasing children.[34] Both the overall sex ratios of the children and infants in the trade and the proportion of young slaves carried per vessel suggest this. If one is willing to assume, as a crude rule of thumb, that a low number of slaves per ton tended to indicate a less crowded vessel it becomes possible to test the statement.[35] If vessels with a low slave to tonnage ratio were more likely to have departed Africa without a full cargo than those with a high ratio, it is reasonable to assume they would have been forced to be less discriminating in their choice of slaves. If they carried more children, it would suggest that they were forced to do by the market, and not their preferences. Table 2.5 shows the results of this experiment.

[34] If one wishes to argue otherwise, one must accept that there were nearly always a large number of children readily available to make up the difference. While possible, it is not likely that this held true consistently enough to produce the figures presented below.

[35] This is by no means a perfect measure: it does not take into account any given vessel or nations operating efficiency or the particular build of any vessel. However, when taken over the entire trade, it is an effective rough indicator of crowding on vessels. When nations regulated the crowding of vessels in the slave trade, this was the measure they used.

	Slaves per Ton	Ave. proportion children disembarked	Median proportion children disembarked
Low (312 cases)	0 - 1.24	0.3	0.29
Medium (393 cases)	1.25 - 1.74	0.22	0.2
High (262 cases)	> 1.75	0.31	0.3
Top 5% (51 cases)	> 3.15	0.33	0.34
Total (967 cases)	all	0.27	0.26

Table 2.5. Children Disembarked per Ton Contrasted with Slaves per ton Carried*

* Figures exclude infants. The figures above are based on samples that contain data on both girls and boys disembarked, total number of adults on board, and the tonnage of the vessel, a total of 967 voyages.

The table indicates that there was a slight tendency to disembark a greater proportion of children on vessels carrying many slaves per ton, not on those carrying few slaves per ton. This was true for both highly crowded vessels and the most crowded vessels – the top 5%. Uncrowded and moderately crowded vessels actually carried fewer child slaves than fully crowded vessels, suggesting that they were not forced to carry children against their preferences. This suggests that slavers did not buy children to complete cargoes in the absence of adults, but rather that they bought them for the same reasons they bought adult slaves. The finding may be slightly nuanced by the fact that it was possible to carry more child slaves per ton than it was to carry adult slaves per ton. Thus vessels that carried a greater proportion of children might automatically have carried more people than vessels carrying a greater proportion of adults.[36]

[36] This substantiates the testimony offered to The Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1838 the first part of the testimony *Q.* Why do they bring them at so early an age? *A.* Because at that age they are smaller and pack more conveniently …" In R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 39.

There is another way to test the conclusion reached above. Slavers had a preference for boys over girls.[37] If slavers had difficulty filling their vessels, and thus took in a large number of children to make up for the unavailable adult slaves, those vessels would have shown a greater proportion of girls to boys. This is because they would not be able to fill their ship as they chose, but were forced to settle for what was available. The data are presented below.

Slaves per ton	Average Proportion Children on board[1]	Boys	Girls	Ratio Boys/Girls
Low (312 cases)	0.3	8078	5097	1.58
Medium (393 cases)	0.22	15600	9360	1.67
High (262 cases)	0.31	16697	9985	1.67
Overall (972 cases)	0.27	40375	24440	1.65
Top 5% (51 cases)	0.33	4186	2350	1.78

Table 2.6. Ratio of Boys to Girls by Vessel Tonnage

[1] Figures exclude infants where listed separately in the Atlantic slavery dataset. The figures above are based on samples that contain data on both girls and boys disembarked, total number of adults on board, and the tonnage of the vessel, a total of 967 voyages.

The data indicate that, on average, all vessels, whether or not they carried a large proportion of children, managed to fill their vessels with the ratio of boys to girls they preferred.[38] Indeed, the vessels carrying the most slaves managed to get a slightly higher proportion of boys to girls than the vessels carrying a low proportion of children. This clearly indicates that carrying (a large) proportion of children to adults reflected a

[37] The question of African agency is not entered in here. No work has been done on the question with regard to children. It is, however, instructive to note that one of the two main arguments for Africans to have preferred to sell adult males into the Atlantic trade – the difficulty and danger of integrating adult male slaves into African societies – does not apply to male children. This might have made them relatively more attractive to Africans, and perhaps to the Arabic trade. The other – the attractiveness of female slaves to the Arabic trade – might also be somewhat less persuasive when applied to children, though this is more speculative.

deliberate choice on the part of the slavers, and that they were generally not carried to fill spaces that would otherwise have been vacant. The ratio of male to female declined slightly over time for both children and infants. It may have been that slavers were forced to be less discriminating in who they bought, especially as the end of the legal trade was anticipated, or that there was a greater demand for females in the New World. The change, however, was very slight, and slavers still managed to obtain considerably more young males than females.

There was a remarkable similarity between the ratio of male to female young slaves between the slaving nations.

	Voyages	Boys	Girls	Ratio
English	871	23324	15009	1.55
French	644	29620	18359	1.61
Spanish	458	17190	11374	1.51
United States	125	1425	880	1.62
Portuguese	119	6538	4345	1.5
Total	2217	78097	49967	1.56

Table 2.7. Ratio of Boys to Girls by Slaving Nation*

*Figures exclude infants where listed separately in the Atlantic slavery dataset. Minor slaving nations and vessels with unknown nationality have been excluded. When included the total ratio was approximately 1.54.

It is important to note that these are averages – actual figures varied wildly between voyages, even between slavers of the same nationality. For example, the Spanish slaver *Amalia* disembarked 166 boys but only 2 girls, giving a ratio of 88 boys to every girl. On the other extreme, the *Piragua*, also Spanish, disembarked 15 girls, but only one boy, a

[38] To a degree this reflects African preferences, See Eltis and Engerman, "Fluctuations in Sex and Age."

ratio of 0.07 boys to every girl. Several voyages reported carrying some boys, but no girls, and vice versa.

The ratio of male infants to female infants was even more biased to slaver preferences than that of boys and girls. Taken over all the voyages that contain data on both male and female infants disembarking, the ratio is 1.97 male infants to every female infant.[39] Only two slaving nations, the United States and Spain, offer enough voyages to allow for a statistically reliable ratio breakdown by nation.

	Male infants	Female infants	Ratio
Spanish (341 cases)	16138	8347	1.93
United States (140 cases)	3533	1552	2.28
Total	19671	9899	1.99

Table 2.8. Ratio of Male to Female Infants on the Middle Passage

The final ratio of male infants to female infants is very similar, although United States slavers carried a somewhat greater number of male infants in proportion to the number of female infants carried. The ratio of male to female infants in non-American or Spanish vessels, though less extreme, was also within the range of the figures in the table above: 1.8 male infants to every female infant.[40] It is not clear why the number of male infants outnumbered the female infants to such a degree in the trade, especially considering that the ratio of male children to female children was about 1.55, although

[39] This is calculated on the number of infants disembarking at the first port of disembarkation (where the vast majority of slaves disembarked), the only data available to me. The very small number of infants disembarking at other ports will not influence the ratios in any case. 548 distinct voyages were used in the calculation, for a total of 21,861 male infants and 11,116 female infants. This gives a ratio 1.966 boys to every girl.

[40] There are 68 non-American or Spanish voyages in the dataset that contain sufficient information to calculate the ratios. They delivered 1224 female infants and 2198 male infants, a ratio of 1 to 1.795.

this does reflect slaver preferences. It is possible that this may have had to do with a greater African reluctance to part with female infants.

The statistical evidence strongly suggests that the middle passage was deliberately inflicted on the young, and that children were a deliberate target of slavers. Though the ratio of young slaves carried varied by region of embarkation, date, slaving nation, and the shipping costs of slaves over time, there was a market for them in the New World. Qualitative evidence confirms that slavers sought out and purchased child slaves deliberately.

Whether infants were similarly a deliberate target of slavers is much more complicated. On the one hand, the unexpectedly large numbers in which they were carried, and the ratio in which slavers acquired male and female infants seems to suggest that they were.[41] On the other hand, their low price argues against this. For example, in a letter from Edwyn Stede and Stephen Gascoigne to the Royal African Company dated 11 April 1683, they describe a vessel that arrived with a very large number of infants. They write that "abt 1/3d part of those he did bring were very small most of them noe better then sucking Children nay many of them did suck theire Mothers that were on board. Their objections to the large number of infants the vessel carried was purely an economic one, noting that "the most part of those small ones not worth above £5 per head." This, they believed, would not cover the cost of their voyage; they "wondred to see soe many small Children brought by him for that they were not worth theire Freight." The retort was equally instructive: "he replyed they cost not much and the Shipp had as good bring them as

[41] But this is complicated – as noted, the sources are not representative of the entire trade. To what degree the effect noted above and chapter one influenced the rest of the trade requires further investigation. The high male / female sex ratio may also, at least to a degree, reflect African preferences, or indicate that slavers could afford to be more discerning in their choices with regard to infants. At this stage it is not

nothing."[42] The number of infants on board a given vessel sometimes reflected unfavourable trading conditions in Africa, as in the example given. The value of infants when landed in the New World was low, and as they were generally sold with their mothers an increase in the mother's price would have had to justify the cost of the infant's transportation.

The sporadic record keeping on infants and, on whether a woman was pregnant also reflects the questionable value of infants to an Atlantic trader. No voyages recorded the number of infants embarked (all calculations made above rely on disembarkation figures). This stands in contrast to the record keeping on economically viable adult slaves, and to lesser degree, children. [43] There is very little qualitative evidence to suggest that slavers actively sought out pregnant women, or women with nursing infants, as they did children. Often slavers were instructed not to buy them, if at all possible. A typical example is the letter from agents in Jamaica who wrote that "there are a great many ... very small Boys and Girls amongst ye Faulconburgh's Negroes of which great care must be taken to prevent ye like complaints."[44] I have not been able to locate any secondary literature that contrasts the prices of pregnant women with those who were not, or which contrasts the price of women with nursing infants with those without, that might shed further light on the motivations of slavers when purchasing such women.

There is, however, qualitative evidence that when the end of the legal trade was expected, more infants and as well as children, were bought and transported to the New

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possible to establish what the case was.

[42] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 306-7. Galenson has related the price of child slaves to shipping costs, and argued that when slaving costs were relatively low, more children tended to be carried. It is quite possible that this may have held for infants too. D. Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves*, 63-64, 97-114.

[43] One frequently comes across casual references such as the following from 1750 "Wednesday 20th March ... Went on board the sloop, bought a cask of pork for Mr Tucker, who came on board about noon with 4 slaves, 2 men, 1 woman girl, and 1 woman with a small child; settled accounts with him and paid the balance." John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader*, 41. However, all captains did not keep a journal, and formal record bookkeeping was very inconsistent. See J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 231.

World. For example, the testimony of Dr. Joseph Cliffe to the British parliamentary commission stated that when slavers were "expecting that the Slave Trade was to have been stopped ... Everything that could be bought, young and old, women with little babies, and women that were pregnant; everything was brought over then." [45] The statistical evidence supports the notion, at least for female slaves brought to some New World destinations, but this cannot account for the very large number of infants sold to the New World throughout the duration of the trade.[46]

It is not possible at this stage to conclude with any certainty what slaver policy was with regard to infants. It appears most likely that slavers did carry more infant slaves when shipping costs were relatively low, and when the end of the legal trade was anticipated. However, many more infants were carried than has previously been acknowledged, also at times when these conditions were not present. Exactly how many, and what the motivations to do so were, cannot be determined with certainty.

The embarkation figures are too limited and inaccurate to allow a calculation of average mortality for boys and girls.[47] I have therefor used deaths reported on the middle passage as a crude measure for estimating the mortality rate. The 99 cases that give both the number of boys disembarked and the number of boys who died on the middle passage returns an average mortality of 14.89% for boys, taken over the entire duration of the

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[44] D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*, 113.
[45] In R. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 31.
[46] Eltis and Engerman, "Fluctuations in the Sex and Age", 312.
[47] Because records are much better at disembarkation than embarkation, it is not possible to calculate mortality by comparing embarkation and disembarkation data. There many cases where several times as many boys or girls disembarked than embarked – obviously this is due to the lack of care taken in identifying age upon embarkation. To illustrate the point: in 331 voyages the number of boys is recorded at both embarkation and disembarkation. Using those figures, calculation shows that boys on average suffered 2.37% mortality. The same calculation for girls (301 cases) shows a mortality of 0.47%. Clearly both these figures are unrealistic.

trade.[48] The 60 cases that give both the number of girls disembarked and the number of girls who died on the middle passage returns an average mortality of 15.34% for girls, also taken over the entire duration of the trade.[49] These figures may be slightly underestimated, as the definition of "middle passage" used by the Atlantic slavery dataset excludes time spent on board while not sailing from Africa to the New World. But the fact that boys tended to die at approximately equal rates to girls is likely to be an accurate observation. There is no reason to suppose that the errors in identifying age should be much more inaccurate between the sexes, and deaths were generally well recorded.

As there are no sources extant that record both the number of infants at embarkation and at disembarkation, and the Atlantic slavery dataset does not record the number of infant deaths on the middle passage, it is not possible to make reliable calculations regarding the mortality rates of infants. The unhygienic conditions on board a slaver must, however, have caused very high infection rates. Newborn and very young infants were most vulnerable. Births occurred regularly on the middle passage, and very young infants, still at the breast were also a common sight. Both infants and newborns must have suffered from the nutritional inadequacies of a slaving vessel diet. Leonard, for example, commenting on the capture of the *Primeira*, writes that there were "four infants at the breast, one of whom was born since the period of capture." He goes on to note that

[48] 2,769 disembarkations plus 484 deaths while sailing to the New World gives a total of 3253 boys, of whom 484 died: 14.89%. Because of the relatively small number of cases available, these figures may not be quite as reliable as the other statistics I present here. My figures are, however, calculated over far larger dataset than previous work. See H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage*, 37 and 162. Klein argues that the mortality for children in the Portuguese trade hovered around 6%, and that of the British trade 15,9% for girls and 22,5% for boys. To me these great variations indicate the hazards of working with national data, which do not provide enough data to allow researchers generalize confidently. As is evident from my calculations, I also disagree with Klein's contention that boys suffered a substantially higher mortality than girls.

[49] 1,418 disembarkations plus 257 deaths while sailing to the New World gives a total of 1,675 girls, of whom 257 died: 15.34%

the child's "mother, unhappy creature, sickly and emaciated, was suckling it on deck, with hardly a rag to cover either herself or her offspring."[50] On land, high infant mortality has been linked to nutritional defects.[51] On the middle passage these defects were without doubt very much worse. The nutritional standards on board were woefully inadequate to provide the mother with the necessary nutrients to nurse her baby adequately. No research has been done to establish what the typical failings of a shipboard diet were by the standards of a nursing mother. A potentially even more serious problem was the rationing of water on a slaving vessel.[52] A British physician, Thomas Nelson, described the women who had arrived on a slaver in Brazil in 1843 with nursing children as follows: "I remarked on the poop another wretched group, composed entirely of females. Some were mothers with infants who were vainly endeavoring to suck a few drops of moisture from the lank, withered and skinny breast of their wretched mothers."[53] Lack of water may have contributed to the inadequate amount of milk of the mother as able to offer her child.

Mothers were also powerless to shield their infants from the abominable sanitary conditions on board a slaver, the often-rampant diseases. [54] More so then on land, the

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[50] Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, 104.
[51] Kenneth F. Kiple, and Virginia H. Kiple, "Slave Child Mortality: Some Nutritional Answers to a Perennial Puzzle." *Journal of Social History* 10, 3 (March 1977). See especially 287-88. For details on infant mortality in Jamaica under slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery,* 101.
[52] See Kenneth F. Kiple, and Brian Higgins, "Mortality Caused by Dehydration During the Middle Passage," *Unpublished paper, Conference on the Atlantic Slave Trade: Who Won and Who Lost?, Frederick Douglass Institute* (University of Rochester, 21-23 October 1988) for details on the dehydration onboard slavers.
[53] In R. Conrad, *World of Sorrow*, 44.
[54] Mothers were also incapable of protecting their infants from the occasional and irrational extremes of cruelty on board. Newton, a generally reliable source, reports that he had heard while on the coast of Africa trading for slaves "A mate of a ship … purchased a young woman, with a fine child, of about a year old in her arms. In the night, the child cried much, and disturbed his sleep … At length he … tore the child from the mother and threw it into the sea." This is certainly not typical, but is representative of some of the accounts of extreme abuse with which the trade abounds. Whatever the truth of this particular incident may have been, it illustrates the central truth that mothers and their young children were completely subjected to the will of their owners. A mother had no power to oppose any decree of her oppressors, and had no recourse to any higher authority. John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader*, 104. These types of incidents may be isolated, but they are not unique. Walvin, for example, recounts an incident in which a captain flogged to death a nine-month-old infant. An

women on board were also more likely to be suffering from depression or other ailments themselves on the middle passage. If an infant's mother were to die on the journey, it is probable that care for the child became the responsibility of one of the other female slaves, though there is little documentary evidence for this. In the case of nursing infants, this would mean that there would have to be at least one extra lactating slave woman on board, otherwise the survival chances of the baby would be slight indeed.

The conditions of confinement for children on board a slaver varied widely. The number of children on board, the age of the child, the level of crowding on the vessel, the construction of the vessel and the policies of the commanding officers all played a role in determining how the children would accommodated. There are, however, indications to suggest that children often had some protection from the worse excesses of slave accommodation, especially the younger ones. Many sources indicate that as children were considered less of a security risk than adult slaves, they were more often allowed to come on deck, and were less frequently shackled or chained to the sides of the vessel than adults. In the report of the Lords to the British Privy Council in 1789 on the nature of the trade in slaves describes the general confinement of young slaves when purchased as "if a Boy, he is put on the Main Deck loose; if a Woman or a Girl, they are placed (without Irons) on the Quarter Deck."[55] But this was by no means universal; the number of children who made the middle passage, and the high proportion they represented in some vessels, precluded the possibility of universally better conditions.

On many vessels male children were regulated to the hold with the adult male slaves. Occasionally slave children of both sexes were housed with the women, and

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incident as bizarre as this one causes one to wonder who was being punished – the infant or its mother? James Walvin, *Slavery and the Slave Trade* (U. of Mississippi, 1983), 59.

occasionally they had their own accommodations provided for them. On Falconbridge's vessel there was segregation was maintained between the men, women and boys – he writes that "... women likewise are placed in a separate apartment between decks, but without being ironed. And an adjoining room, on the same deck, is besides appointed for the boys. Thus are they all placed in different apartments."[56]

Even though children generally had more freedom of movement on board than adult slaves did, their conditions of confinement were by no means benign. William Chancellor, surgeon on the slaver *Wolf*, bemoaned the conditions on board his vessel for the accommodation for children slaves (of which his ship carried a great many). In his opinion, "there is not a vessel in the harbour" that was "so unfit for Slaves, for we have no quarter deck no platform abf [?] aft for Children which we have of 3 & 4 years old, that they lie on Casks & it is no wonder we loose them so fast."[57] Children could not escape the horrendous conditions and deprivations which existed on board of a slaving vessel, and which everyone necessarily shared in. Nor could they escape the violence and disease that were often rampant on board. If there was hunger or thirst on board a vessel, the children suffered it as the adults did.[58] If there were incidents of extreme violence on board, the children witnessed it just as their fellow captives did. Seen from the

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[55] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 595.
[56] Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade*, 19-20.
[57] Darold D. Wax, "A Philadelphia Surgeon on a Slaving Voyage to Africa," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92, 4 (1968), 468.
[58] For example, as late as 1836 the *Jesus Maria* was captured and brought in to Havana with a cargo of mostly child-slaves; according to Commander Stewart, the vessels captor "The negroes are dreadfully crowded; several of them are in very emaciated condition ... when I fell in with her she was short of water, which I believe is the cause of so many deaths...." Water shortage was the cause of immense suffering and mortality in the trade, and children were as susceptible as adults. Many more examples may readily be found. In Society of Friends: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, *An Exposition of the African Slave Trade, From the Year 1840-1850, Inclusive: Prepared From Official Documents* (Detroit: Negro History Press, 1851, reprint 1969), 19-20.

perspective of the slave child, the particular confinement conditions they would face were largely a lottery draw.

The conditions for all slaves generally worsened in the post 1807 illegal trade, and this was experienced as much by children as by adults. The Select Committee of the House of Commons in Britain was presented with the following testimony in 1838. It indicated both the increase in children carried late in the trade, and showed that the more children a particular vessel carried, the worse the conditions for children were likely to be.

> *Q*. Are they permitted to get up?
> *A*. Small boys would be. Small boys are never confined, but the way in which they are put in now, is, that they are generally jammed in such masses, even allowing that there was elevation sufficient for them to rise up, they could not rise without the whole section rising…
> *Q*. Are these men shackled?
> *A*. No, the little ones which they bring now are not shackled. The most favourite cargoes, at the present, are boys of eight to twelve years of age.[59]

This testimony is not universally applicable by any means; it is more reflective of the later slave trade, a time when far more very young slaves were being transported than before.

Leslie Owen's observation that "children are often so closely connected with the behaviour of adults and parents that the historical record needs considerable maturing" is a profound one.[60] It held especially true of children on a slaving voyage. Scholars necessarily project their concerns and interpretations upon the children. In addition, the normal relationship between slave children who suffered the middle passage and adults was perverted. This was true for their relationships with other slaves, and with crew. It

[59] R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 39.
[60] Leslie Owens, "The African in the Garden: Reflections About New World Slavery and Its Lifelines," in

held for both the majority of children who suffered the middle passage without parental support, and for the minority who made the journey accompanied by one or both parents. Every child, like every adult, came on board a slaving vessel taking his or her previous life experiences with him or her. Some were free in Africa, others were slaves for an extended period before they came on board. Some had known security with their parents, others had been subjected to severe hardships in Africa. Their sex and their age covered the entire spectrum. All these factors, as well as their individual temperament influenced how they experienced the middle passage, and what they internalized. But children need support and protection from adults, and the middle passage replaced that with terror or impotence.

All children on the middle passage had already lost that which children need most from adults. They had lost any security that they may have had, and the value of their individuality was similarly lost. They knew that they could not rely on the protection of a loving guardian, be it a parent or someone else. Individuals who did not have their best interests at heart exercised control over their lives. While many of the children would not have experienced this for the first time on the middle passage, the middle passage emphasized it unambiguously. Whether this translated into the knowledge that they would henceforth be treated as if their entire selves belonged to another, and that while on the slaving vessel, their value was directly proportional to their sex and size, varied by age and individual. But all would have had impressed upon them that skin colour was an important predictor of power. Though many of them will have experienced that some Africans could exercise a similar control, on board a slaving vessel they would learn that

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The State of Afro-American History Past, Present, and Future, Darlene Hine, (Baton Rouge: 1986), 33-34.

a white skin almost per definition assumed power over a black skin.[61] In this, the middle passage was an early start of their socialization into New World slavery. While the same might be argued for the adult slaves on board the vessel, adults had the benefit of being able to realize the context of their experiences, an ability less developed in children, according to their age.

Thornton has suggested that slave cargoes were more homogenous in terms of ethnicity and origin than has been generally believed. He argues that "an entire ship might be filled, not just with people possessing the same culture, but with people who grew up together."[62] If he is correct in this, many more children would have made the journey with people familiar to them, perhaps parents and other family members, than has been hitherto suspected.[63] If a child's parent was on board, the child would have witnessed the complete usurpation of that parent's authority by the slavers. The child would also have witnessed the inability of the parent to protect him or her from the cruelties, dangers, and conditions surrounding him or her. The child would have learned that the basis for the transfer of power lay in the control of violence.

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[61] Yet one must not make too much of this; children were clearly able to discriminate between people who had their best interests at heart regardless of skin colour. A British medical officer who was employed in treating the slaves on board captured slavers off the Brazilian coast, reports that "It is astonishing to witness the sagacity, if I may so call it, and the fortitude with which the poor creatures submit, nay, press to be treated with the different remedies. Not only do they appear perfectly aware that their interest is consulted, and give no trouble, but exhort each other to stand firm while the necessary painful operations of scarifying and of touching the inflamed and ulcerated parts are performed. ... Children not more than five or six years old will go down on their knees, and opening their swollen eyelids with their own fingers, will remain firm and unflinching whilst the pungent remedies are applied to their eyes." Not only did children realize when their best interests were being consulted, they were also capable of considerable bravery and trust in those circumstances. In R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 48.

[62] See John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: 1992).

[63] It appears that this can be extrapolated beyond 1680. Philip D. Morgan has supported the notion of greater ethnic homogeneity in slaving vessels in his article "The Cultural Implication of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.), 123.

Greater ethnic homogeneity on board would also have increased the chance that there would have been one or more adults on board, who could perhaps have been turned to for guidance and comfort. Even though these adults could offer little in concrete terms, their presence would have in and of itself been a source of support. This drawing of comfort and support was not necessarily a one way street. If an adult slave chose to look after a child, whether their own or not, it is possible that they would have derived some benefits as well. A greater sense of purpose and something to distract one from pondering on one's own fate and uncertain future might have ameliorated the horrors of the middle passage somewhat. Children could also support adults in a more direct fashion: Commander Sprigg of the *Ferret* captured an illegal slaver, the *Malaga*, in 1847, and wrote that "I cannot refrain from mentioning an humble individual, in the person of a liberated African boy, on board, in soothing the suffering of the slaves whose dialect was his own."[64] This is an intriguing reference, but the document provides no further information.

Some of the children on slavers made the Atlantic crossing with other children whom they knew from their homes in Africa. The children and women in the Atlantic trade were more frequently obtained from coastal regions than adult male slaves, a larger proportion of who came from the interior. This increased the chance that other children whom they knew would share their fate. Although speculation, it is quite possible that older children looked after younger children whom they knew. Children generally make friends readily, and the strains of the middle passage created the conditions necessary to form mutual support networks. Among adults, deep and lasting friendships, more akin to

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[64] Society of Friends: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, *An Exposition of the African Slave Trade,* 107.

family ties than ordinary friendship, were forged during the middle passage.[65] Children probably also made friends, especially among children of their own age. Whether these friendships resulted in ties as deep and lasting as those of some adults, we do not know. No friendship or relationship could have negated the horrors of the middle passage, but they will have made them a little more bearable.

Many children who made the middle passage will not have had a parent or a guardian on board with. This raises makes the question of how slave children interacted with adult slaves, and how adult slaves saw their responsibility (or perhaps lack thereof) to slave children all the more pertinent. Even on the middle passage, adult slaves had some measure of power and authority over children. This role was severely restricted and expressed at the whim of their enslavers, but nonetheless they had the potential to dominate children, and not vice versa. This position could be used for the good of the child, or not. This is especially true for when the slaves were locked in the holds, away from the immediate control of the slavers. That both occurred we know. In what proportions, we do not know. As with much of the information on the trade, examples of extremes tended to survive, and typical day-to-day events tended not to be recorded. There are sources extant that indicate that interactions between adult and slave children were not always harmonious. Life on board a slaving vessel was a battle to survive for all who were on board, and not all individuals were equally noble in fighting that battle. For example, the surgeon of the *Wolf* "found a little girl dead" and "on Inquiry among the Slaves found one of the women had beat her in the night."[66] This was not typical, but it does indicate the potential power relations between adults and children.

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[65] Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery*, 150. He does not, however, discuss children.
[66] Darold D. Wax, "A Philadelphia Surgeon", 484.

The slavers, of course, exercised had greater power over the children than adult slaves did. For many of the children, the middle passage was the first or the first sustained contact that they had with white people. It is reasonable to expect them to have associated whiteness and the white world with violence, oppression and power. Yet individual acts of kindness from the crew towards a certain child did occur. Contemporary accounts occasionally indicate that a crew member took a young slave under their wing for the duration of the passage. Contradictory as it may seem, some slavers developed a liking for some of the children that they were carrying into a lifetime of bondage. William Chancellor, for example, felt his responsibility to his charges keenly. He wrote the following heartfelt lament in his diary: "I found a boy dead, at noon another, and in the afternoon, another. Oh Reader, whoever thou art, it is impossible for you to conceive or me to describe the Torture I sustain at the loss of these Slaves we have committed to a watry grave." He does, however, add that among the dead children was "one of wch. boys was to have been my own." Yet when read in the context of the remainder of the diary, it is easy to believe that Chancellor was bemoaning more than a loss of a personal possession, or giving vent to an injured professional pride. He refers to the children slaves in his care as "our little creatures" and repeatedly writes how, for him it "is hard to See Young Creatures suffering in this manner in short it renders my life a misery to me." And Chancellor was by no means a critic of the slave trade. He reconciled this contradictory position with a firm and sincere belief that although "It is accounted by numberless people that a voyage to Africa in regard to the purchasing Slaves is very vile", it was in the slaves' own interests. He argued that "tis redeeming an unhappy people from inconceivable misery under which they continually labour, and from those

miserys of life into which they are every day precipated ."[67] There is no reason to doubt Chancellor's sincerity; he was not writing for any particular audience, was not testifying to any investigative committee, and was not an opponent of the trade. While Chancellor was not typical of the crew on board a slaver, he was also not unique. For the modern reader his reasoning seems difficult to understand; however to understand him, it is first and foremost necessary to believe him. To believe him is to accept his premises, including those of the cultural inferiority of Africans. This makes him both consistent, and even reasonable. But the vast majority of children did not attract friendly attention from the crew, and most surgeons did not suffer the torments Chancellor did.

For most children, the relationship with their enslavers was far from benign. Some children attracted an altogether different form of attention from their enslavers. Their captors abused them sexually. Even very young children are known to have suffered. The French slaving captain, Philippe Liot "pushed his brutality to the point of violating a little Negro girl of eight to ten years, whose mouth he closed to prevent her from screaming. This he did on three nights and put her in a deathly state."[68] It is not possible to establish how common this was for any particular age group. Many of older girls suffered sexual abuse, but almost certainly, the younger the child, the less prevalent sexual abuse was.

Many "girl-women", to use a term from the trade, however, were victims. Captain John Newton explicitly mentioned that both mature women and girls were at risk of being sexually abused by members of the crew. He wrote, "When the women and girls are taken on board a ship … they are often exposed to the wanton rudeness of white

[67] Darold D. Wax, "A Philadelphia Surgeon", 487-490.
[68] R.L. Stein, ***The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business*** (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 101.

savages."[69] The phrase "women and girls" is the pertinent one here. There are some indications to suggest that not only female children suffered such brutalities at the hands of their captors. Postma, noting that "Captains of slave ships frequently had privately owned male or female companions, which usually were sold along with other slaves at the end of the middle passage" implies that there could have been sexual overtones in the relationship, though without offering hard evidence.[70] That crewmembers occasionally had privately owned slaves on board is a fact. That they had an increased risk of being abused by their owners is likely. How often it actually occurred is impossible to establish.

The emotional consequences to a child of sexual abuse on a slaver can hardly be overestimated. They were in an extremely vulnerable position in a dangerous and unpredictable environment, and they had no avenue of protection to turn to. Nor would they generally have had a trusted support network to fall back upon after having suffered a violation, almost certainly not their parents. Perhaps other slaves on board might have provided some comfort, but if so, they could do little for the child. Certainly they were powerless to intervene.

Most children on board a slaver will have experienced neither the unusual friendship of crewmembers, nor sexual exploitation by them. Nonetheless, all children had to come to terms with, and to formulate a response to, their white abductors. In by far the most cases this process took its course in an unremarked upon fashion, leaving the social historian with little to reconstruct the details of an 'average' experience. As with adult slaves, children will have quickly learned that the best way to survive was to master the ship board routines, and not to be noticed insofar as possible. Another possible

[69] J. Newton, *The Journal*, 105.
[70] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch* , 43.

response was resistance. Samuel Waldo, the owner of the slaver *Affrica*, cautioned his captain to "have the needfull Guard over your Slaves, and putt not too much confidence in the Women nor Children least they happen to be Instrumental to your being surprised which may be Fatall."[71] Not all captains "putt too much confidence in the ... Children." On the wreck of the *Henrietta Marie*, a slaving vessel of the late 17th century, almost one hundred pairs of small shackles were recovered. These could only have been intended for children, given their size. [72] They do not prove that all the children were generally shackled, or that they were chained. What it does offer evidence for, is that children were routinely shackled on some vessels, and probably chained too. While children did often have more liberty on board than adults, slavers did retain the option to secure them as they did adults. The shackles on the *Henrietta Marie* would not have been specially commissioned for that particular voyage. Rather, they were part of the fittings of a slaving vessel for its journey.

There is little in the primary sources to suggest that children often played important roles in slave mutinies or other forms of resistance. Little evidence has surfaced to suggest that slave children undertook acts of resistance to free themselves or their fellow sufferers on their own initiative. Children taking part in structural resistance was in and of itself rare, and when they did so they tended to be agents of the adults. Cugoano, who made the journey a young boy, did claim that "when we found ourselves at last taken away, death was more preferable than life, and a plot was concerted among us [the men and boys], that we might burn and blow up the ship, and perish all together in the flames."[73] But Cugoano was an adult when writing his account, and involved in the abolitionist cause. If

[71] Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, Suffolk Court Files, no. 46527. Reproduced in E. Donnan *Documents*, vol. 3, 45.
[72] M. Burnside, *Spirit of the Passage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 122. The book offers detailed information on the excavation of the *Henrietta Marie*.

the incident did indeed occur as he relates it, it was atypical, and the role of the boys was probably exaggerated. There is very little evidence to confirm that children played any role of significance in the planning and executing of plots this serious, and less yet to suggest that they did so on their own initiative.

The question of whether children were more likely to betray plots or to take the side of their oppressors than other slaves is one that deserves consideration. While contemporary documents do not unambiguously indicate that women betrayed plots more frequently than men on slaving vessels, the case is different with regard to children. When referred to in the context of resistance, the sources disproportionaly indicate that the children, either voluntarily or involuntarily, aided rather than opposed the slavers' interests. This can be partly accounted for by the fact that the children were seen and exploited as, the weakest link when mutiny was being planned. For example, Captain Newton had boy slaves betray a plot by the men twice during the same voyage. He writes in his journal that it was "upon the information of 3 of the boys" that he "found some knives, stones, shot etc. and a cold chissel." Three boys betrayed the plot, but "Upon enquiry there appeared 8 [men] principally concerned to move in projecting the mischeif and 4 boys in supplying them with the above instruments."[74] The four boys who supplied the tools for the mutiny attempt were most likely instruments of the adults. They almost certainly acted in accordance to the instructions of the adults, who used the greater mobility allowed to the youngsters to further a plot of the their making.

It is not clear if the three boys who gave Newton the information on where to search did so voluntarily. It is possible that they did so under duress. Though by the

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[73] Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments of the Evil of Slavery* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1787), 10.

standards of the trade a humane slaver, Newton subsequently "put the boys in irons and slightly in the thumbscrews to urge them to a full confession."[75] The boys put in thumbscrews were almost certainly the four who were actively involved in the plot. It is however, instructive that he chose the boys as his source for "a full confession." He almost certainly saw them as easier to break than the men whom he had already identified as part of the conspiracy. When another mutiny attempt was conceived some two months later, Newton could note the incident as follows: "The boy slaves impeached the men of an intention to rise upon us. Found 4 principally concerned and put them in neck yokes."[76] This time it seems that the boys had learned their lesson, and impeached the plot without coercion on the part of Newton.

There are several sources that indicate that children, particularly boys, aided the crew in times of mutiny in various ways. For example, when there was a mutiny on Captain Snelgrave's vessel in 1704, his son, later to be a slaving captain in his own right, recounts that "a lusty Slave struck him with a Billet so hard, that he was almost stunned. The Slave was going to repeat his Blow, when a young lad about seventeen years old, whom we had been kind to, interposed his Arm, and received the Blow, by which his Arm-bone was fractured." [77] Similarly, when the slaves mutinied on the *Wolf*, the surgeon was wounded in endeavoring to suppress the uprising. He was supported by "One of the little boys to whom I had taken a liking and he to me, [who] attended me with Balls Pistol

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[74] J. Newton, *The Journal*, 71.

[75] There is little reason to doubt Newton's humanity – when judged in the context of the trade. Only three weeks before this incident he had written in his diary that "I can sincerely say that I have ... endeavored to do my duty by them, without oppression, ill language or any kind of abuse as remembering that I also have a Master in Heaven and that there is no respecter of Persons with him. And I resolve to entertain no personal hatred or ill will ... I will treat them with humanity while under my power and not render their confinement unnecessarily grievous..." J. Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader*, 71.

[76] J. Newton, *The Journal*, 77.

[77] W. Snelgrave, in E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 354. The slave was freed for his intervention upon

and Cutlass, & during the time that I was fainting with the loss of blood got me some water to wch. I attribute my being able to keep myself up."[78]

In the small sample of documents that relate acts of active resistance and mutiny in which children are mentioned, the majority indicate that children either betrayed their fellow slaves or aided their captors in some other way. The acts of resistance which children did take part in of their own initiative were nearly always intended to ameliorate their immediate conditions, and did not challenge the structure of the trade on any meaningful level. Children's resistance tended to be actions such as taking more water or food than allowed. They very rarely seem to have threatened white lives, the success of the voyage, or have overtly challenged the authority of the slavers to own and transport them.

The same is true of suicide among children on slaving vessels. While children did occasionally commit suicide, they did so less frequently than adults, and often for different reasons. Children were more resilient than adults in some respects, and resistance to suicide was one of them. There are very few accounts of children committing suicide on their own initiative extant. It is probable that this is because that although the children on a slaver generally shared the extreme harshness of the conditions, they did not appear to share the despondency and lack of hope to the same degree. They probably pondered less on their futures, and related the happenings on board less to their future prospects than adults did. The surviving sources suggest that when children did commit suicide, they did do so not out of a principled and considered

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arrival in Virginia.

[78] Darold D. Wax, "A Philadelphia Surgeon", 485.

reaction to being enslaved. Rather, they did so in order to end an immediate and concrete suffering.

When children chose to commit suicide, they nearly always did so either because of unbearable physical pain, or as a result of extreme fear. An example of the first kind of suicide is provided in the journal of the Rhode Island slaver the *Mary*, kept from 1795-1796. The entry for June 25th, 1796 noted that at "About 10 A.M. a Slave boy jumped overboard and drownd him self to get clear of a pain in his bowels, Occasioned by a Dysentry. No. 16."[79] The boy committed suicide because the conditions *in* slavery were unbearable, not because the condition *of* slavery was unbearable. An example of the second kind is provided by Augustino, who made the journey from Africa on a slaver while a boy of about 12 years of age. He testified to the Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1849 that on his journey in 1830 "The young ones had the right of coming on deck, but several of those jumped overboard, for fear they were being fattened to be eaten."[80] Again, the cause of the suicide had little to do with resistance to the institution of slavery, although that institution created the conditions for it.[81]

In suicide attempts, as in other acts of resistance, children were susceptible to being used and abused by the adults around them. This was nowhere better reflected than in the following account of the suicide – murder – of slave children on board a slaving

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[79] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 376.
[80] In R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 39. The fear of being cannibalized was a fear that surfaced often during the course of the trade. For more information on this aspect of the middle passage, see chapter 5, Mutiny.
[81] An exception to this generalization is to be found in Equiano's narrative, in which he indicates that he (then a young boy) would gladly have committed suicide by jumping overboard. But this is unlikely to be true; in the first place, given his prominent position in the abolitionist movement, and the years that went by, there is a great chance of projection. Second, and more importantly, is the fact that the authenticity of this early part of his narrative as been drawn into severe question. See Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery and Abolition* 20, 3 (December, 1999).

vessel. After a bloody but failed mutiny attempt on board the Danish slaver the *Christiansborg* a mass suicide attempt occurred. According to the letter of an eyewitness, Paul Isert, some of the slaves returned to their quarters quietly after the mutiny was suppressed. "The others, however, when they saw they could not succeed all sprang overboard into the sea." This was not unusual – the aftermath of failed mutinies often led to suicide attempts. But "Some boys from the same nation as the rebels, but lacking the courage to take such a drastic step were deliberately pushed over by the older ones."[82] Children in general do not commit suicide easily, and nor do they escape the influence of adults easily. Both were as true on the middle passage as elsewhere.

Life on board a slaving vessel was violent. The violence could be latent at times, and at other times overt, but violence and the threat of violence was the most important formative factor of the middle passage. Punishment was one of the many forms which violence could take. Understanding the effect of punishment on board a slaver had on a child being punished, requires a consideration of not only the physical violence, pain and violation of the child. The context of the punishment – who it was administered by (a stranger, a white person, a person of enormous power), and the spirit in which it was administered (not a correction by a trusted authority figure, whose ultimate forgiveness could be relied upon) was as important as the punishment itself.

The punishment children received on board, though unquestionably extremely harsh by modern standards, generally did take into account the type and severity of their transgressions and their age. Children were not, or very seldom, executed, as men and women were. Whipping was by far the most common form of punishment for children. The extreme pain of whipping, however, should not be underestimated. Though not often

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[82] P. E. Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 178.

recorded in detail, the references that are made to children being punished for a transgression generally read as the following: "There was no.... flogging [after a mutiny attempt] excepting of the boys for stealing water, farina and so forth, when it was not allowed them."[83] If, however, a child had information that the slaver needed, then age was no impediment to the tortures that the child could be exposed to.

In order to fully understand the effect of punishment on children on slaving vessels historians need to ask not only what effect the punishment of a given child had on that child. They also need to consider what the effect of seeing and hearing extremely painful punishments, including execution, being inflicted on other – usually adult – slaves would have had on them. Punishment on board a slaving vessel was a public affair, and children were not shielded from it in any way. These were, presumably, the things which memories that lasted a lifetime were made of. This, like much on the experience of children on the middle passage, requires further investigation.

Much work still remains to be done on children in the Atlantic slave trade in general, and the middle passage in particular. New questions need to be formulated, and new ways of arriving at answers need to be developed. Whatever form these questions may take, they must necessarily center on two main issues. First is the actual experience of the middle passage: how did the children themselves experience what they were subjected to? The children themselves, after all, were the ones who experienced their journey – not adults. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to learn more about the facts of the middle passage as it pertained to children, and about the lives of the children themselves. The seeking for more facts to use for further analysis should not

[83] R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 42. Equiano recounts a similar incident, in which a number of boys were severely flogged for attempting to steal some fish. However, as noted above, the authenticity of this

restrict itself to the actual middle passage. It is also important to recover the lives of children before they were sold into the Atlantic trade, whether they were free whether they were enslaved in Africa. The sale, transport to the coast, time waiting to be sold in the barracoons and other formative events from their young lives need to be recovered. Only then will it be posssible to understand how the children understood and made sense of, or did not make sense of, the world around them.

Future work must also necessarily devote itself to the question of the effect that the middle passage had on the children who suffered it. This is an area of investigation that will necessarily include interdisciplinary work. Child psychologists and historians have much to offer each other, and much to learn from each other in this regard. Of course exact answers will vary from individual to individual and according to their specific circumstances. Nonetheless, if historians wish to gain a more complete understanding of the middle passage, they must ask what consequences it had on the development of the child into adulthood, how it effected their sense of self and sense of others. This question is far more profound than only attempting to recover the trauma suffered by the children. The middle passage was a formative experience for children; the question that needs working out is, in what ways it was formative. This question need not restrict itself to the development of the individual – it can and also should cover issues such as the role of the middle passage in the socialization of the newly arrived slave-child into New World slavery, and other group-based investigations. How and when did the child understand that the self did not belong to the self, but rather to another? How did children who made the middle passage differ in their adaptation to a lifetime of slavery compared to those born into New World slavery? At this stage of our knowledge, it is

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early part of his narrative has been brought into question.

quite reasonable to ask whether indeed the middle passage served any socialization function, or whether it was generally experienced as a horrific ordeal, mercifully over, but one with little relevance to their new lives. Other questions that need to be considered include on which groups of children – boys or girls, in which age group, from what background – did particular effects tend to develop? What was universal, and what individual? Comparative studies with slave children born and raised on land will be indispensable in answering the kinds of questions posed here.[84] It would be surprising indeed if the middle passage did not turn out to formative in some regards; what children learn depends mainly on what they are taught, and on what they observe. The middle passage took too much away from the children who made the journey, and added too many new experiences not to have had a lasting impact on its victims.

This chapter offers more hints than answers, and more suggestions than conclusions. Yet one conclusion is already possible. Even though the immorality of the slave trade has received much attention especially in the last fifty years or so, the magnitude of that immorality will not be fully charted until the experiences of children have been added to the historical record next to that of adult slaves. The fact that children tended not to draw as much attention while on board should not blind scholars to the fact that they formed an integral part of the trade in human beings from Africa. The very large number of children (and infants) who made the voyage make an eloquent case for the re-writing of much of the work on the middle passage, both demographic and otherwise.

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[84] This too is an area in which very little work has been done. The only full-length study that has been completed on the topic is Wilma King's *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

CHAPTER 3: CREW

"[They] must have neither dainty fingers nor dainty noses."[1]

Slaves and crew contributed equally to form the middle passage took. They relied on each other for their roles and public identities, and acted and reacted according to the spaces which each deliberately or inadvertently allowed the other. An understanding of the social history of the crew of an Atlantic slaver is vital to understanding the experience of slaves, just as an understanding of the social history of the slaves is vital to the understanding of the experience of the crew. This chapter primarily focuses on the crew of slavers while they were on the Atlantic crossing. Some attention is paid to the time that they spent on the African coast while preparing the vessel for slaves, and the process of slaving, as well as on the structural aspects of their voyage. The middle passage was only one of the two, or more commonly, three legs of their journey.

As with women and children, a complete history of the crew of Atlantic slavers remains to be written. The work that has been done concentrates on demographics. The Atlantic Slavery database will cause these to be refined further, though adjustments are likely to be minor.[2] Much less work has been done on the social history of crew. Sporadic information can be derived from various works, but no complete social history exists. The combination of traditional research into the primary documents with the use of statistical data is necessary to address the lacuna.

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[1] Advice given to the Royal African Company in 1706 by Sir Dalby Thomas regarding the hiring of crew. Quoted in C. Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 47.

[2] The best demographic work currently available on crew, Stephen. D. Behrendt's, "Crew Mortality in the TransAtlantic Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.) is based on (a pre-release of) the Atlantic Slavery database.

The entire Atlantic slave trade to the Americas was made up of approximately 40,000 voyages.[3] The average number of crew on board a slaver was fractionally over 30 people.[4] Crews sizes fluctuated over time, but were considerably larger than those of other merchant vessels.[5] As James Penny noted in 1789, "The Slave Ships are double manned."[6] Slavers frequently carried crews 50% larger than those of non-slaving voyages in order to manage and guard the slaves.[7] Outward-bound slavers had crews that were substantially – between 30 and 50% – larger than those on the return leg, as slavers often discharged crewmembers when they were no longer needed to maintain and control the slaves.[8] Desertions and mortality also both reduced the number of crew by the voyage's end. The financial burden of employing a large number of crewmembers was an incentive

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[3] This figure relies on an estimate by the editors of the Atlantic Slavery dataset, which contains some records of 27233 voyages. This number is may still to be too low; uses a conservative total number of slaves exported from Africa, and does not take into account voyages that took place before 1600. The illegal trade is also likely to be underrepresented.

[4] 30.09, but the figure must be taken as a rule of thumb, as it does not take into account national variations. It is calculated from a set of 10702 voyages on which the number of crew at the outset of the voyage are known. Combined, there were 322095 crewmembers employed (including repeat journeys).

[5] The figures here are overview figures; there was change over time, by vessel size, and some areas of the African coast required vessels to have larger crews than others. Crew sizes also declined in the eighteenth century as operating efficiency increased. Donnan, basing her conclusions on the investigations of Thomas Clarkson, writes, "a vessel to the Windward Coast of West Africa carried a larger crew than one to the Leeward Coast, because the Windward trade was carried on by boats manned from the vessel." Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930-35), 559. Minchinton has shown that the size of the crew of slavers increased in times of war, and fell in times of peace. He has further demonstrated that larger vessels were manned proportionately less than smaller vessels, reckoned by weight. But the value of this last observation is questionable; the correlation between vessel weight and the number of crew required is not perfect. A more meaningful comparison is the number of slaves per crewmember, though the same criticism applies, but to a lesser degree. Walter E. Minchinton, "The British Slave Fleet, 1680-1775: The Evidence of the Naval Office Shipping Lists," in *De la traite l'esclavage, vol. 1*, Daget, 70.

[6] Reproduced in Michael Craton and James Walvin et. al., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Longman, 1976), 37.

[7] See S. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality" and Hebert S. Klein, "Recent Trends in the Study of the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Indian Historical Review* 15, 1-2 (1988-89), 7, for earlier work on the relative size of slaving vessel crews.

[8] David Richardson suggests that a typical range was 3.2 – 4 tons per man on the outward legs, and 5.7 – 6.8 tons per man on the return voyage. Over the entire voyage, between a third and a half fewer crew manned the vessel on the return leg. D. Richardson, "The Costs of Survival: The Transport of Slaves in the Middle Passage and the Profitability of the 18th-Century British Slave Trade," *Explorations in Economic History* 24, 2 (1987), 189.

to complete the voyage as quickly as possible. The age of crewmembers varied greatly, generally in the range of fourteen to fifty, but the bulk were in their late teens to early twenties.

Crewmembers lived with the knowledge that their profession was an exceptionally dangerous one. Many contemporary documents mourned the high mortality of slaving crew. Captain John Blake for example, wrote in 1652 that "It hath pleased the Lord Aflickt us with much Sickness that we have bured three and twenty men. I never See men dye so soudainely In my Life ... for we have beuried all thes men In a months tyme, Sum tymes three or four In a day." His words were repeated in a variety of ways for the duration of the trade. The family of crewmembers understood the risks involved in slaving. Blake's despondent request "If our Companyes wyfes Comes to Inquire for newes" to "put them in as Good Comfort as you may" too, is representative.[9]

Crew death was generally caused occasioned by illnesses, and less commonly, inadequate nutrition and water, accidents, and slave insurrections. Diseases, particularly malaria, yellow fever and gastrointestinal disorders, especially dysentery, were the main threat to sailors' lives.[10] General ill health, bad hygiene, inadequate nutrition and medical treatment all contributed to the risk diseases posed. Crew mortality often exceeded that of slaves they carried, expressed in percentages.[11] As with slave mortality, rates of crew

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[9] Quoted in Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (London: Temple Smith, 1974), 78.

[10] Slaves and crew did not die of the same diseases in equal numbers. Slaves were more likely to be effected by gastrointestinal diseases, while crew were more likely to suffer fevers. For a discussion of the diseases which afflicted crew most commonly, see Raymond L. Cohn, "Maritime Mortality in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Survey," *International Journal of Maritime History* 1, 1 (1989), 174. See also P.D. Curtin, "Epidemiology and the Slave Trade," *Political Science Quarterly* 83, 2 (1968).

[11] In the Dutch trade, for example, Postma has calculated the mortality of crew to be 17.9%, while average slave mortality in the same sample was 12.3%. J. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1990), 156. See also S. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality."

mortality showed a steady decline throughout the period of the trade.[12] Most crew died on the coast of Africa, far more than on the Atlantic crossing. Because crew were particularly at risk for diseases incurred in Africa, the actual crossing offered some protection.[13] The wet season was the most dangerous for crew, regardless of where they slaved in Africa. Conversely, the dry season provided some measure of protection.[14]

The number of crew deaths on any given voyage was largely a lottery. Most vessels escaped with a below average number of deaths, while other vessels were virtually incapacitated by illness and death. As with slaves, though to a much lesser degree, crew mortality rose the longer a voyage lasted. The vast majority of diseases were contracted on the coast of Africa and from shipboard epidemics, and vessels that spent a shorter amount of time on the coast of Africa often experienced lower crew mortality.[15] Some African locations were considerably more dangerous than others, as the text to a common seaman's ditty acknowledged:

Beware and take care
Of the Bight of Benin:

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[12] Average crew death percentages varied between around 8% to over 20% depending on time period, the nationality of the slaver, place of slaving and the season in Africa. In the French trade, crew deaths declined from an average of 13.9% in the beginning of the eighteenth century to 8.4% at the end of the century. English crew similarly experienced a decline, though less spectacular. S. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality", 51 -.

[13] Drawing from a sample of 1,730 French slaving voyages that 3% on which deaths occurred on the outward leg, Behrendt has calculated that 42% of deaths occurred on the African coast, 22% on the middle passage, 26% in the Americas and 7% on the homeward passage. The high rate of the last 2 can be explained by residual effects of diseases picked up in Africa and on the middle passage. Stephen. D. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality", 67. For representative earlier work, see P.D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Johannes Postma, "Mortality in the Dutch Slave Trade, 1675-1795," in *Uncommon Market*, Gemery and Hogendorn; H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton: Princeton U.P, 1978). The numbers calculated by Klein have been considerably refined by later work, but his work remains valuable for the comparative work on the mortality rate of (white) troops in various places in the world, including West Africa, it provides.

[14] See Behrendt, "Crew Mortality", 53 for a detailed breakdown of death by month of slaving and African region.

[15] See R.L. Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 98-100.

For one that comes out
There are forty go in

The song was correct; crew mortality in the Bight of Benin and Bight of Biafra was more than twice as high on average than in the safest slaving location, South-East Africa.[16] Rank provided some protection; the higher the rank, the less chance a slaver had of dying. This is partly accounted for by the fact that surviving one or several fevers provided a certain amount of immunity to future attacks, and of course, only survivors could be promoted to higher positions.[17] The vessel's surgeon, however, was an exception to this rule due mostly to the nature of his work. Captains had the best survival chances.

A captain's power and pay were commensurate with his responsibilities. He was ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the voyage.[18] His duties included the day to day running of the vessel, management of the crew and slaves, navigating the vessel, and bookkeeping responsibilities. In the absence of a supercargo the captain was also in charge of acquiring slaves where and how he deemed in the best interests of his financiers. If present, supercargoes, sometimes provided with assistants, were in charge of the commercial side of the voyage. The combination of skills required to be a successful captain – mariner, manager, and businessman – were not easily found. Consequently, a successful slaving vessel captain could command a high price for his

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[16] The high mosquito populations in the wet seasons in the Bights of Benin and Biafra were responsible for the spread of yellow fever and malaria, resulting in increased crew deaths. S.Behrendt, "Crew Mortality", 52.

[17] S. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality",60.

[18] A full-length study on the crew of a slaving vessel is needed to differentiate between crew ranks and various tasks and responsibilities on board. Due to a lack of space, I provide only a cursory overview below. For more information on captains in the slave trade, see Stephen. D. Behrendt, "The Captains in the British Slave Trade from 1785 to 1807," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 140 (1990).

services. Of the crewmembers, captains were the likely to have the largest financial stake in the voyage, sometimes including a personal investment. They were also the individuals who most consistently profited by the trade. Aside from their salaries, they frequently benefited from bonus schemes (nearly always based on the number of slaves delivered alive) and the opportunity of trading a certain number of goods and / or slaves on their own account.[19] A slaving captain who had made a number of successful voyages could easily become wealthy from his activities. It was not unusual for a successful captain to become an investor in the trade after retiring from the sea.

Experience on a slaving vessel was highly valued, and consequently captains often rose to their rank. In spite of this, captains were often young men. After typically accruing about a decade's worth of experience, they tended be in their mid twenties to early thirties by the time they achieved their rank. For some, it was the result of careful career planning. The trade could be attractive to individuals who had other options. For example, in 1726 a number of Bristol merchants commented that "a great many of the present traders are the sons of gentlemen of the best estate and fortunes who have survived their apprenticeship to Masters."[20] Elder has argued that, in the case of Lancaster slavers "The slave trade obviously attracted young and ambitious sons of moderate, middle-income families." And that "quite often it seemed to be the path chosen

[19] Often other crewmembers also had these privileges, though to a lesser amount. The amount crewmembers were allowed to trade on their own account was strictly regulated, and varied by rank. The system could benefit crewmembers substantially, particularly those of higher rank. The primary documents, particularly correspondence between financiers and captains, are rich sources for descriptions of this system of carrying "privilege" slaves and private trading. It was a system that was easily abused – it was a truism that privilege slaves never died – and the sources often pay detailed attention to how the trade was to be conducted. The instructions to William Barry by his financiers are typical. They write "Your Coast Comm'n is 4 from every £104 of the Net proceeds of the slaves etc., your privelidge slaves 2 provided you purchase 'em with your Own Goods and mark 'em in the presense of boath Mates …" In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 327.
[20] Quoted in C. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 46.

by one of the junior members of the family, where older brothers had come into their father's trade or land."[21] Many captains made only one, or a few voyages, but most slaving expeditions took place under the command of a captain who made more than one voyage.[22] If they survived, and retained their health, this was often a sound financial decision.

Galenson has reprinted several primary comments by financiers and observers of the trade who emphasized the importance of having experienced captains on board in order to improve the chances of a successful voyage. He places great faith in the observations of Sir Dalby Thomas who argued in 1706 that "when yor. ships have great Mortality unless occasioned by ye Small Pox, you may be assured is thro Carelesness of yor. Captns., Mates, Surgeons & Cooks usage who ought to answer to yor. Honors for it."[23] Galenson is correct in noting that contemporary observers and financiers preferred experienced captains. But the matter has never been properly evaluated.

A comparison of a sub-set of 5800 voyages made by captains of various nationalities who all commanded at least four slaving vessels to a dataset composed of 6744 voyages under the command captains who made only a single voyage yielded unexpected results.[24] Seven criteria were selected to measure the competence of captains:

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[21] Melissa Elder, *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of Eighteenth-Century Lancaster* (Halifax, England: Ryburn, 1992), 50.

[22] See the Atlantic slavery database set for a determination of the amount of voyages that sailed under the command of a captain who made more than a single voyage. Precision is not possible, as it can be very difficult to determine whether one is dealing with a single individual in the case of multiple spellings of the same name, when dealing with a common name. Nonetheless, a global examination of the database indicates that well over 50% of voyages were made under the command of a captain who made more than one voyage.

[23] D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behaviour in Early English America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 50-51.

[24] The results are hardly ever based on the average of the complete datasets, as the relevant information is not always present for each voyage. However, the sub-sets of data are always large enough to generalize confidently from.

1. Average number of slaves who survived over the entire voyage (not just the Atlantic crossing), in percentages. This criterion is self-explanatory. It tests the captain's ability to effect the survival of the slaves on his vessel. The greater number of slaves delivered alive, the more successful the voyage from the perspective of the financier and captain.
2. Average crew deaths over the entire voyage, in percentages. This tests the captain's ability to influence the survival chances of his crewmembers. While perhaps less relevant to financiers as a test of competence, it was important to the crewmembers themselves.
3. Average percentage of crew who deserted at any time during the voyage. This criterion tests how well the captain was able to manage the crew under his command. It is somewhat less reliable than the other tests, as it was sometimes in the captain and his financiers' interests to have crew desert.
4. Average voyage length, taken over the entire voyage. This tests two important skills of a captain – his ability to navigate his vessel to minimize the length of the Atlantic crossing, and his ability to procure slaves quickly while in Africa.
5. Average length of the Atlantic crossing. This is a refinement of point 4. It is a better test of navigation and ship handling, as the ability to procure slaves and to load a cargo in the Americas for the return journey is excluded.
6. Percentage of cases in which violent conflict between slaves and crew was reported. The fewer reported conflicts, the better the security arrangements, and crew and slave management ability of the captain.

7. Percentage of cases when the vessel or its boats were "cut-off" by Africans. This is a test of the captain's skill in dealing with free Africans. If intimidating free Africans could sometimes be in a vessel's interest, losing the vessel or its boats never was.

	Single Voyage	Multiple Voyages
Slave survival[a]	84.89%	84.92%
Crew mortality[b]	20.19%	18.83%
Crew desertions[c]	8.30%	14.52%
Slave insurrections[d]	1.50%	1.72%
"Cut off" by Africans[e]	0.21%	0.35%
Ave. total voyage[f]	301.65 days	277.97 days
Ave. Atlantic crossing[g]	67.23 days	65.44 days

Table 3.1. The Influence of the Experience Level of Captains on the Outcome of a Slaving Voyage

[a] Over the entire voyage, not only the middle passage. Single voyage: 1488943 / 1754153 slaves. Multiple voyages: 1457823 / 1716800 slaves.
[b] Over the entire voyage, not only the middle passage. Single voyage: 5259 voyages / 26048 crewmembers. Multiple voyages: 9611 voyages / 51023 crewmembers.
[c] Only includes voyages were at least one crewmember was reported to have deserted. Single voyage: 1157 voyages/ 13945 crewmembers. Multiple voyages: 3943 voyages / 27157 crewmembers.
[d] These figures do not indicate of how many insurrections actually occurred; they represent the number of insurrections reported in the surviving documentation for a given voyage. This can be very scanty. As neither single nor multiple voyages are likely to have been preserved better, the *comparison* is meaningful. Single voyage: 101 insurrections/ 6744 voyages. Multiple voyages: 61insurrections / 5800 voyages.
[e] To a lesser degree, the caveat in [d] is applicable. Single voyage: 14 cut off / 6744 voyages. Multiple voyages: 20 cut off / 5800 voyages.
[f] Single voyage: average of 1695 voyages. Multiple voyages: average of 3342 voyages.
[g] Single voyage: average of 1065 voyages. Multiple voyages: average of 788 voyages.

In terms of slave survival, there was no reason to choose an experienced captain over an inexperienced one. This was because the causes of most factors contributing to slave mortality lay outside the captain's realm of influence. Epidemics, rough seas (leading to dehydration), shipwrecks, and the like were not very amenable to intervention by the captain. Exceptions included death by abuse, extreme neglect, and possibly deaths

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by insurrections and suicides. But either these did not occur often enough to affect the averages, or the experience of captains did not effect them. When average slave mortality declined in the mid to late eighteenth century, the benefits were shared equally by experienced and inexperienced captains. Crew mortality too, was roughly similar between those sailing on vessels with an experienced captain, and those with a captain who made only one voyage. It is possible that the slightly higher mortality that occurred on board of vessels with an inexperienced captain reflected a harsher regime on those vessels, but that is speculation.

Crew desertions were substantially higher on vessels with an experienced captain. This probably indicates that experienced captains better knew how to rid themselves of excess crew in the Americas. A study of *where* crew deserted would settle the matter. Experienced captains were, however, slightly more prone to suffer insurrections on board, and substantially more prone to engage in (losing) conflict with Africans on the coast. This could again reflect a harshness and rigidity towards slaves engendered by constant exposure to the trade, or its seeming opposite – a laxness in security arrangements due to overconfidence, or it could have another explanation. Only in voyage length did an experienced captain clearly outperform inexperienced captains. This might reflect better navigational skills and a more intimate knowledge of the slaving coast. Navigation and sailing of vessels was as much art as science in the seven – and eighteenth centuries, and experience would have been a valuable asset. The effect was, however, considerable only when measured over the entire middle passage, and much less over the Atlantic crossing only – a difference of 2.7% compared to one of 7.9%. This suggests that while a difference in the skill of handling a vessel might have been present,

it was not the main factor in the more rapid completion of voyages. The more efficient networks an experienced captain was likely to have may have allowed him to load a new cargo of slaves more rapidly in Africa, and to dispose of them more quickly in the New World.

Perhaps surprisingly, the level of experience of a captain does not seem to have had much impact on the final outcome of the journey in terms of the criteria tested. The fact that nearly everybody who rose to the rank of captain had had considerable experience on sea, and most often on a slaving vessel probably accounted for this. Extreme neglect could harm a voyage, but does not seem to have occurred any more often on vessels commanded by either experienced or inexperienced captains. Given a competent captain, luck was the most important factor influencing the success of a slaving voyage.

The power of the captain on board his vessel was enormous. Captain Newton described his power in a letter to his wife as follows: "I am as absolute in my small dominions (life and death excepted) as any potentate in Europe. If I say to one, come, he comes; if to another, go, he flies. If I order one person to do something, perhaps three or four will be ambitious of a share in the service. Not a man in the ship will eat his dinner till I give him leave – nay, nobody dares to say that it is twelve or eight o'clock, in my hearing, till I think it proper to say so first. There is a mighty bustle of attendance when I leave the ship, and a strict watch kept while I am absent, lest I should return unawares and not be received in due form. And should I stay out till midnight (which for that

reason I never do without necessity) nobody may presume to shut their eyes till they have had the honour of seeing me again."[25]

The power of the captain over his crew was often formalized in extremely restrictive contracts. The articles of agreement for the English slaver the *Sally*, for example, signed on July 22 1785, was representative of many others. Crewmembers agreed that "each and every of them shall and will in all Things observe, perform and obey the Orders, Commands, and Directions of the Master or Commander of the said Ship, for the Time being, without any Manner of Denial, Mutiny or Resistance, whatsoever."[26] The agreement was deliberately broadly formulated to enhance the power of the captain. The contract included no protective clauses for the crew, or any arbitration possibilities in case of disputes. Sometimes these were included, but the sailors were frequently restricted to presenting their cases before the financier, or someone nominated by him.[27] On occasion sailors, and even officers, were not allowed to read their contracts. Arnold, a surgeon, testified in 1789 that on the slaver the *Ruby*, "When the vessel was getting under weigh, all hands were called up to sign articles, and when my turn came I asked permission to read them first, not wishing to put my name to the unknown." Captain Williams, however, "roughly refused, saying if I didn't sign them I might go ashore." Arnold, in need of money, "signed [his] name and walked forward." He goes on to relate that "It was the same with the rest. No one was permitted to read the clauses in

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[25] In G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 508.
[26] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol.2, 559-561.
[27] The slave trade surgeon Falconbridge notes that "By their articles, on entering aboard some Guinea ships, the sailors are restrained, under forfeiture of their wages, from applying, in case of ill-usage, to any one for redress, except to such persons as shall be nominated by the owners or captain; and by others, to commence an action against the captain for bad treatment, incurs a penalty for fifty pounds." A. Falconbridge, *An Account*, 50.

the articles."[28] If literate officers were treated in the above fashion, the lower-ranked sailors, frequently desperate and ill-educated, were all the more vulnerable. The power invested in a slaving captain was necessary, but it also allowed them to enforce a conspiracy of silence among crew for possible misdeeds, such as improper financial dealings, the abuse of slaves or crew and the like.[29]

In spite of their privileges and immense power on board, captains were not immune to the dangerous and brutal nature of the trade. They could only ameliorate conditions to a degree. The Royal African Company was advised in 1706 that "Your Captains and Mates should be such as will do the meanness [sic] office, must have neither dainty fingers nor dainty noses, few men are fit for these voyages but them that are bred up to it. It's a filthy voyage as well as labourious."[30] This was true for all on board, but especially for the ship's surgeon.

More has been written about surgeons on slaving voyages than about any other class of crewmembers. This reflects the availability of sources; surgeons often kept detailed written records, and several have survived.[31] Surgeons formed an important part of the crew of the vessel: the financial success of a voyage was directly related to their

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[28] In G. Dow, *Slave Ships*, 168. Arnold's testimony describes an unusually sadistic and dishonest captain, and on certain points at least, it is not possible to verify his account. But there is little reason to doubt his description of the signing of articles.
[29] Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*, 180.
[30] Quoted in C. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 47.
[31] See for examples Richard B. Sheridan, "The Guinea Surgeons on the Middle Passage: The Provision of Medical Services in the British Slave Trade," *International Journal of Historical Studies* 14, 4 (1981); W. N. Boog Watson, "The Guinea Trade and Some of Its Surgeons (with Special Reference to the Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh)," *Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh* 14, 4 (1969); Sir James Watt, "Sea Surgeons and Slave Ships: A Nineteenth Century Exercise in Life-Saving," *Transactions of the Medical Society of London* 104 (1987-1988). Substantial portions of William Chancellor's diary are reproduced with commentary in Darold D. Wax's "A Philadelphia Surgeon on a Slaving Voyage to Africa," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92, 4 (1968). Unfortunately many of the articles published on diaries are little more than an annotated reprint of selected pieces. The most well known slave ship surgeon is Falconbridge. Portions of his writings are still widely available in

skill in selecting and treating slaves. It is not necessary to confuse humanitarianism with good business sense to recognize the importance of surgeons on a slaving vessel, or to recognize that their presence was nearly entirely justified by what good that they might have done for slaves. Most slavers understood this. The Royal African Company paid its surgeons according to the number of slaves who reached their destination in good health.[32] By 1788 the British had legislated that every slaver have at least one surgeon on board before departing for Africa. The French similarly mandated the presence of a surgeon.[33]

The quality of the surgeons varied considerably. Serving on a slave ship was unpleasant and dangerous. Surgeons had highest death rate of all crewmembers, about 25% per voyage.[34] Only those in dire need of money, and who had difficulty finding other work, tended to apply. James Arnold, surgeon on the Ruby, for example, testified to the House of Lords in 1789 that "As I had less than five pounds that I could call my own, it was practically a case of Hobson's choice and so I signed my name and walked forward."[35] Many under-qualified or otherwise second-rate surgeons were appointed both to slave vessels and to the coast of Africa. The surgeon and slave trader Archibald Dalzel, for example, admitted to his brother in a letter that "I am conscious, Andrew, I shall never make a good M.D. ... Sure I am, I shall never make a proficient in that way." He

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his *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone, During the Years 1791-3* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967) and *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (New York: AMS Press, 1973).

[32] K.G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1957), 292.

[33] R.L. Stein, *The French Slave*, 68.

[34] Stephen D. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality," 60. It is not clear why this was the case, though close contact with ill slaves, and the time spent onshore evaluating potential purchases may have been among the reasons.

[35] In G.F. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1927), 168.

therefor entered the slave trade, declaring that "the most powerful argument in favour of my scheme is necessity."[36]

Captains and officers complained incessantly about the quality of the doctors on board their vessels. Comments like Robert Plunkett's observation in his report to the Royal African Company that "19 slaves dead since their being put on board. Mr. Trashall the Doctor Negligent" were common. There were some surgeons who cared for their charges, such as William Chancellor.[37] But all surgeons were extremely restricted in what they could do. The limits of the medical knowledge of their day and the crowded, unsanitary conditions on board a slaving vessel both constrained their effectiveness. Many conditions on board rendered them helpless.[38] When an epidemic broke out on a slaver, especially the uniformly feared smallpox, all surgeons' best efforts were overwhelmed. [39] Even when no epidemic ravaged a vessel, the tone of the writings of ship doctors frequently betrayed a sense of helplessness. They were limited in what they could do, and they knew it.

After the captain in terms of responsibilities was the first mate; in the case of the captain's death, command of the vessel would passed to him. Below the first mate in terms of responsibilities and remuneration were the other officers; the 2nd and 3rd mates,

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[36] I. A. Akinjogbin, "Archibald Dalzel: Slave Trader and Historian of Dahomey," *Journal of African History* 7, 1 (1966), 67-8.
[37] See Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 2, 285. He is discussed in Chapter 1, "Women."
[38] They did, however, have some effective medications. Among these was "Peruvian bark" (cinchona tree) which contained quinine, effective against malaria. Dr. Thomas Trotter, who published *Observations on Scurvy* in 1786, was briefly a slave ship surgeon. By 1795 the British admiralty had ordered the navy to be supplied with lemon juice. James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade,* 292.
[39] For example, Thomas Phillip's frustration was evident when he wrote of the *Hannibal* in 1693-4 "What the smallpox spared, the flux swept off to our great regret." In spite of his best efforts – "our pains and care to give them their messes in due order and season, keeping their lodgings as clean and sweet as possible, and enduring so much misery and stench so long among a parcel of creatures nastier than swine" he was not able to profit from his trade in humans. In his words, "all my expectations [were] defeated by their mortality." In Nigel Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade: Comprising the log of the Daniel and Henry of*

the Boatswain and so on. How many officers a vessel carried depended on its size. In keeping with the spread in slaver sizes, this could vary widely, but four to ten was a typical range. All in all, officers and skilled crewmen compromised about a third to a half of the crew on a typical slaver. This is a higher proportion than was usual in other commercial vessels.[40] While their pay was typically good by the standards of the day, officer's earnings fell well below that of the captain.

Every vessel carried its petty officers; the number depended on the size of the ship, but a typical range was four to eight. The bosun was the link between the captain and the remaining crew. It was his task to see that the captain's orders were properly executed, and to maintain discipline among the crew. A slaver also carried several specialists on board. Carpenters filled a well-paid and important position. They were responsible for a wide variety of repair works, and for the rebuilding of the interior of the vessel in Africa. Coopers also had a vital responsibility on board. They provided the water supply for both crew and slaves. This was a large undertaking, and the consequences for inadequate performance were invariably dire. A vessel could also carry joiners, sailmakers, smiths and even gunners, depending on a vessel's size. Regardless of their specialties, all crewmembers were to some degree responsible for guarding against slave uprisings, and were assigned to other tasks, depending on the situation.

All vessels carried a cook, and sometimes several cook's assistants. The cook was relatively isolated from the rest of the crew, and spent most of his time in the small galley with his assistant(s). Their position was unenviable. Even if they were competent, and cared to do their best, they had to make do with extremely rudimentary means, both in

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1700 and accounts of the slave trade from the minor ports of England, 1698-1725 (London: J. Cape, 1991), 153.

terms of food and equipment. They were often accused of being dishonest, incompetent and lazy. Understandably, their best efforts rarely satisfied crew or slaves. In the absence of extreme neglect, neither opinion carried very much weight, that of the captain and officers excepted.

The above by no means describes the positions of all officers and skilled crewmembers on a vessel, nor all the specialized positions that a slaver might have had. Slavers sometimes carried stewards, bakers, barrel makers, longboat operators, a chaplain, and numerous other specialists, depending most importantly, on the size of the vessel. A slaving voyage, especially a large one, required the operating and managing of one of the most technologically advanced pieces equipment of the age. This required a large number of people, many of them specialists. It also required a firm authority structure.

There was a sharp distinction between the officers and the common sailors. Among the sailors there was a clear line between able-bodied sailors, who had experience and understood the working of a sailing vessel, and inexperienced seamen. Among the inexperienced seamen, there was a further distinction between the seamen and boys. The later, regardless of age, were inexperienced in the ways of the sea, while the later had at least some experience. Able-bodied seamen were a minority among the sailors.[41] As James Penny noted in 1789, "[slavers] are forced to take out a great many good Officers, but near One Half of the rest of the Crew are Landmen and Boys – These are idle People

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[40] R.L. Stein, *The French*, 67.

[41] Behrendt offers the observation of a contemporary writer Sheffield, who in his *Observation on the Project for Abolishing the Slave Trade* claimed that on a vessel intended for 500 slaves, there were "20 real seamen, and 30 or 40 landsmen, the very dregs and outcasts of the community." It is unclear what the average was, but it varied by nationality. Behrendt argues that "In the British trade, captains frequently hired 'landmen' who were not apprenticed to sea ... There may have been comparatively few landmen on French vessels." S. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality", 65.

picked up from the manufacturing Towns, who would not be received on Board a Ship, as Sailors, in any other Trade."[42] The number of landsmen increased in times of war, as regular sailors were the first to be pressed into military service. Sailors were usually, though not necessarily, of the same nationality as the vessel registration or captain. 'Migrant labour' was also sometimes employed as slave crew.[43]

Slavers as a group had a reputation for danger and the harsh treatment of crewmembers, which could make recruiting of crew difficult. This led to various unethical stratagems being used from time to time, including "crimping."[44] Sailors were occasionally shanghaied (kidnapped from shore), but this was highly exceptional. Crew often knew the reputations of the vessel they were to sail on and, circumstances allowing, took that into account in their decision whether or not to enlist. Robert Crook, the financier of Nicholas Owen's voyage, his name to the contrary, was one such. According to Owen, he "always ordered good usage in all his vessels, perticularly chargeing all his officers to be moderate to his people." "This kind usage and other things worthey the notice of an honest man" led to Owen and his "brother a thurd time in this man's employ." He roundly praised Crook for "never stinting us with any thing upon our voyage, which a great many people has good reason to complain of upon the coast of Africa." At least as important, at the end of the voyage "Every man" received "the reward

[42] M. Craton and J. Walvin et. al., *Slavery, Abolition*, 37.
[43] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 153.
[44] Falconbridge describes the procedure as follows: "There are certain public-houses, in which, ... the sailors are trusted, and encouraged to run into debt. To the landlords of these houses the captains apply. And a certain number being fixed on, the landlord immediately insists upon their entering on board such a ship, threatening, in case of refusal, to arrest and throw them in prison. At the same time the captain holds out the allurements of a month's pay in advance above the ships in any other trade, and the promise of satisfying the their inexorable landlords. Thus terrified on the one hand by the apprehension of prison, and allured on the other by the promised advance, they enter." A. Falconbridge, *An Account*, 49. Clarkson documented similar abuses, noting that if not tempted by money the potential crewmember was "plied with

of his toyls with honour from our marchant Robert Crook."[45] Payment by the month was common practice, though other methods of paying crew were also used.

Pay was low, but slavers typically paid 20 to 40% better than other commercial vessels. Sailors were not always able to collect their full pay. Aside from death, desertion was an important reason for crew collecting only a portion of their wages. Sometimes sailors were cheated by their financiers, who either did not pay the promised wages, or paid less than the full amount owing.[46] Even if this did not occur, an extravagant lifestyle when not on a vessel, and periods of unemployment led to the average non-officer almost always being poor.

Living conditions on board for sailors were bad, and sometimes horrific. Sometimes sailors had the benefit of sharing dirty and cramped quarters beneath deck, but not always, especially after the slaves were loaded. Falconbridge, commenting on "The temporary house constructed on the deck" when sailors were regulated to the deck, notes that it "affords but an indifferent shelter from the weather." The sailors had no choice and were "obliged to lie under it, as all the parts between decks are occupied by, or kept for, the negroe."[47] Tattersfield's ironic comment on the living conditions for the crew of the *Daniel and Henry* sums the matter up well; he writes that "Into these cramped

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liquor until he became intoxicated when a bargain was made over him between the landlord and the mate." Quoted in T. Brady and Evan Jones, *The Fight Against Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1975), 76.

[45] Nicholas Owen, *Journal of a Slave Dealer: A View of Some Remarkable Axcedents in the Life of Nics. Owen on the Coast of Africa and America from the Year 1746 to the Year 1757.* ed. Eveline Martin (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1930), 37.

[46] The later led to one of the most serious riots in the history of Liverpool in 1775. In a depression in the trade, the crew of the *Derby* were offered only about two thirds of the wages due to them, which sparked off a protest by sailors which led to slaving merchants' houses being attacked and ransacked and more than ten deaths. Eventually soldiers who engaged in open battle with the disgruntled sailors quelled the riot. This unusually interesting aspect of the slave trade has not had the academic attention it deserves. For further (primary) details on the riot, see Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 548; J. Mackenzie-Grieve, *The Last Years of the English Slave Trade: Liverpool 1750-1807* (London: Putnam & Co. Ltd., 1941), 92 – 94; Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 555 – 560.

quarters, already alive with vermin, came the flower of England's merchant marine. They had but the haziest idea of whence they were bound, little idea of basic hygiene, only the most meagre bedding for their comfort, and few clothes."[48] Other comforts too, were meager. Rations were often not good, especially on the middle passage. They were the cause of many complaints, and of friction between officers and the remaining crew.

There was plenty of work to keep crew occupied on a day to day basis. Endless maintenance tasks characterized all wooden sailing vessels. Sailors had to perpetually maintain the wood of their vessel by scrubbing, sanding, oiling and painting, and filling cracks with oakum. The sails needed constant attention and repair, as did the cables, ropes, and rigging. When the vessel suffered from heavy seas and storms, the workload increased even more.

For crew, the busiest and most dangerous time of a slaving voyage was from landing in Africa, until the last slave was disposed of in the New World. The other leg(s) of the journey were, by comparison, undemanding. Building slave decks and readying the vessel to receive its captives was one of the most important tasks while slaving along the coast of Africa. This time was the busiest for the ship's carpenter, and his assistants. The other sailors were kept constantly busy with provisioning the vessel with food and water, checking and readying the guns, hanging nets, checking and repairing sails, and a multitude of other tasks. The vessel would typically be purchasing and embarking slaves as they were acquired while this work was going on.

As slaves were taken on board, the task of guarding and caring for the captives gained momentum. The unpleasant work of keeping the slave quarters clean also became

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[47] A. Falconbridge, *An Account,* 38.
[48] N. Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade*, 67

necessary. Both slave and crew labour was used for this. Slavers varied in the amount of attention they paid to cleaning the slave quarters, but nothing approaching a thorough cleaning was possible with a full cargo of slaves.[49] Slaving vessels were infamous for the smell on board, with good reason.[50] There are several records extant of older vessels being abandoned after a slaving voyage due to the amount of work required to clean the vessel and to make her ready for another voyage. Time spent on the coast of Africa was also a busy time for the ship's surgeon. It was his task to select the best slaves, and to avoid any with physical problems. This required careful attention, as the sellers in Africa were as adept in cheating the Europeans as vice versa.

The treatment of sailors on slavers was harsh but it was not unique to the slave trade. The treatment received by sailors in other branches of the mercantile fleet, and especially those in the navies of slave trading nations, was also severe. Much depended on the degree of involvement of the financier. If they cared to order humane treatment, the chance of abuse occurring was reduced. Some did so - instructions to an unnamed captain dated the 3rd of August 1770 by his three financiers, for example, read "the owners ... [recommend] humane treatment to your Crew."[51] Instructions like these implicitly acknowledged the occurrence of abuses. Slaving and sailing were both brutal occupations, and the combination was particularly so. As with other branches of

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[49] On board the vessel *Albion*, the procedure is described as follows: "some of the ship's crew to do that office constantly and several of the slaves themselves to be assistants to them and thrice a week we perfumed betwixt decks with a quantity of good vinegar in pails, and red-hot iron bullets in them, to expell the bad air, after the place had been well washed and scrubbed with brooms; after which the deck was cleaned with cold vinegar." In G.F. Dow, *Slave Ships*, 82-83.
[50] Thomas Nelson, a physician in charge of captured slavers in Brazil describes what the smell was made up of in a particularly ill-fated vessel the *Crescent* in 1843 as follows: "The stench on board was nearly overwhelming. The odour of the negroes themselves, rendered still stronger by their filthy and crowded condition, the sickening smell of the suppurative stage of small-pox, and the far more disgusting effluvium of dysenteric discharge, combined with bilge water, putrid jerked beef, and numerous other matters...." In

seafaring, the lot of the sailors depended very much on the captain, and to a lesser extent, the ranking officers on the vessel. The abuse of sailors also formed one of the pillars of abolitionist arguments against the trade. Far from being "a nursery for seamen" as proponents argued, the abolitionists claimed that it was rather "the grave of the British marine", in the words of one of the most effective documenters of the abuses, Thomas Clarkson.[52]

In spite of instructions not to mistreat crew, cruelty and abuse of crewmembers did occur on slaving vessels. Largely because of the research and writings of the abolitionists, it is easy to find examples.[53] These range from sick crewmembers being denied full rations to the deliberate killings.[54] Falconbridge, in his memoirs, relates several. In one example, an older sailor was abused by an officer who "beat out several of his teeth" and had "one of the iron pump-bolts ... fixed into his mouth and kept there by a piece of rope-yarn tied around his head." This was potentially lethal abuse – "Being unable to spit out the blood which flowed from the wound, the man almost choked, and was obliged to swallow it." The man's offense was complaining about the water ration. In another example, a seaman "having been in some degree negligent, had a long chain fixed around his neck, at the end of which was fastened a log of wood. In this situation he

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R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 44.

[51] G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 550.

[52] Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the Slave Trade: In Two Parts* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), 326. Clarkson, careful in his researches, traced the histories of at least twenty thousand sailors. Modern scholars, including Behrandt, have largely supported his mortality calculations.

[53] The power of the officers was large, but they could not always act with impunity. In 1758 the death of the sailor George Crawford, of the *Rainbow* who fell from the rigging and was beaten while unconscious led to a murder trial. However, such trials were uncommon. In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 4, 371.

[54] For example, in 1786 on a slaving voyage from Liverpool, "No sooner was a wretched sailor's name entered on the sick list, than the pitiful allowance of a quarter pound of beef, and the small glass of brandy, were denied him, without anything being given in lieu thereof. A little bad bread, with a proportionate quantity of water, was nearly the whole of what patients had to subsist on." Quoted in Behrandt, "Crew Mortality", 70.

performed his duty." The punishment lasted "for several weeks" and "after his release he was frequently beaten for trivial faults … till [his] back was raw." In order to increase his suffering, "Chian pepper was then mixed in a bucket with salt water, and with this the harrowed parts of the back … were washed."[55] These accounts both come from one source, but they are easily multiplied by accounts from other sources. More graphic examples can also be easily found. They may not have been typical of the trade, but the knowledge that captains had the power, and that some abused their power, served to intimidate all crew.

The authority of the captain did not usually depend on sadism or extremely harsh treatment of the crew, but rather on tradition and a strictly enforced routine. Command structures were clear, challenges to authority were not tolerated, and incompetence or violations of orders were punished at the captain's discretion. By modern standards, the rigor of the discipline on board a slaver was extreme, as were typical punishments. But they were generally accepted as a requirement for a successful slaving voyage. Newton, for example, wrote "that I do not value [the ceremonies] highly for their own sake; but they are … necessary to be kept up with, for without a strict discipline the common sailors would be unmanageable" after describing his power on board.[56] Newton's observation reflected reality.

Crewmembers were often unruly, drunk, and sometimes violent. The large number of inexperienced crewmembers, who understood neither sailing or managing slaves, added to the necessity of a strict code of conduct, rigorously enforced. Many

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[55] A. Falconbridge, *An Account*, 40-41. He provides other examples, several of which are more brutal than those mentioned above.

sources blame the weakness of the captain in establishing control over his crew for the failure of a voyage. Financiers sometimes discouraged excessive harshness, but they also discouraged excessive leniency. Thomas Leyland for example instructed Captain Lawson in 1803 to "Keep strict and regular discipline on board the ship; do not suffer Drunkenness among any of your Officers or Crew."[57] A captain simply could not afford to be intimidated or allow challenges to his authority to pass unanswered. Crew could, and sometimes did, mutiny, but "mutinous" behaviour was far more common, as was "insubordination." Insubordination described a wide spectrum of behaviors. These included "murmuring", abusive language to superiors, refusal to work, and outright attacks on officers. Typical punishments also covered a broad range. They included the imposition of extra or unpleasant work, the cutting of rations, whippings, and the ironing and charging of the offender on the vessel's return to port. The later was reserved for serious offenses, as occurred on the *Mary* in 1796. The journal of the vessel records that Capt. Henry "found John Burges one of the Sailors, Noisy and troublesome." On confronting Burges, "several of the Crew assembled to Burgess' assistance and ... Knocked the Capt. Down with a Hatch bar and wounded him in Several places ...and would have murdered him no doubt." Henry was "Relieved by his Officers and some of the more Sober and Considerate part of the Crew" as well as the crew of another slaver

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[56] In G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 508. Captain William Barry was urged to "keep a good Harmony and decorum without to much familiarity or Austerity seeing the Voyage depends on good Conduct." In E Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 327.

[57] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 651. Drunkenness was indeed the most common reason for breaches in discipline. Primary documents list drunkenness time and again as the cause of insubordination, dereliction of duty and insurrections. The commonness of drunkenness is well illustrated by the following laconic entry in the log of the American slaver *Mary*. "*Tuesday 2d*. [1796] This Day Brisk Trade. Bought Eleven Slaves. Imployed in Delivering Goods. All Hands Drink and Disobedient." In E. Donnan, vol. 3, 366. Whether the alcohol consumption on slaving vessels was similar to the amount used in other branches of the seafaring trade, or whether it was greater on slaving vessels is not clear. If the later is true, it is interesting to speculate that it might have to do with the type of work crew were engaged in. But that is a

anchored close by. The mate of the second slaver "assisted in putting the Ring Leaders in Irons."[58] A well-organized and relatively fair routine alone was not always a sufficient safeguard. Without the threat of violence and the use of physical punishment, the trade could not have functioned.

Captain Hugh Crow observed that while bonuses were sometimes paid for delivering slaves alive "not a word was said about the ... poor sailors; these might die without regret."[59] Slaves were worth money to the financiers of the voyage if delivered alive, sailors were not.[60] Captains knew this, and acted accordingly when forced to choose between the two. This was reflected in, for example, the distribution of food and water on slaving vessels. Crew rations, never overly generous to begin with, were sometimes cut in times of shortage in order to provide for the slaves. The journal entry of May 16, 1678 for the vessel *Arthur*, for example, indicates that the captain was "intendinge to give our Negroes white mens provitions if theres should fall short."[61]

There was a sense of brotherhood based on shared hardship and oppression among sailors, but it was a violent brotherhood. Quarrels, sometimes serious, were part of a sailor's world. Occasionally fights could get out of hand, as was the case in 1756 when, on the coast of Africa "one Harrold, second mate to captain Dodson, ... stabbed a

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matter for further (comparative) research; even if use was higher, there might well be other reasons, such as the type of sailors the trade was most likely to attract.

[58] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 369.

[59] In Suzanne Schwartz, *Slave Captain - The Career of James Irving in the Liverpool Slave Trade* (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1995), 32. Stein agrees, noting that slaves "were ultimately less dispensable than crew members in the search for a profitable trade. Captains were ... never rewarded for keeping sailors alive."

[60] The demographics of the trade support this. Financiers, for example, slaved on the coast of Africa in the dangerous wet season so as to be able to deliver their slaves in the New World in time for the December-January harvest, when demand for slaves was high. Behrendt argues that "merchants organized slave voyages to maximize profitability regardless of potential crew loss." He concludes, "the primary aim of merchants in the late eighteenth century was to minimize slave deaths ... Minimizing crew mortality was a secondry consideration." Behrandt, "Crew Mortality" 65 – 66.

[61] E. Donnan, vol. 1, 232.

prentice Boy and abused him afterwards in such a manner he died on ye spot."[62] Fights could be occasioned by many different causes, and were most common while onshore when sailors could more easily escape the close observation they were under on the vessel.

But not all was violence and deprivation for a slaver's crew. Sailing offered benefits not easily realized on land. On a slaver, as on other vessels, the life of a sailor offered a certain freedom, the chance to explore the world, and often, a carefree lifestyle between voyages. The drink and general debauchery of many sailors too, was an attraction. If a crewman was prepared to ship on slavers regularly, it was work that provided a steady income. The long length of slaving voyages compared to that of non-slaving voyages meant fewer voyages, and less time spent unemployed. The outward journey from European ports was a relatively comfortable voyage – rations were plentiful and fresh, and there were plenty of hands on board to do the day to day work of sailing the vessel. It was also relatively safe. Crew were not subject to the dangers of the African coast, and there were as yet no slaves on board to guard. Even after embarking slaves, some crew were fortunate enough to stop off in Sao Tome, a destination so popular with slavers that the harbor could have considerable waiting lines of vessels. Strategically situated, Sao Tome was about a week's sail away from the Guinea coast. The reasons for stopping over were strictly practical – replenishing water and supplies, and occasionally, crew – but the equatorial island paradise made for a very welcome break after the unpleasant and dangerous work of slaving on the coast. Even on the middle passage proper, there were sometimes moments of fun and camaraderie, such as the traditional

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[62] Quoted in Melissa Elder, *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of Eighteenth-Century Lancaster* (Halifax, England: Ryburn, 1992), 61.

dunking in the sea of sailors who passed the equator for the first time, if they did not provide the crew with something to drink or a pay small amount of money.[63]

Crew and slaves interacted closely while on board. The management of slaves – the feeding and exercising of the slaves, the cleaning of the holds and similar tasks – ensured this. The confined nature of the vessel, and the need for vigilance added to the contact between the two. Financiers believed that management could effect slave mortality rates to a considerable degree. Instructions to crew to take good care of the slaves were nearly standard in correspondence between financiers and captains. Not all captains were equally adroit at the task, but some were consistently better than others. In 1721 a Royal African Company agent reported approvingly that "I cannot perceive but that Capt. Mitchell has taken great care of the Negros in the Voyage by keeping his ship clean, feeding them well, and diverting them with Musick, the Negroes being all in good order except 8 which are sickly."[64] Unfavorable comments can be found with equal ease. For example, agents for a financier in 1720 predicted that, "considering the little order & command that is to be observed among the Capt. & his Officers ... will be of ill consequence to the Voyage" of the *Generous Jenny.*[65] They were correct: the voyage suffered a mortality rate of 16.2 percent among the slaves. Good management, though no guarantee, was a requirement for a successful voyage, and required extensive contact between crew and slaves.

Ordinary crew interaction with slaves was determined on the one hand by the procedures laid down by the captain and officers and on the other by the dictates of their roles. The crew on a slaver formed and was formed by the middle passage. They were

[63] In G. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving*, 86-87.
[64] In D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*, 49.

part of a transient and constantly reforming sub-culture. They had an own code of behaviour and group cohesiveness of sorts, formed by their daily exposure to harsh living conditions, dangerous and distasteful work, high mortality, shared poverty and the need to be constantly on guard. Proponents of the trade argued that the trade formed a 'nursery for seamen', training a valuable pool of experienced mariners for navies and other branches of seafaring. And indeed, many of the lessons learned in the trade were transferable. Abolitionists agreed that the trade was a school of sorts. They, however, held that the trade taught the wrong lessons. Captain Newton, commenting on "the dreadful effects of this trade upon the minds of those engaged in it" claimed that "I know of no way of getting money, not even that of robbing for it on the highway, which has so direct a tendency to efface the moral sense, to rob the heart of every gentle and humane disposition, and to harden it, like steel, against all impressions of sensibility."[66] Like his ideological opponents, Newton too, was correct.

It took a particular kind of way of viewing the world and one's fellow human beings in order to be able to crew on a slaver. In addition to enduring the rigorous discipline on board, slaving crew had to guard, and when ordered to, to fight, whip or otherwise do violence to the slaves under their control. They had a job that could only be done by denying the humanity of their captives, or by denying a part of their own humanity. Suffering and anguish, as well as sullen suspicion and anger surrounded them at every turn. Newton's claim that this inured them to the suffering of others is plausible. Although slaving crew were to a degree self-selected, the work probably hardened most who partook in it. Newton admitted that "There are, doubtless, exceptions" and the

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[65] D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves,* 49.

sources corroborate his claim. But in general slavers were a hard-bitten lot, used to violence and the threat of it, both directing it, and having it directed at them. Their profession was based on violence to others, and this shaped their attitudes and actions towards the slaves in particular ways.

The relationship between crew and slaves was, by and large, generally one of mutual fear, contempt and distrust. The effects of this could range from indifference to outright brutality. Wanton cruelties by crew to slaves, however, was not common on board slavers, and was subject to disciplinary action by the officers. Nonetheless, it occurred regularly enough for financiers to have regularly issued explicit orders in an attempt to curb it. Captain William Barry, for example, was ordered by his financiers in 1725 to "see the sailors dont abuse them which has often been done to the prejudice of the Voyage."[67] The commonness of such instructions suggests how widespread abuses were. Captain Snelgrave blamed "the Sailors ill usage" of slaves for most slave mutinies. He was incorrect about this (see chapter 5, "Mutiny"), but his remark betrays the commonness of "ill usage."

The general contempt of crew for their captives cannot fully explain the level of abuse directed at slaves, or the necessity for such strict controls against it. The fear that at some level plagued all those involved in the trade also played a part. It is easy to imagine how a seaman's frustrations could be taken out on the weakest link in the trade.[68] Brutality could serve to assuage fear. Explicitly exercising power (violently expressed)

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[66] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750-1754 (With Newton's 'Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade')*, Martin Bernard and M. Spurrell (eds), (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 103.
[67] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 327.
[68] As with the sexual abuse of women, officers and particularly the captain were by far the most at liberty to abuse slaves. While rare, there are records of seamen being charged with the killing of a slave on the middle passage, but virtually none of officers. For an example, see E. Donnan, *Documents* vol. 3, 46.

over that which threatens one can create at least a temporary feeling of security. The dehumanizing treatment that slaves were subjected to, and their status as property, threatened the security and self-image of their oppressors. Crew were brutalized by both the nature of, and the circumstances in which they performed their work. Both combined to find expression in their treatment of the slaves in their charge. However, the value of the cargo, and the vigilance of officers usually curbed extreme abuses.

The suspicious and disdainful attitude that crew had of the slaves under their power was not necessarily static for the duration of the voyage. Especially in vessels carrying fewer than average numbers of slaves, the crew occasionally developed some form of relationship with the slaves, as they became more familiar with them. The longer they were in each other's company, the more likely this was to happen. The relationship between crew and slaves in these circumstances cannot be described as friendship, though it tended towards that between certain slaves and certain crewmembers.[69] Rather it was the recognition of a common humanity and suffering, as well as the realization that slaves were individual people, with their own characters, fears, habits and dispositions. Being constrained over a long period of time in close quarters with slaves made it impossible for some sailors to view the slaves as merely cargoes or commodities, even while they knew their relationship with them was transient. This was, of course, not a universal reaction among crew. It effected some sailors sooner and to a greater degree than others, and some crewmembers not at all. But it effected enough crew to at least subtly change the way they viewed the slaves, and sometimes, their treatment of the

[69] As with the "consensual" sex, the word "friendship" must be taken within the context of the trade. The power and status differences between the slaves and the crew were far too large to allow any form of relationship to emerge that can be properly termed friendship. True friendship requires some measure of equality, if not in status, than in respect, and this was clearly not possible on a slaver.

slaves. The process did not work to an equal degree on all vessels, but it probably occurred to some degree on all vessels.

In a case related by Captain Snelgrave with regard to his voyage of 1727, the crew of another slaver, the *Elizabeth*, had built up what they regarded as a friendship with the slaves. The *Elizabeth* had been under way for some time and been taken by pirates, and then released. As the vessel belonged to the same owner as Snelgrave's, and had about 120 slaves on board, he proposed taking the slaves on his own vessel, so that at least one of the ships could leave Africa immediately. This was not an unusual occurrence. The crew of the *Elizabeth*, however, refused to deliver the slaves to Snelgrave because, in the words of the commander (the second mate), "the Slaves had been on board a long time, and they had a great Friendship with them: therefor they would keep them." The "friendship" was ill-fated. Snelgrave warned them "not to rely on the friendship of slaves", and indeed, the slaves mutinied the next day.[70] They killed the cooper, who had spoken out against their removal, and the remainder of the crew were forced to barricade themselves while awaiting rescue by Snelgrave's crew. For the slaves, the stakes were too high to allow sentimentality towards their enslavers to interfere with their attempts to regain their freedom. Dissemblence by slave on the middle passage, as on land, was an everyday occurrence.

Aside from the obvious dichotomy between slave and free, there was a huge chasm of understanding between crew and captives on board. The enormous differences in racial and cultural status blunted empathy between the two sides. But the extremely close contact forced on all on board constantly challenged both, as occurred on the *Elizabeth*.

It was more common for individual crewmembers to develop a relationship with some slaves, than for an entire crew to do so. But both always occurred within the context of an inherently cruel trade, and one that crew helped sustain. The actions of these individuals could not, and did not, effect the structure of the business they were involved in. Nor did these relatively humane figures often believe the trade to be cruel and wrong. Those crew members who did not deny the cruelty often pleaded – and believed in – the necessity of the trade.[71] Slavers were products of their society and time, and shared the prejudices of their time. A slaver's crew was largely composed of the least powerful members of their societies. When placed in a position of unquestioned dominance over the slaves, they tended to live up to their roles. Racism, cultural prejudice, economic incentive and right of the strongest were the underlying assumptions that sustained the trade.

Yet occasional references to ex-slavers, both crew and financiers, who regret their part in the trade exist. Newton and Falconbridge are probably the two most well known examples. A less well known individual is Moses Brown who contacted his friends upon "Being informed yesterday that you had in Contemplation sending a Vessel to Africa for the purpose of getting Negroes and selling them as Slaves in the West Indies." He wrote "with a view to dissuade and discourage your pursuing the Voyage" so that his friends might "avoid the unhappy reflections which I have had."[72] These pricks of the conscience were exceptional.

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[70] E. Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 2, 357.

[71] So it was with the Dutch slaver William Bosman. He wrote in a letter "I doubt not that this trade seems very barbarous to you, but since it is followed by mere necessity, it must go on ..." In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 441.

[72] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 334. His attempt was in vain.

More typical is the opinion of Nicholas Owens, who made six voyages. He was frank about why he entered the slave trade. He knew that "Some people may think a scruple of congience in the ... trade," but he slaved in order "to enlarge my fortune by honest mains."[73] For the vast majority of slavers the trade was first and foremost an honest method of earning money. For most of the trade participation, particularly in the higher ranks, carried little social stigma.[74]

The captain and the crew were not only responsible for the slaves, but also for the safety of the vessel. Taken over the entire voyage nearly 20% of slaving vessels were lost to their original owners.[75] The greatest danger was attack and possible capture by privateers or pirate, or in the illegal trade, by British patrols. Such losses accounted for over two thirds of all slaving vessels lost in the trade. Wreckage was the distant next most common reason for losing a vessel. Slavers shared equally the general risks of seafaring with other vessels, but bore several that were unique to them, first and foremost slave mutinies. Less likely, but still a risk, was losing the vessel to a crew mutiny or to an attack by coastal Africans. The breakdown of the causes of vessels known to have been lost in the slave trade is presented in Figure 3.1.

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[73] N. Owen, *Journal of a Slave Dealer*, 5.

[74] For example, all three of Rhode Island's Governor Wanton's daughters married slaving captains, and he himself had several ventures into slaving. Sarah Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen: Newport Slavers, 1735-1774," *The New England Quarterly* (Boston, Mass.), 250-253.

[75] Of the 27,233 voyages listed in the Atlantic slavery dataset, 22,985 delivered their slaves as intended, 4,248 were lost, and the outcome of 2,939 voyages is not known. Thus of the voyages of which the outcome is known, 18.48% were lost.

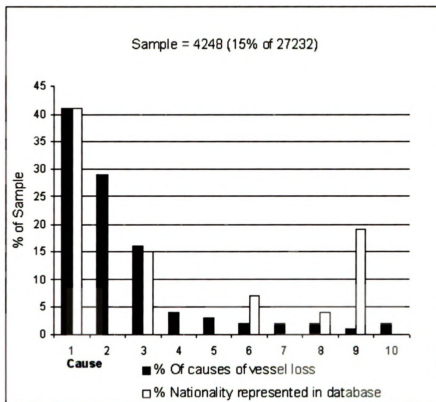

Figure 3.1. Causes of Vessels Lost in the Atlantic Slave Trade

Legend:

1. British captor; 41% (1739 cases)
2. Natural hazard; 29% (1217 cases)
3. French captor; 16 % (663 cases)
4. Captor unspecified; 4 % (185 cases)
5. African captor; 3 % (119 cases)
6. USA captor; 2%, (82 cases)
7. Privateer or pirate 2% (76 cases)
8. Spanish captor 2% (69 cases)
9. Portuguese captor 1% (41 cases)
10. Other causes 1% (e.g. Crew action or minor slaving nations as captor)

The size of the vessel, and particularly the number of guns and crew members carried, were the most important factors in determining both whether a slaver would be attacked by pirates or privateers, and the outcome of a battle. The number of guns carried by slavers varied widely, ranging from none (7%) to fifty (3 different vessels).[76] Vessels

[76] The Atlantic Slavery Database contains information on the number of guns carried by 5485 slaving vessels. It is possible that this will slightly overstate the average number of guns and the number of vessels

carrying only one or two guns would usually not have had any carriage guns. They would have relied on swivel guns that could be used for intimidating, and if necessary, firing on slaves in case of insurrection. Carriage guns were too heavy for this, and too cumbersome to maneuver effectively. Some nations armed their vessels much more heavily than others did.[77]

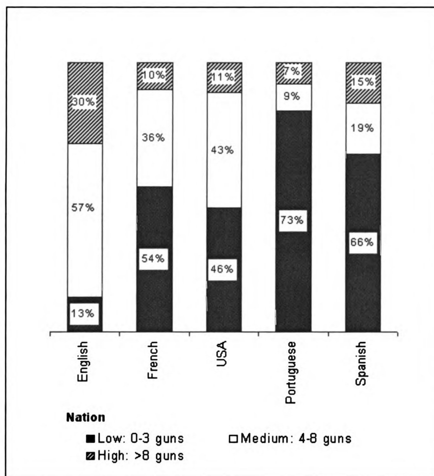

Figure 3.2. Most Common Number of Guns Carried, All Nationalities

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carrying an above average number, as it may be that vessels which were unusually heavily armed were more likely to have their armament commented upon in the primary documents. The statistics are most reliable for the English trade, as 92% of the sample is composed of English vessels. However, the figures on the French trade are also likely to be reasonably reliable. The sample size is much smaller than that of the English trade, but sufficiently large to generalize with confidence.

	Sample size	Ave. no. carried	Median	Max. carried	Ave. crew per gun	Ave. tons per gun	Ave. slaves per gun
English	5030	7.48	6.00	50	4.55	28.46	44.44
French	157	5.04	2.00	40	9.48	55.67	111.97

Table 3.2. Average Armaments of British and French Slavers

Slavers were in general fairly heavily armed. Unsurprisingly, heavily armed slavers were less likely to be taken by a privateer or pirate than more lightly armed vessels. The converse was especially true for very lightly armed vessels. Extremely highly armed vessels, however, were captured nearly as often as moderately armed vessels.

	Captured	Not Captured
Sample size	466	4629
Low (0 - 3 guns)	38%	15%
Medium (3 – 8 guns)	33%	57%
High (> 8 guns)	28%	28%

Table 3.3. Rate of Capture by Armament Levels

For defensive purposes it made the most sense to invest in a vessel armed in the medium range. Anything more than that would suggest other uses for the armaments, including possible doubling as a privateer. The more heavily armed the a slaver, the more likely the crew were to have been engaged for their fighting skills, while a lightly armed vessels' crew were far more likely to concentrate solely on slaving.

The guns carried by slavers varied in size, and were classified by the weight of the shot they fired. Three to twelve pounders were the most common, but some vessels

[77] The French and English data are the most reliable, but variation almost certainly existed between other

carried considerably heavier weapons, sometimes upwards of twenty-four ponders. The guns were fuse-fired muzzleloaders, with smooth bores that could fire a variety of shot (grape, canister or solid round), either to kill and maim the crew of the enemy vessel, or to wreck the vessel. Slavers were often at a disadvantage to privateers due to the quality of the gunners privateers they carried. Large guns required experienced gunners for most effective use. When vessels engaged each other, it was frequently a question of which one pounded which other one into submission first. Not infrequently the victor came out looking little better than the loser. In order to avoid the destruction of their vessel, attacking captains frequently attempted to grapple the enemy vessel in order to board her. In this manner many hours of mutually destructive firing could be avoided.

Slavers had elaborate constructions of nettings. These served both to prevent slaves from committing suicide, and to make boarding more difficult for enemy vessels. Outrunning potential assailants was the preferred strategy, but was often impossible. However, if a slaver was fitted out to double as a privateer, the large number of crew typically carried by slavers gave them an advantage. Privateers were a major risk factor for crewmembers. In times of war, privateers – privately owned vessels of an enemy nation – routinely preyed on slaving vessels. They posed a substantial danger to commercial shipping, including slavers. The history of privateering in general, and its impact on the slave trade in particular, is an important, yet much neglected topic.[78] With

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slaving nations too.

[78] A detailed study of the effect of war between the European nations and the effect of this on the slave trade of the nations involved has yet to be undertaken. The study is beyond the purview of this work. However, the data are largely available. Ideally such a study would be comparative in nature, combining information on crew sizes, vessel armaments, and the number of ships taken. The results would give insight not only into the slave trade, but also the economic and maritime history of the nations considered. Given the frequent altercations between the slave trading nations, the project would be complex, even if it were restricted to major wars. In the case of Britain alone, seven major wars would have to be considered: 1689-1807 – The war in Ireland and against France, 1688-97, War of Spanish Succession, 1702-13, War with

the exception of slave mortality, it posed the single largest risk to the success of a slaving voyage. Crews were not only expected to guard, and in the case of an insurrection, fight the slaves, but they were also expected to combat privateers. In times of war, slavers tended to carry larger crews than in times of peace in order to boost their fighting strength.[79] Privateering and piracy was a part of the violent sub-culture that crew were a part of, and simply an integral risk of the business in which they were engaged.[80]

Slavers were acutely aware of the risk that privateers posed to their lives and to the success of their voyages. In correspondence between captains and financiers the later frequently urged caution while the former reported both on engagements and strategies to avoid them. The instructions of Thomas Leyland to Captain Caesar Lawson, who was bound for the West Coast of Africa on a slaving voyage, were typical. In July 1803, Leyland wrote that "we earnestly desire you will keep a particular look out to avoid the Enemy's Cruisers, which are numerous and you may hourly be expected to be attacked by them."[81] Though the frequency differed, privateering threatened vessels of all nations.

The American Captain Peleg Clarke wrote to his financier in 1776, that "I am excessive sorry to hear there is no likelyhood of matters being Accomodated between Great Britian and her Colonies." He was "in the greatest Dilemma Imaginable About the Acts, and what to do with the Vessel, as I never durst take Any Slaves on board not

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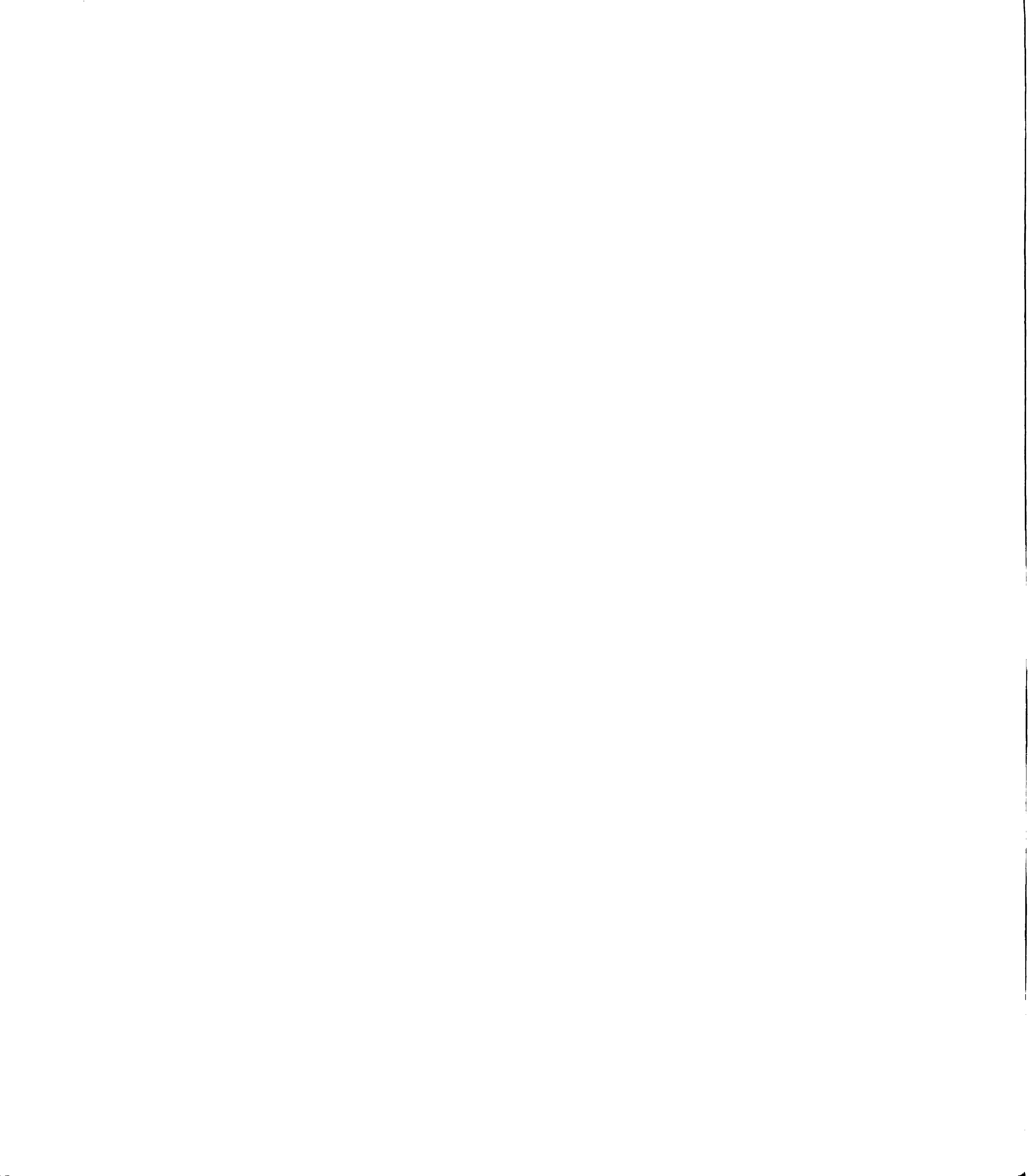
Spain, 1718-21, War with Spain (Right of Search) and of Austrian succession, 1739-48, Seven Years' War, 1756-1763, War of American Independence, 1776-83, French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815. The most important is the last one; about a third of all British vessels taken were captured after 1793.

[79] See W. Minchinton, "The British Slave Fleet" in *De la traite l'esclavage, vol.* 1, Daget, 70.

[80] In the post 1808 illegal trade they ran the additional risk of capture; in Mathieson's words, "If a slave ship was of any considerable size and at all well-armed, she usually resisted capture; for resistance was not punishable under any of the abolition treaties, and the high wages offered to the crew were contingent ... on the success of the voyage." William Law Mathieson, *Great Britain and the Slave Trade, 1839-1865.* (London: Longmans, Green, 1929), 196.

[81] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 651.



thinking the Intrest safe to be brought off in her."[82] Clarke was right to worry. Privateers were after profit in the broadest sense, and the stealing of slaves could be very profitable. Usually the taken vessel formed a part of the plunder, but not always. Some slavers were notorious for the bad quality of their vessels. Slaves, however, were always saleable. The *Boston Newsletter* of October 15, 1761 for example, reported that a French privateer had taken over the slaver *Sally* under Captain Molton. However, the Frenchmen did not consider it worth their while to keep the vessel. After "taking out all the slaves [128] and plundering the sloop, they permitted him to proceed in her (being a dull sailor) to New York."[83] This was not exceptional.[84]

The costs of privateering were so high in the slave trade, that the insuring of a voyage sometimes become impossible or ruinously expensive. In January 1759 for example, the Browns of Providence, Rhode Island were quoted a 25% premium in order to insure their vessel, aptly named the *Wheel of Fortune*. Most of this high charge reflected the risk of capture by French privateers.[85] The high stakes involved ensured that many slavers would put up a fight if attacked by privateers, even when outgunned.

Contemporary documents frequently refer to the "gallant action" of the crew when they succeeded in fighting off a privateer. However, such "gallantry" had its risks. Aside from the obvious risk of being injured or dying in battle, the victors did not always

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[82] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 318.
[83] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 453.
[84] The *Boston Newsletter*, June, 9, 1720 for example reported that "the *Petersborough* Galley of Bristol, Capt. Owen, and the *Victory* of London Capt. Rideout, were fallen into the hands of Pyrates, who had plundered the later and let her go, but had taken the former and fitted her up for a Pyrate."
[85] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 173. LeVeen, in a brief paragraph in a work dealing with the suppression of the illegal trade, notes that the "major factor which influenced these [insurance] rates was whether the Europeans were at peace or at war. However, rates are alleged to have varied with the particular ship captain and for the time of year, for hurricanes made the Carribean unsafe during late summer and early fall." Phillip LeVeen, *British Slave Trade Suppression Policies, 1821-1865: Impact and Implications* (Arno

appreciate their prey's resistance. For example, *Lloyd's List* for February 1760, reported that "A store ship from Cape Coast, with about 130 slaves, whose crew consisted of 23 men fell in with two or three French Privateers, whom he fought for two Days, but was at last taken; and in Return for such a bold Defense, the crew were cut and wounded in a most barbarous manner."[86] Such brazen ill treatment of the crew of a captured slaver was rare. Usually the complaints were about hardship, not about being killed or deliberately wounded after capture. For example, Captain Gill, who lost his vessel *Nancy* to the French in January 1752, complained bitterly about having "no better lodgings than the decks, only short and bad allowance" and being "marooned without provisions." [87] Non-ranking crew could expect, and received, even less solicitous attention from their captors.

In a violently competitive world, slavers occasionally combined slaving with privateering, particularly if their vessel was large and heavily armed.[88] Captain Lawson, to whom Leyland urged caution, was also informed that "We have taken out Letters of Marque against the French and Batavian Republic." He was given detailed instructions on what to do if he were to be "so fortunate as to fall in with and capture any of their vessels." He was to "Send the Same direct to this Port, under the care of an active Prize Master, and a sufficient number of men out of your ship; and also put a Copy of the Commission on board her." [89] The vessel Lawson sailed in, the *Enterprize*, was itself a prize taken from the French. At 405 British measured tons, the vessel was large enough

Press, 1977), 107-108. A study on the insurance rates over the duration of the trade and the factors effecting them has yet to be undertaken.

[86] In J. Inkori, "The Unmeasured Hazards", 7.

[87] It was, he concluded, "treatment beneath a European enemy, let alone the polite nation of France." In G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 481.

[88] Though over a century old, the best work on this topic remains G. Williams's *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), first published in 1897.

[89] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 651.

to face most other commercial vessels, and most slavers. Leyland was careful to order his captain to "not molest any neutral ship, as it would involve us in expensive Lawsuit and subject us to heavy Damages."[90] It would have been piracy. There was often a fine line between privateering and piracy, and occasionally a captain, after capturing an enemy vessel, interpreted his mandate more broadly than his papers allowed.[91]

From the perspective of slavers, privateers and pirates were different sides of the same coin. Letters between financiers and slaving captains often contained references to piracy though these were not as common as those referring to privateers. This reflects the lesser risk. Far fewer slavers were lost to pirates than privateers. As with privateers, pirates could attack both in the waters around Africa and the Americas. James Phipps and John Stevenson of Cabo Corso Castle on the African coast, for example, complained to the Royal African Company in 1720 of "the decay of Trade on that Coast by reason of Pyrates." They believed that "Pyrates design to range on the Coast to Windward till end of Febry." They had reason to fear – they conclude their letter with a terse "Pyrates take 2 large French Ships."[92]

Newspapers in the Americas published accounts of piracy relating to the slave trade disproportionaly frequently. The *Boston Newsletter* of 9 June 1720, for example, in a typical account, reported that "the Pirates have done a great deal of Mischief on the Coast of Guiney." They added that the pirates took "and plundered ships to the value of

[90] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 651.
[91] The temptation and the rewards to combine piracy and slaving could be great, but the risk was very high. In 1838, for example, a judge concluded that the slaver Esplorador "forcibly and piratically took from the other vessels there the cargoes they had collected. Having thus got together about 500 negroes ... they arrived here with only about 200 surviving." The penalty for piracy was death. T.F. Buxton, *African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 170-1.
[92] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 243. More general warnings were commonly issued to captains; Captain Barry was instructed in 1726 to keep a "Constant Look Out, and trust no sail you see fearing Pirates." 328.

2000 *l.* upon one of which ships and Cargoe, it is said six Thousand Pounds were insured here."[93] To a degree this reflected the tastes of their readers, but it also partly reflected a genuine concern with the lawless depredations occasioned by pirates and their effect on the local economies. Attacks by privateers and pirates were, however, not the only assaults on their vessels slavers had to fear. Africans sometimes attacked slavers.

At least 119 slaving vessels are known to have been captured by Africans. Extrapolated to the entire trade (using an estimate of 40,000 voyages) this returns a minimum of 175 vessels being taken by African agency.[94] For every vessel captured by Africans, many more were attacked. Dishonesty in dealing with Africans was commonplace, and was the most common reason for attacks on slaving vessels. Captain Newton noted that "Every art is employed to deceive and wrong them [the Africans]" and that "a marvellous dexterity is acquired in these practices." He added that "he who has most address in this way has the most to boast of."[95] Usually this led to arguments and fights between the parties, but sometimes these escalated to attacks on the slaving vessel. In Newton's words, "the natives ... become jealous, insidious and revengeful."[96] Another

[93] The *Boston Newsletter*, June, 9, 1720. The *Boston Newsletter* published similar accounts in July 4th and 18th of the same year. The article on the 18th of July is explicit about the concern they felt for their local economies. "Our Merchants have an Account, that the ship *Europe*, Capt. Bound, has been taken by Pirates on the Coast of Guiey, loaden with slaves for the River Plata in the Spanish West Indies. The Pirates have done great damage and infest that Coast, and ruin commerce, to the great Detriment of our Merchants." E. Donnan, *Documents*, v. 2, 243.

[94] Source: Atlantic slavery dataset. This is based on the surviving information of 27,233 voyages. The real numbers are probably certainly higher, as a voyage is only entered as being captured by Africans when information survives confirming that that was the case. The outcome of nearly 3,000 - well over 10% - of the voyages contained in the dataset is unknown.

[95] There were endless ways to cheat: According to Newton, "Not an article that is capable of diminution or adulteration, is delivered genuine, or entire. The spirits are lowered by water. False heads are put into the kegs that contain the gunpowder. ... The linen and cotton cloths are opened and two or three yards ... cut off. ... The natives are cheated, in the number, weight, measure, or quality of what they purchase in every possible way." J. Newton, *The Journal*, 106.

[96] J. Newton, *The Journal*, 106.

common reason for vessels being "cut off" was the abducting and enslaving of free Africans and selling them into slavery in the Americas.

Africans were not helpless victims in the trade – if they could not revenge themselves on the perpetrator, they sometimes did so on the next slaver to arrive. This resulted in reprisals from the traders, and matters could escalate considerably before a new suspicious peace was established. Slave trading was a risky business, just as slave transportation was. Newton's conclusion that "We trade under arms, they are furnished with long knives. For, with few exceptions, the English and the Africans, reciprocally, consider each other as consummate villians, who are always watching opportunities to do mischief" sums up this risk to slavers well.[97]

Slaving vessels, like all vessels, faced the risk of storms and of wreckage due to bad luck or bad navigation. The risk this posed to crew was by no means negligible; nearly 30% of all voyages lost, were lost due to wrecks.[98] A vessel was far more likely to be lost due to shipwreck than to a slave insurrection. The risks were, as the chart below shows, not evenly spread across the various slaving nationalities. The Portuguese data shows a high percentage of voyages with an unknown outcome, which may partially account for the low number of vessels lost to natural causes, but other nations, particularly the Dutch, Spanish and Brazilian trades show that this is not necessarily the case. The region in which slaves were obtained and the region where they were delivered

[97] J. Newton, *The Journal*, 106.

[98] Nearly 4,5% of all voyages ended with the loss of ship due to shipwreck. Of the 27,233 voyages contained in the Atlantic Slavery Database, 1,217 (4.46%) were reported as being lost due to natural hazards. The outcome of 2,939 voyages is not known. If the same proportion were lost to natural hazards as the 24,294 voyages of which the outcome is known, the number of vessels wrecked increases by about 150 vessels. Conservatively estimated, the entire slave trade was compromised of approximately 40,000 voyages, which returns a total of 1,784 vessels lost due to natural hazards.

accounted for most of the discrepancy between nations.[99] Some routes were simply more risky to sail than others.

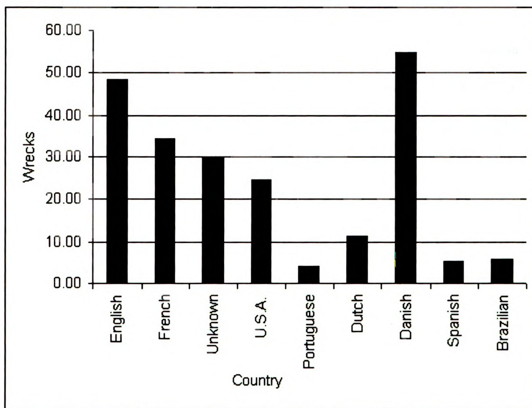

Figure 3.3. Shipwrecks per 1000 Voyages[100]

[99] The Portuguese, American and Dutch vessels show a high ratio of unknown outcomes to vessels lost. This may mean the losses are under-reported, but this is not certain.

[100] Using a sample of 1,053 vessels lost in the British slave trade between 1689 and 1807 Inikori has calculated that 64.5% were taken by enemy vessels in war, 17.7% were lost as a result of slave insurrections, attacks by coastal Africans and wrecked on the coast, while 17.9% were wrecked at sea outside the African coast.[100] His figures are too imprecisely categorized to use here. Inikori's main purposes were, however, to establish African agency in the trade and to include the slaves who died in all wrecked voyages in the demographics of slave exports. Instead of focusing on natural hazards and human agency as separate categories, he chose to include all wrecks along the coast of Africa in the same category as slave insurrections and action by coastal Africans. My calculations show a considerably different pattern.

The chance of losing a vessel due to natural hazards depended on (the interaction of) a number of different factors, the most important being the sailing route of the voyage, length of the voyage, the time of year sailed, bad navigation, and bad weather. Wrecks could and did occur on all three legs of the slaving journey. Most wrecks occurred on the coast of Africa, followed by the crossing from Africa to the Americas, and then by the passage from Europe to Africa. By far the safest leg of a slaving voyage was the return passage from the Americas to Europe.[101] Only a minority of shipwrecks occurred when the vessel was fully loaded with slaves.

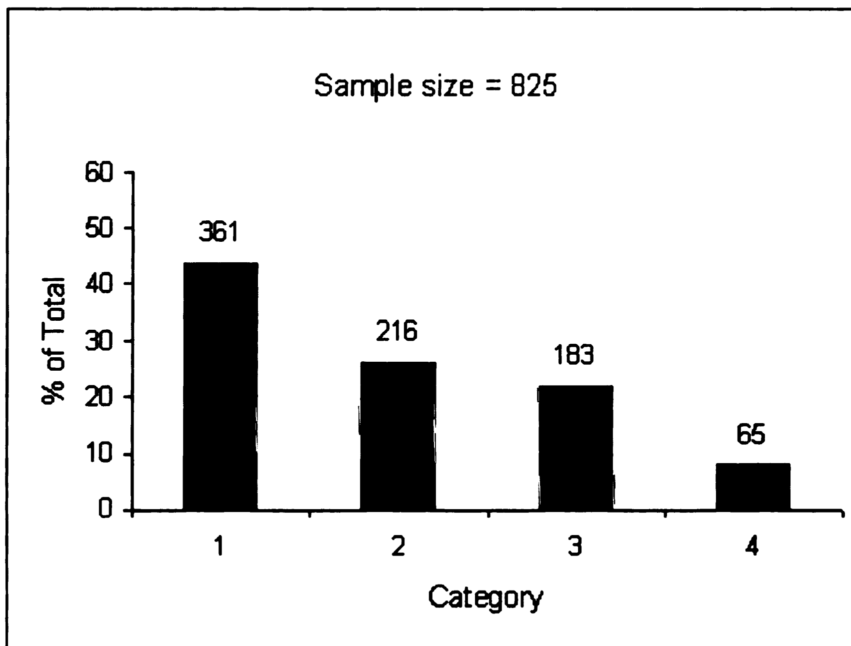

Figure 3.4. Shipwrecks and Slave Presence

Legend: 1. Shipwrecked or destroyed, after disembarkation
2. Shipwrecked or destroyed, before slaves embarked
3. Shipwrecked or destroyed, after embarkation of slaves or during slaving
4. Shipwrecked or destroyed, unspecified

[101] J. Inikori, "The Unmeasured Hazards" 11.

Relatively few wrecks resulted in the total loss of crew or slaves, though the later were considerably more vulnerable than the former.[102] Only point three and some of point four above applied to slaves, but all did to crew. A slaving voyage also faced threats from inside the vessel, both from slaves and crew.

Occasionally the crew on slaving vessels mutinied. They were, however, far less common than slave mutinies. This was largely due to the harsh punishments convicted mutineers were subject to. Upon conviction, they were almost certain to be executed. The bodies of executed mutineers were sometimes displayed in harbors as a warning to other sailors. Two crewmembers of the *Joronomy*, tried for mutiny in 1752, for example, "were convicted of the Crimes laid to their charge, and ... are to be hung on gibbets." Because of the risks involved, crew mutinies frequently involved the coercion of crewmembers who were timid or not in favour of the action. This was the case on board the *Joronomy*; the main conspirator "drank D------n to the Captain, which was heartily pledged by Paddy, but with reluctance and fear by the rest."[103] In spite of the harshness of the punishment crew mutinies remained a constant threat against which officers had to guard. As with slave mutinies, vessels were most at risk for crew mutinies while close to the coast, and when a large fraction of the crew of the vessel was either ill or deceased.

As with slave mutinies, contemporary documents the sources are far more forthcoming about failed attempts than successful ones. This is unsurprising – very few attempts succeeded. There were uncountable ways in which a mutiny could fail. Many were betrayed by a crew member, and most barely started before they were suppressed.

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[102] See Chapter 6, "Survival Strategies."
[103] The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 7, 1752.

Newton, for example, discovered a plot that "some of our people had been concerned" on his vessel in 1752. He believed it to be "no less than seizing the ship." He learned about it only because a crewmember, "William Coney, the informer, told me he had been solicited by Richard Swain to sign what he called a round robin, a term to which I was before stranger to."[104] As was often the case, Newton managed to identify the main conspirators and avert an actual mutiny. If a mutiny did take place, and succeeded initially, there was also the risk of a counter-mutiny, as happened on the *Othello* under Captain Johnson in 1783. The crew successfully took the vessel on the coast of Africa. It was retaken by the officers, but at the price of the captain's life.[105]

Because of the near certainty of failure and because of the risks of later apprehension if the attempt was successful, it was often difficult for crewmembers to recruit sufficient allies to put their plan into execution. This occasionally led to an unlikely alliance between crew and slaves in order to muster the fighting strength necessary to overcome the remaining crew. On the *Wolf*, for example, the second mate "has been the only instigation to the Slaves rising, having perswaded them to it, with a promise of carrying them home again, ... but they wou'd not consent till part by his promise and part by thr. fear of being eat ...."[106] Disaffected crew did not always need to use the threat of cannibalization. On the *King David* in 1750, "the Slaves on board the said Ship arose about five o'Clock in the Morning." The slaves, however, did not mutiny on their own initiative. Rather, "The Insurrection was contrived and begun by 15 that had

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[104] J. Newton, *The Journal*, 69-70.
[105] In G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 566.
[106] Fear of being cannibalized was common among slaves; some captains went to great pains to explain to their captives that they had been purchased to work, but this was not always successful. See chapter 6, *Mutiny*. Darold D. Wax, "A Philadelphia Surgeon", 486.

for considerable Time been treated with the same Freedom as the white men; and a great many of the later dying, encouraged them in their Design."[107]

When slaves and crewmembers conspired to mutiny, usually there was either a large diminution in the numbers of the original crew, or there were only a small number of slaves involved in the first instance. The last condition might be fulfilled because the vessel only carried a small number of slaves (as was the case on the *Wolf*, which had only ten slaves on board at the time of the insurrection), or because a small number of the slaves were singled out to help the crew, as on the *King David*. This was because the conspiring slaves and the crew needed to build up some form of relationship, and because the risk involved in involving a large number of slaves was too large. The plot could be too easily betrayed.

Officers, and the captain in particular, were the most likely to lose their lives in a successful mutiny by a portion of the crew. In 1729, for example, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported that "the Men entered into a Conspiracy" on Captain Atkins' vessel. They "seized upon the Master, and bid him prepare for Death, and in a short Time they ty'd his Hands and Feet, and threw him over board."[108] Even though the penalties for mutinying left little incentive to leave potential witnesses alive, officers and non-conspiring crew were more commonly left stranded than murdered. The *Newport Mercury* of July 20, 1767 report that after the crew mutinied on the *Juba*, "the captain and officers" were "sent on shore on the long boat" was typical in this regard.[109]

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[107] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol.2, 486.
[108] The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 27 November 1729. The mutineers then "shared the Gold Dust &c,. and went away for Antigua, from whence they were discover'd by some Negroes aboard, and were all apprehended , try'd and condmn'd for Piracy."
[109] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 459.

Very few slavers were pirates, but piracy was one of the few options open to crew after a successful mutiny. No port was safe for crewmembers known to have mutinied against their officers. The penalties for mutiny and piracy were the same, which left little reason not to turn to piracy after a successful mutiny. Consequently, when a crew plotted a mutiny, it was frequently with the intention to become pirates. The second mate who organized the mutiny on the *Wolf*, for example, did so with the "intention was to procure the Gold dust to himself, and then, by putting to death the white men, turn pirate with the Vessel."[110]

Deserters from slaving vessels too, occasionally enlisted with pirates. Sailors on a slaver had little prospect of bettering their long-term lots. They faced hardship, deprivation and risk to their lives as a matter of course, and for a few, the added risk of piracy seemed well worth the potential rewards. Ten deserters from the slaving vessel the *Three Sisters* where among the pirates who took the slaver the *Clayton* in March, 1752. After having taken the vessel they "brought with them in their boat a bale of scarlet cloth, and another of handkerchiefs, and told the Clayton's crew that if they 'would go a-roving they should be clothed in scarlet." As a result "Four, unable to resist this dazzling proposal, voluntarily entered as rovers, and the chief mate and two boys were impressed into the pirate service."[111] Only a small minority of deserters from slaving vessels, however, turned to piracy.

Crew desertions were common. It is not possible to accurately determine the

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[110] Darold D. Wax, "A Philadelphia Surgeon", 486.
[111] G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers,* 479.

percentage of vessels that suffered desertions, but much can be derived from the data on vessels that are known to have suffered crew desertions.[112] The number of crew members who deserted from any given vessel varied widely; many vessels report that only a single member deserted (just under 30% of all vessels), but other vessels reported well over half the crew members abandoning their posts. The *Tartar* lost 72.5% (29 out of 40) of its crew to desertion in 1806.[113] Extremely high desertion rates were not exceptional; in the English trade 2% (27 out of 1231) of vessels reported more than half the crew deserting, and 18% (216 out of 1231) reported a quarter or more crew members deserting. There was, however, considerable variation between nationalities. The records on the French trade provide no examples of half or more of the crew deserting, and only 2% of the vessels report a quarter or more of crew absconding (25 out of 1006). Crew on English slavers appear not to have deserted as frequently as those on French vessels, but they tended to so in much larger groups, as the tables below show.[114]

[112] Of the 11,166 English voyages collected in the Atlantic Slavery dataset, 1,231 contain some information on desertions (11,02%). Of the 4,034 French voyages in the dataset 998 contain references to desertions (24,73%). The remaining voyages that contain no information about desertions will contain both voyages that experienced no desertions, and voyages of which the records of desertions have not survived. It is not possible to distinguish between the two, which makes confident generalizations about the percentage of voyages that experienced no desertions impossible. The number of vessels suffering desertions in the English trade is likely to be greatly understated; when they reported desertions they were more severe than those suffered by the French, making it unlikely that a smaller percentage of their vessels would have suffered desertions. Only about 2% of all voyages explicitly reported no desertions (8 in the French trade and 215 in the English trade), but this number is too low, as desertions were far more likely to be reported than an absence of desertions.

[113] This was in spite of the fact that only one crewmember died, giving it an unusually low 2,5% crew mortality. Voyage No. 83727, Atlantic Slavery dataset.

[114] Only the English and French trades contain sufficient information from which to generalize. The charts are all based on voyages that reported at least one crewmember as having deserted, as it is not possible to distinguish between no desertions, and no information on desertions. Figures are per vessel.

No. of Crew members Deserted	% in French Trade (sample = 998)	% in English Trade (sample = 1014)
1	40.5	17.5
2	24.6	15.1
3	13.7	10.9
4	7.6	8.3
5	3.6	8.7
6	2.7	6.3
7	2.4	6.1
8	1.1	5
9	0.9	4.3
10	0.7	4.1
Total	97.80%	86.30%
> 10 Deserted	2.20% (20 cases)	13.70% (138 cases)

Table 3.4. French and English Desertion Patterns

Nationality[a]	Ave. No. Deserted	Ave. % Deserted	Max. % Deserted	Ave. Crew Size	Sample Size
French	2.63	6.86	45.83	41.41	998
English	5.7	16.34	72.5	34.88	1014

Table 3.5. Statistical Overview of French and English Desertion Patterns

[a] Only the French and the English trades provide enough information to generalize. It is possible that further work into the crew of other slaving countries will uncover substantial further national differences in desertion statistics.

Falconbridge suggested that "In the case of desertion, the sailors forfeit their wages, by which the expences of the voyage are lessened, and consequently the merchants reap benefits from it" and cruel treatment by officers were the main reasons for high desertion rates.[115] The articles that crew signed before boarding the vessel frequently contained clauses that stipulated the forfeiture of their entire wages for

[115] A. Falconbridge, *An Account*, 45-46.

desertion. The articles signed for the vessel *Sally*, for example, specified that if any of the crew were to "quit the Service of the said Ship, ... or otherwise desert the Service of the said Ship", then "the whole of the Wages ... shall be forfeited." This was to occur notwithstanding "any Law, Usage, or Custom, to the Contrary notwithstanding."[116] It was clearly in the financier's interests to reduce the number of crew after the slaves were delivered.

A large percentage of crewmembers were required to guard and manage the slaves, and they became redundant on arrival in the Americas, where most desertions occurred.[117] The British parliament, when investigating the slave trade, was informed that "It was no uncommon thing for the captains to send ashore, a few hours before they sail, their lame, emaciated and sick seamen, leaving them to perish." These sailors were variously known as "wharfingers", "beach-horners" or "scowbankers" in ports around the Americas.[118] They often wandered around the ports of slave disembarkation trying to find a berth back home, a task that often proved difficult. Behrendt has claimed that "In the Americas, most crew deserted ship or were discharged within a few days or weeks of arrival. New crew usually entered pay close to the dates of sail from England, Africa or the Americas."[119]

There is no clear evidence to establish that captains regularly treated their crew deliberately harshly in order to encourage desertions on the scale described above.[120] Nor

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[116] E. Donnan, *Documents* vol. 2, 561.
[117] Desertions in the Americas were especially common during war years. Behrendt "Crew Mortality", 67.
[118] In J. Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 108.
[119] S. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality," 56. He does, however, not provide statistically significant evidence and offers only one case to illustrate his point.
[120] Crew also deserted in Africa, though not as often. Newton's journal entry to the effect that "the watch upon deck being either asleep or consenting, 2 of the people, viz. James Wilkinson and Richard Griffith run away with the yaul below", while on the coast of Africa is typical. He "sent to the King to offer a reward to the King for apprehending my people." J. Newton, *The Journal*, 68.

could this explain the difference between English and French desertion rates. If crew on English vessels lost a much greater percentage of their sailors while in the New World rather than Africa, this might be evidence for the systematic abandonment of sailors in the English trade, but it would still not establish whether captains engaged in deliberate harsh treatment to that end. The Atlantic Slavery dataset does not indicate where sailors absconded.

Crewmembers deserted for a variety of reasons. These ranged from fleeing particularly cruel treatment to simply changing their minds. A brief report published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of November 16, 1774 suggested an intriguing other possibility. The newspaper reported "That Captain Daniel Darby, ... got about thirty leagues out at sea, when his slaves rose." The confrontation was a violent one; the slaves "killed his chief mate" and the crew killed "a number" of the slaves before they were subdued. The captain was forced to return to shore, whereupon "his people all left him."[121] Did the crew desert because of the unruliness of the slaves? Or, more broadly put, did crew members tend to desert more if their lives were endangered by resistance attempts by the slaves? A preliminary assessment suggests this might have been the case, though the evidence is not conclusive. Vessels that reported at least one desertion suffered more violence at the hands of slaves than those that did not.[122] Whether the

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[121] *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 16, 1774.

[122] Of the 1931 voyages that reported at least one desertion, 48 (2.48%) voyages also reported an insurrection and an additional 2 were attacked on the coast of Africa by Africans (0.1%). The 8721 voyages that do not contain information on crew desertions report 147 (1.68%) insurrections and 41 instances of African action (0.47%). This is, however, not conclusive evidence. The average number of crew deserting from vessels that did not report a mutiny or attempted mutiny (4.23, calculated over 1931 voyages) is actually higher than those that did (3.08, calculated over 48 voyages). There are several serious limitations to this preliminary assessment. The records of the voyages not reporting crew desertions are likely to be less well documented than those that do, and thus also less likely to report mutinies and mutiny attempts. In addition, as discussed in chapter 5, "Mutiny," mutinies and mutiny attempts are severely underreported in the Atlantic slavery dataset. Desertion information too, is far from complete. Nor does the dataset does

effect is real or not, serious insurrections did not occur nearly frequently enough to change the overall desertion patterns described above.

The presence of black crewmembers on slavers has been vastly under-acknowledged. Some work has been published on black seamen, both slave and free, but no writer has concentrated on slaving vessels. Packwood and Bolster have demonstrated a widespread black presence on coastal and deep-sea non-slave vessels.[123] However, only a few passing references exist to black crew on slavers in the secondary literature. Curtin without offering evidence has, for example, claimed that most free blacks in Europe during the period of the Atlantic slave trade arrived as free crew on slaving vessels after being recruited in Africa to replace dead or deserted white sailors.[124] The extensive presence of slaves and free blacks on vessels engaged in virtually every branch of seafaring, including privateers and recruitment by Royal Navy impressment gangs, suggests that they also crewed on slaving vessels.[125] From the perspective of officers and financiers, black crew had a number of distinct advantages over free white sailors. They were comparatively cheap, and enslaved crew may have deserted less often than white sailors as they were likely to have had families in bondage in their homeports. If slaves,

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indicate when or where crew deserted. Finally, it is not possible to distinguish cause from effect reliably: did crew desert because of a particularly dangerous cargo of slaves, or did the slaves rebel because a large number of crew deserted?

[123] See W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Harvard University Press, 1997); W. Jeffrey Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man': Black Seamen in the Northern States," *Journal of American History*, 76 (March 1990); Colin Packwood, *Chained on the Rock: Slavery in Bermuda* (New York: Baxter's Ltd., 1975). Packwood's work is clearly the weakest, but it does offer some interesting accounts.

[124] Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 14.

[125] While not strictly speaking relevant to a work concentrating on the middle passage, it is instructive to note that African seamen also played an important role in the slave trade. Africans who lived close to the sea often had a tradition of sailing in coastal waters, and were regularly employed by white traders, including slavers, to transport food, water and slaves to their vessels. They were linguists, pilots and surfmen, who hired themselves out for short periods of time, and mediated between African and European traders. See W. Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 50-51.

they could be forced to sail by their owners.[126] It is unclear how many black sailors participated voluntarily in the slave trade.[127]

Primary documents do not often explicitly distinguish between black and white crew on slaving vessels, making quantification difficult. Often only an off-hand reference indicates a crewman's race. When sources indicate a black sailor, they do not suggest that it was unusual. The doctor in charge of treating the captured slaves on the illegal slaver taken by the H.M.S. *Frolic* off the Brazilian coast in 1843, Thomas Nelson, for example, betrayed a sailor's race by noting that "One of the crew, a slave, ... preferred being captured by Englishmen to escaping with his master."[128] To Nelson the remarkable fact was that the slave had chosen for and managed to be captured by the British, not his race. Bolster has persuasively argued that about 20% of all sailors in non-slave trade in the Americas were black. It is possible, but unlikely, that this same figure will hold for slaving vessels. Most slaving vessels originated from European ports, and the sources do not make reference to the race of sailors frequently enough to support such a high percentage. Some black sailors did ship out from European ports on slavers. In 1726 the slaver *Luxborough Galley* departed from Kent, England under Captain William Kellaway. The unusually interesting crew of somewhat more than forty individuals included Caesar (an Indian), Hammose, Merry Pintle, Sharper and Coffee (black) and

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[126] W. Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 118.

[127] Not all black sailors who were involved in the slave trade were slavers; there is evidence that some English vessels employed manumitted slaves on vessels engaged in suppressing the trade. Leonard noted that "It has been the custom with the liberated African department, for a long period, to send on board our ships of war a number of African lads recently emancipated...." Some of these "African lads" undoubtedly served on vessels patrolling the African coast. Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa in His Majesty's Ship Dryad, and of the Service on That Station for the Suppression of the Slave Trade in the Years 1830, 1831, and 1832* (Nendeln: Kraus, 1973), 253-5.

[128] In R. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 47.

Jemmy (a mulatto).[129] National differences between carriers played a large role in determining the number of black sailors on board. The Brazilian trade, for example, had a very large number of black crewmen. By examining the registers of the Brazilian slavers, Klein has determined that 42% of the 350 ships in his sample used slaves as sailors. He argues that the average slave vessel had 14 slave crewmen, which would mean that at least between a third and a half of the total crew were black.[130]

Sailing offered black men, both slave and free, several advantages. They had a kind of freedom not available to those onshore; they traveled large distances, and were generally not subject to continual oversight by their owners. And if they were slaves, sailing offered a greater possibility of earning, through trade, an income that could be fairly easily be hidden from their owners. Though far from having been free from racism, there was often a greater egalitarianism among sailors, black and white, than was the case in other forms of employment on land.

The relations between white and regular black crewmembers were complex and contradictory. They shared a common bond forged by shared work, discipline and hardship. Competence was usually respected, whomever it came from. Pay was often equal between white and black for the same work. But racism, conditioned by land-based norms was very much alive on board. Black were subject to regular and overt racist prejudice – they had the most menial jobs, little to no chance of rising to high office, and were the butt of cruel jokes and outright harassment far more frequently than was their fair share. Sometimes this took very severe forms. The free black Portuguese sailor who

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[129] N. Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade*, 210. As an aside – the highlander Evander MackEvoy (or McIvor) who fought a battle to the death with Edward Teach (a.k.a. Blackbeard the Pirate) also sailed on the vessel.

was employed on board as the cook on the British slaver the *Little Pearl* for example, "was the common butt on which the captain and mates daily exercised their cruelty." The surgeon on the vessel testified to the British parliament that "The former, indeed, appeared to enjoy a particular pleasure in flogging and tormenting him. Among other instances of wanton and unnecessary barbarity, he often amused himself with making the man swallow cockroaches alive, on pain of being severely flogged, and having beef brine rubbed into his wounds. This last severe and humiliating alternative the man sometimes preferred."[131] This was extreme, and by no means representative of the treatment black sailors received. But the racism on board ensured that black crewmembers were more vulnerable than their white counterparts to being tormented by officers and other crewmembers. The fact that they generally occupied the most menial and lowest status positions on the vessel added to their vulnerability. Typical employment was as "boys", stewards, cook, or regular seamen.

In spite of the severities faced by black crewmembers, there is no evidence that suggests that black crewmember instigated or supported slave mutinies any more often than white sailors. If anything, they are underrepresented in the accounts of crew mutinies. Slaves did not distinguish between, black or white crew, when they revolted. Both were the oppressors, and both ran the same risks when a slave mutiny occurred. The following account, published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of June 16, 1763 indicated no surprise or concern with race in their description of the following mutiny. Captain Frost, "having Occasion of either for some Wood or Water, sent two of his Men, and a Negroe

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[130] This is the only quantitative work on black crew on slavers. It is a short paragraph, offered as an aside, in an early work quantifying the trade. However, the Brazilian trade cannot be taken to be representative of the Atlantic trade as a whole. H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage*, 58-9.
[131] In G.F. Dow, *Slave Ships*, 165.

on Shore for that Purpose, himself, the Mate, and a Negroe, who belonged to the Vessel remaining on board." Foolishly, "in the Mens Absence he ... permitted the Slaves, to the Number of about 60, to come on Deck, who immediately seized him, with the Negroe man, and threw them overboard." Captain Frost was speared by the slaves when he swam back to the vesel, "The Negroe, who was thrown over with him, had the good Fortune to get safe ashore."[132] Black crewmembers could expect no more mercy than white crewmembers on account of their skin colour.

There were two main categories of black sailors: free and slave. For slaving vessels, the later category can be further refined to distinguish between slaves who were regular crewmembers, and those who I term temporary, *de facto* crew. These include slaves who were purchased in Africa and who aided in sailing because it was short-handed, or in order to teach them a skill to raise their sale value. Also included are slave linguists and slaves who were appointed as guards while on the middle passage.

Occasionally a slaver would find itself short-handed while on the coast of Africa, and employ Africans as a crew. For Africans, sailing on a slaver posed an additional risk. They could be, and sometimes were, sold into slavery at arrival. How many were sold into slavery and ended their days as slaves is a matter of speculation. Free Africans taken on board as crew were sometimes baited or threatened by the prospect of being sold when the vessel arrived in the Americas. On the *Rainbow*, for example, "Captn. Harrison at Benein, hired one Dick, a free negro man, as a Linguist." A sailor "told Dick that he was no better than a Slave, and woud. be sold as such when they arriv'd at the West Indies, that thereupon Dick grew sulky."[133] Given their vulnerable position, the threat was easy

[132] The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 16 July 1795.
[133] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 4, 371.

to believe. It was sometimes used as a cruel joke, but the potential for carrying out the threat ensured that it more than a joke. It was a form of control.

If a slave could prove that he was kidnapped, and understood that he could seek legal remedy, he could sue for his freedom and damages. Although the odds were stacked against kidnapped slaves, some did find redress. In March 1779 a kidnapped slave was awarded the substantial compensation of £500, an amount clearly intended as punitive damages.[134] But this was a very exceptional case; the majority of African crewmen who were sold into slavery remained slaves for the rest of their lives. They are irretrievably lost to the historical record, making any estimation of their numbers pure guesswork.

Though less vulnerable, free black sailors from the Americas also ran the risk of being sold into slavery after the completion of their voyage. They were also, like white crewmembers, subject to impressment by the Royal Navy. George Yorke, for example, was a free black man who sailed on the slaver the *Daniel and Henry* in 1700. He was, along with two of his white shipmates, a victim of the Royal Navy impressment gangs on arrival in Jamaica.[135]The Royal Navy was colour-blind in its impressment policies, a position it took because of its (occasionally dire) need for sailors, not out of any political principle.

African slaves were often used as de facto crewmembers in order to teach them a skill and the rudiments of a European language in order to raise their value on arrival. They were used in a broad range of tasks, depending on the needs of the vessel and on

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[134] Earl Mansfield, in awarding the damages, determined that "In 1774, the defendant, wanting hands while on the coast, hired the plaintiff as sailor, advancing part of his wages. When the ship arrived at Jamaica, the plaintiff was sent, with three other sailors, to row some slaves on shore, and, to his intense astonishment and grief, instead of being allowed to return to the ship, he was detained by the purchaser of the slaves, to whom the captain had sold him, and sent up to the mountains to work as a slave." G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 565.
[135] N. Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade*, 54.

what would most raise their price. Tasks included aiding in unskilled sailing work, cleaning, repair, and sometimes learning a specialized skill such as cooking or carpentry. James Barbot noted that these "privilege slaves" routinely received the best food and accommodations on board, and are "train'd up aboard, to be carpenters, coopers, and cooks, so as to sell for the double the price of slaves in America, because of their skill etc."[136] Usually the captain or officers on board owned such slaves. The arrangement had clear advantages to both the slaver and the enslaved; the former had a better chance of his investment surviving, and could expect a greater return, while the later managed to avoid the holds with all its hazards and horrors. The losers were the remaining slaves, at whose expense the privilege slaves received better rations and treatment, and the financiers of the voyage who were also thus duped. It was a truism in the trade that privilege slaves never died – they were merely exchanged for others below, in spite of the elaborate precautions that financiers took to try to ensure that this did not happen.

Unlike slaves who were recruited to sail because of depleted crew numbers, privilege slaves do not appear to have revolted disproportionately frequently. This may have been due to their favoured position, or to the caution of the crew. In some cases privilege slaves changed their allegiance entirely, and betrayed the plots of slaves confined below the decks. The crew of the *Mary*, for example, were in 1796 "informed by one of our Slaves that was not confined but on deck as a Sailor, that the Slaves had intentions of taking the Ship, and also advised by him to be on our guard."[137] An

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[136] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 465. How much the price generally increased is not clear. But their skills were a recommendation; an advertisement in London's *William's Advertiser* of June 24, 1757, for example, offered for sale "One stout NEGRO young fellow, about 20 years of age, that has been employed for 12 months on board a ship, and is a very serviceable hand." In G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 475.
[137] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 374.

examination of the slave quarters led to evidence being found for the preparation for a mutiny, and caused the premature launching of the attempt. Its failure was due to the betrayal by the slave sailor.

Raising the value of slaves was only one of several reasons slaves were made de facto crewmembers. Slaves were sometimes employed as guards over other slaves. This appears to have often worked very well from the perspective of the slavers. Captain Thomas Phillips of the *Hannibal*, for example, writes that "we have some 30 or 40 gold coast negroes, which we buy, and are procur'd us there by our factors, to make guardians and overseers of the Whidaw negroes." Their duties included that they "sleep among them to keep them from quarrelling" and "to give us notice, if they can discover any caballing or plotting among them." Phillip's factors in Africa obtained the slaves specifically to act as guards, and ensured that they were from a different people than the rest of the slaves, suggesting that it was a structural part of the slaving expedition for some slavers. Phillips was not disappointed by his slave-guards – the crew gave every guard "a cat of nine tails as a badge of his office, which he [was] not a little proud of, and exercise[d] with great authority." According to Phillips, it was a "trust they will discharge with great diligence."[138] Instructions from owners confirmed Phillip's experiences. They sometimes ordered their captains to buy slaves to be guards, as Captain Barret was in 1687. He was informed that "It is for your safety that Wee order you in Charter party to take in 20 Gold Coast Negroes for Guardians which you must carefully doe."[139]

Using slaves to betray other slaves was not confined to any particular nationality. Postma has noted that "At times Dutch ships employed spies, presumably free Africans

[138] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 407.
[139] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 361.

who could understand various African languages, to obviate escapes and slave revolts."[140] He offers no examples or evidence, so it is not clear whether he is referring to linguists, who were indeed usually free, or to guards who where appointed from among the slaves. I have not uncovered any primary documentation that indicates that African guards were free individuals, hired for that purpose in Africa. There may have been some, but slaves were far more commonly used for the purpose. It is, however, likely that the practice of appointing slaves to aid in guarding other slaves occurred primarily in the earlier years of the transatlantic trade. References to the practice were more common in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, but became increasing rare in the mid to late eighteenth century. It is unclear why this is the case.

Nor is it clear why slaves could be recruited for positions that were clearly against their own long-term interests, and then discharge them faithfully. That they were usually from a different people than the remaining slaves cannot alone explain why they so often remained true to their oppressors' interests. Increased chances of personal survival may have been one reason. Slave solidarity could not be taken for granted.[141] The relative status of the overseer slaves to the remaining slaves may also have played a role. Their whips were a symbol that set them apart from the other slaves. As they were relatively few, they were accorded individual recognition by the ultimate powers on board, the crew. This may have lessened the feeling of degradation imposed on all slaves. Participating in the oppression of other slaves may have decreased their own sense of being oppressed, and given them the illusion of having been somehow more in control of their own fates. But this is speculation, based on the observation of others in total

[140] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 165.
[141] See Chapter Six, "Survival Strategies."

systems.[142] The actual benefits they received from their betrayal of their fellow slaves were negligible. They may have received some extra rations, but they shared the same quarters with the other slaves, were sold at the end of the voyage, and in addition, bore the animosity of the other slaves.

The linguist on board held a position that was in some respects similar to that of African slave guards. They both served the interests of the slaver, and both were Africans. The vital distinction between them was that the guards were slaves, while linguists were nearly always free.[143] The slaver paid linguists, unlike the guards, and there were far fewer on board, often only one. Linguists were hired primarily to facilitate communication between slavers and their slaves, and not to betray slave plots. But they were unambiguously in the pay of the slavers, and their interests coincided with the slavers'. Thus they frequently betrayed plots by slaves, and if fighting broke out on a vessel, both slaves and slavers understood on whose side the linguists stood. Linguists were frequently the victims of slave unrest, partly because of the amount of time they spent among the slaves. They were also often first in the line of attack before a mutiny was defeated. This was the case on Captain Harris' vessel. He wrote to his owners on February 28, 1758 that "The negroes rose on us after we left St. Thomas's; they killed my linguister whom I got at Benin, and we then secured them without farther loss."[144]

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[142] See for example Viktor Frankyl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1985).

[143] There were exceptions – a slave who made the middle passage on a Portuguese vessel, Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, wrote in his biography that "Some of the slaves on board could talk Portuguese. They had been living on the coast with Portuguese families, and they used to interpret to us. They were not placed in the hold with the rest of us, but came down occasionally to tell us something or the other." In R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 28. This was however, an exceptional case. The slaves were not formally employed as linguists, and had their privileged position to thank to their coincidental usefulness to the crew.

[144] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 4, 371.

Linguists, like all African employees on a slaver, ran the risk of being betrayed by their employers, and being sold as slaves when the vessel arrived in the Americas.

Among the de facto crewmembers was a group of temporary slave crewmembers that I term "emergency slave crew." These were ordinary slaves purchased in Africa who were ordered to do particular tasks, often in times of distress. The tasks covered a broad spectrum, but unless the slaver was short-handed, they had in common that they were particularly unpleasant or dangerous. Slaves were used to clean the holds, and sometimes to remove the dead bodies from the holds. The later was the case during a smallpox epidemic on Captain Canot's vessel *La Estrella*. He relates that "Twelve of the stoutest survivors were ordered to drag out the dead from among the ill." So horrific was the work that "though the twelve were constantly drenched with rum to brutalize them, still we were forced to aid the gang by reckless volunteers from our crew." This was not an isolated incident; in the illegal trade slaves on board the *Boa Morte* were forced perform the same task. As "The crew revolted at this work", "we had to rely on gangs of slaves to drag the dead heaps from among the living." [145]

When a vessel was short-handed or otherwise in distress, the crew sometimes turned to the slaves for aid. Usually the depletion of the regular crew by illness or death, sometimes combined with desertions forced the captain to use slaves as emergency crew. Such was the case in 1795 when the notaries in Brazil inventoried the number of slaves on a recently arrived vessel. They found that there were "494 live slaves and one female child of one-half rights, and 11 children at the breast, in which figure are included 12 who

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[145] Isidor Paiewonsky, ***Eyewitness accounts of Slavery in the Danish West Indies, Also Graphic Tales of Other Slave Happenings on Ships and Plantations*** (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 53.

come as members of the crew, ... for lack of sailors."[146] Such references are not rare.[147] Using slaves as temporary crewmembers in emergency situations was, however, risky.

Illness, mortality, and navy press gangs forced slavers to make difficult choices. Extra hands were sometimes an absolute necessity. But as the slaves were not experienced sailors, a relatively large number needed to be released to do the work of the regular crew. As illness and death had already reduced the number of regular crew, releasing so many slaves posed a double risk. Most often this passed without mishap, but not always. A newspaper report of 18 November 1765 was a typical account of a slave insurrection that was begun by temporary emergency crew. Captain Hopkins, "soon after he left the Coast, the Number of his men being reduced by Sickness, ... was obliged to permit some of the Slaves to come upon Deck to assist the People." Not being agents of the slavers, unlike slave guards or linguisters, "These Slaves contrived to release the others, and the whole rose upon the People, and endevoured to get Possession of the Vessel."[148] This attempt, like most, was defeated. The crew was on their guard, and retained control over the tools of violence. In addition, when slaves were released for emergency work, the vessel was nearly always on the actual Atlantic crossing. The slaves did not have the skills to handle or navigate the vessel, and this gave substantial protection from insurrections.

An insufficient number of healthy regular crew to man the vessel was not the only emergency situation in which a slaver looked to his slave holds in order to save his

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[146] In H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage*, 52.
[147] In a typical example, when illness ravaged the crew of James Stanfield's vessel a number of slaves were chosen from the holds, and "freed from their irons, and *they* pulled and hauled as they were directed by the inefficient sailors." In G. F. Dow, *Slave Ships*, 166.
[148] According to the article, this "was happily prevented by the Captain and his Men, who killed, wounded and forced overboard, Eighty of them, which obliged the rest to submit." The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 18, 1765.

vessel. Slaves were occasionally used to fight privateers who attacked the slaving vessel. Crew were aware of the danger, and often signed a clause in their contracts that bound them to fight. Slaves did not. Yet slaves sometimes fought to save the vessel from capture. In testimony to the British parliament in 1789, Captain James Penny claims in times of war to have "sometimes disciplined Part of the Negroes as Marines." He claims to have "had such Confidence in them, that he has frequently been upon the Quarter Deck in the Middle of them, when they have been armed, and have been entrusted with Powder and Balls."[149] Penny's testimony was not by any means unique. In 1758 Captain William Boates had "a smart engagement with a French privateer sloop of 12 carriage guns, and full of men, which attempted to board him several times." According to Gomer, "Captain Boates armed several of his negroes, who behaved very gallantly with the small arms, and eventually the privateer sheered off, much disabled, and it was later reported that she had sunk."[150]

A letter dated 28 April 1781 from Captain Stevenson to his owners relates a very similar story. He "had the misfortune to fall in with a French privateer of 14 guns, and 85 men." They battled with "great guns and small arms", but the French vessel "grappled our main chains, and we lay together yardarm and yardarm for above one glass." During

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[149] In Michael Craton and James Walvin et. al., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, 36. Penny's testimony is strongly biased in favour of the trade, and downplays the horrors inflicted on the slavers. This aspect of his testimony, however, is supported by several unrelated accounts.

[150] G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 484. William Boates is one of the more colorful figures of the eighteenth century slave trade. Due to his extensive dealing in the slave trade, his name appears on many documents relating to the trade, and elsewhere. His life is the quintessential eighteenth century rags to riches story. He was an orphan who had his last name to thank to the vessel he was found in, and was later apprenticed as a mariner. He rose through the ranks to command several slaving vessels, after which he became a major Liverpool ship owner and financier of the slave trade. When he heard the news that one of his vessels had captured a Spanish vessel laden with gold, silver and other valuables, he is reported to have run along Pierhead shouting "Billy Boates – born a beggar, die a lord!" He died aged 78, and was eulogized in the local Liverpool newspaper of 3 November 1794 as a man whose "extensive transaction in the commercial world rendered him a most useful ember of society, and whose memory will be long revered by all who had connections with him." This presumably excluded slaves.

that time, Stevenson relates, "I had about fifty men, black and white, on deck at great guns and small arms, halfpikes, boathooks, boat oars, steering-sail-yards, firewood, and slack ballast." The black men to whom Captain Stevenson refers were certainly slaves, as the *Rose* shipped with only thirty crewmembers.[151] He concluded that "My people all behaved very well, both white and black." He suffered one fatality among his crew, was himself "wounded , and five other white people, as likewise seven blacks, one of which is since dead, the other six I am in hopes will recover." The injuries were sustained as "The Frenchman hove such a large quantity of powder flasks on board us, that the ship abaft was all in a blaze of fire three different time. This hurt the blacks much, having no trowsers on them."[152] The fact that the black fighters had "no trowsers" confirms that they were slaves. Regular black seamen would certainly have had trousers.

When a slaver was under siege, slaves were sometimes also put to other tasks. In a battle in 1831 between an illegal Spanish slaver, armed with "five guns, twenty pounders, (one on a pivot) and seventy-two men" and a Royal Navy vessel, for example, "The Spaniard did every thing in his power to escape." The *Marinerito's*, crew "compelled the slaves to take the oar, and had therefor an additional advantage over his persuers."[153]

Both positive and negative incentives were used to enlist the slaves' aid when a vessel was under attack. Slaves were sometimes promised their freedom if they fought. Godfrey Malbone, a slaver and privateer from Rhode Island , when under attack by pirates, "offered freedom to all the slaves who would join in defending the vessel. The enemy was repulsed, and the freed slaves settled on the Malbone estate in Pomfret,

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[151] D. Eltis et al. *The Atlantic Slavery Database*, voyage no. 24204.
[152] G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 565.
[153] P. Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, 130-131.

Conn."[154] Very few sources, however, indicate that such a promise was made, and the making and keeping of a promise to slaves could easily be two different things. The slaves had neither the right nor the power to enforce the bargain. It is possible that such promises were made more frequently than they were kept; in such cases it was not be in the captain's interest to record the promise.

In an example of a negative incentive, Joseph Wright and his fellow slaves were terrorized into aiding their oppressors in 1827. Wright's narrative relates how the sight of British Navy vessel, " put [the Portuguese] to disquiteness and confusion. They then told us that these were the people which will eat us, if we suffered them to prize us." The threat worked – the Portuguese gave the slaves "long oars and .. we tried to pull as we were able." The fear of being cannabalized existed on many vessels, including Wright's. Even before the British vessel was sighted, in Wright's words, "we had heard that the Portuguese were going to eat us when we got to their country." [155] Slavers exploited this fear when it was in their interests to do so. Only very seldom was the slaves' fear of being captured justified. They were nearly always sold in the New World by the victors, as a prize of the battle, which changed their situation not at all.[156]

The range of choices open to slaves when their vessel was under attack was very narrow. Only a small percentage of the slaves, presumably those judged most trustworthy by the crew, were selected to fight. Whether or not they were explicitly promised a reward, they probably expected some preferential treatment after the battle. By not

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[154] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 131.
[155] In P. D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered*, 331.
[156] There is a highly exceptional account in which this did not happen. The Liverpool slaver *Ogden*, under Captain Tristram "bound from Africa to Jamaica, was taken by a Spanish privateer. The gallant resistance made by the crew so irritated the Spaniards, that, on boarding the Ogden, they killed all, both whites and blacks, during which the ship sunk, and all on board, except one man, five boys, and nine negroes, perished." In G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 472.

fighting, they risked reprisals by the crew. Revolt was not an attractive option. They were under constant observation by armed crew, had had no time to plan a revolt, and a failed attempt would certainly be dealt with swiftly and violently. If they succeeded in taking the vessel while it was under attack, it would almost certainly fall to the attacker. In the final analysis, revolting while the ship was under attack promised little hope for slave to better their lot.

Crewing on a slaver was a hard life, and for those in the lower ranks, usually an unrewarding one. Yet in spite of the circumstances which proscribed their actions and choices, and the times that provided the context for their slaving activities, to a significant degree, slaving crew were a self-selected group. Most often they did not *have* to sail on slavers. Usually they had other choices – often difficult ones, with uncertain outcomes to be sure, but choices nonetheless. While on board, though constrained by their circumstances, they still had some choice in their day-to-day actions, their attitudes, and how they treated the slaves. As such, they were to a large degree responsible for their actions, and were as much as financiers and planters responsible for the Atlantic slave trade.

CHAPTER 4: RESISTANCE AND REBELLION

"We receive them onboard from the first as enemies"[1]

All slavery depended on violence and the threat of violence for its maintenance. The ubiquitous nature of resistance was the reason for this. The intensive study of resistance has changed the modern perception of slavery, the relations between slaver and enslaved, and has allowed a more nuanced and subtle understanding of the institution of slavery to unfold.[2] Unlike slave resistance on land, slave resistance on the seas has not been accorded systematic study. In part this is because the sources are not as forthcoming, and in part because the middle passage has been conceptualized as a time of transition rather than a stage upon which lives unfolded. This view has been held at the expense of the social history of slaves and slavers on the middle passage. This chapter and the following address the lacuna.

A lack of sources that could be used to recover what slaves felt and thought forces scholars to look to slaves' actions to speak for them. As with any grouping of individuals

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[1] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750-1754 (With Newton's 'Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade')*, Martin Bernard & M. Spurrell (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), p. 103. He noted that "... it is not to be expected that they will tamely resign themselves to their situation. It is always taken for granted, that they will attempt to gain their liberty if possible. Accordingly, we dare not trust them ..."

[2] For land-based slavery the study of resistance has a rich body of work built up from the early efforts of scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, John Hope Franklin, Kenneth Stampp, and Herbert Aptheker among others. Several later historians, such as Vincent Harding, John Blassingame, Herbert Gutman and Eugene Genovese have expanded on this. The study of resistance has become an integral part of the study of slavery. No serious work now considers any aspect of slavery without taking into account how resistance strategies, overt or implicit shaped the experience. Oppression and resistance to it were two sides of the same coin. The emphasis placed on resistance in modern slavery studies, however, also can potentially be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has been vital in allowing a more accurate representation of slavery to be written. It has also returned an agency to the oppressed that would otherwise have been lost. But on the other hand, there is a danger of creating unreasonable present-day expectations from slaves. The stakes were extremely high to slaves, and it is far easier to expect resistance when far removed in time and condition from the slaves' plight, than it is to expect it in its historical context. Such expectations risk trivializing much of the resistance that did take place.

where one group holds an inferior position of power with regard to the other, the open, day-to-day interactions between the groups are not necessarily the best or most reliable guide to the actual relationship between the groups. The actions of both parties on a day to day basis involved a form of role-playing. The role-playing of slaves towards their oppressors was informed by, among others, the dominant groups expectations of them, their own survival needs, and the amount of flexibility permitted in the relation. Much of what occurred on board can no longer be recovered; only the recorded public interaction between the groups survives. That and what can be deduced from it forms the basis of this chapter. Role-playing broke down when slaves resisted. Resistance and mutiny were a way in which slaves spoke out for themselves, individually and collectively.

I define resistance as any action *deliberately* undertaken by a slave or a group of slaves that was not in the interests of their owner or his agent. Resistance on the middle passage was any action deliberately undertaken by a slave or a group of slaves while on board that was not in the direct or indirect interests of their owner(s) or their agents. This definition excludes acts of resistance that took place in the barracoons, or attempts to escape while on the beaches and the like.[3] My definition is an extension of how slavery and a slave were defined in the New World legal tradition. The slave was legally property, and an extension of his or her master's will. The definition of slavery implies the definition of resistance under slavery. If a slave was defined as a piece of property rather than an individual in his or her own right, than any deliberate actions by which the slave asserted his or her own will against that of the owner must necessarily have been an act of resistance against the owner. By extension the act was also resistance to slavery as

an institution, whether or not the slave intended it as such. This was necessarily so, as that which is resistance against the owner necessarily challenged the system to which the owner subscribed. The conditions of oppression defined what resistance against it was, and thus the slaver, not the enslaved, set the standards for determining what resistance against slavery was.[4]

It is not always easy to determine whether any given act was or was not an act of resistance on the middle passage. The sources are usually incomplete, and very rarely describe incidents from the perspective of the slave. This often makes it difficult to recover the motivation for any particular action. The question of whether an act was undertaken deliberately is also not always clear cut. A slave, by his or her circumstances or perceptions, might have been forced into a particular course of action. From the enslaver's perspective the same act might have been a deliberate act of resistance that he felt undermined his authority or proprietary rights. For example, a slave might have refused food on the middle passage due to illness or shock, rather than out of a deliberate attempt to starve him or herself. Here too, it is often well nigh impossible to recover where the truth lay, if indeed there was one single truth.

I define rebellion as resistance that deliberately directed violence outwards toward the oppressor. Not all acts of resistance that included a violent component were acts of rebellion. A suicide, for example, was a violent action, but the violence was not directly aimed at the oppressor – rather it was turned inward. Thus it was an act of resistance, not

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[3] This too is a time period in the enslavement process that has not been accorded sufficient attention. It is almost impossible to find a scholarly article that examines life in the barracoons, the differences between holding areas by nation or time period, mortality and the causes thereof, and similar questions.

[4] This raises the essential philosophical difficulty with slavery: resistance invoked the slave's articulation of self, of his or her individuality, that which was not an agent of the owner, but made its own statement on its own terms. This directly contradicted the owner's assertion that to be a slave was to have one's self entirely

rebellion, by my definition. Similarly, slaves fighting among themselves was not rebellion by my definition, even though it involves overt violence, and is not in the slaver's best interests. The striking of a crewmember, however, was a clear act of rebellion.

Slaves on the middle passage could not simply be divided into docile, obedient slaves and rebellious slaves. All slaves had the potential to rebel and who did or did not, and when, depended on a myriad of dynamic factors. These included the temperament of the individual, opportunity or the lack thereof, the actions of other slaves, the sanctions against a particular act and the risk of being caught, all of which were subject to change over time and slaving vessel. Slavers could guess which slaves or times were particularly dangerous, but they could not know with any certainty when resistance would occur or who it would come from. This affected their actions, and that of slaves. The threat of resistance was at least as formative of the middle passage as actual acts of resistance or rebellion.

Resistance and the *threat of resistance* played a vital part in the shaping of the middle passage both for crew and slaves. For the slavers, every slave was a potential risk. They were simultaneously the source of profit, and an important threat to the success of the voyage and their enslavers' lives. Every slave had the potential to rebel, and both slavers and slaves knew it. Because of this, instructions to captains of slaving vessels were replete with warnings about uprisings and tips on how to avoid them. The following, issued to Captain William Barry in 1725 was typical. His financiers detailed strict preventative measures, urging Barry "So soon as you begin to slave let your

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subjected to the will of the owner. In other words, strictly speaking, a slave could have no true self, as it was always necessarily under the influence of the slave's owner.

knetting be fix'd breast high fore and aft and so keep 'em shackled and hand Bolted fearing their rising or leaping Overboard." They ordered to "let always a Constant and Carefull watch be appointed to which you must give the strictest Charge."[5] The threat of resistance and rebellion were of primary importance in determining both slaver routines and actions. Slavers often could not know which slaves were most likely to rebel, and this uncertainty necessarily caused them to view all slaves as on board as threats.

Slaves on sea thought about and plotted serious acts of rebellion frequently. These plans that did not come to fruition are almost all lost, as they were very unlikely to be recorded if they did not actually occur. But on a certain level they did happen. They cannot be counted and examined in the same way as realized acts of resistance and rebellion can be, but they threatened the slavers nonetheless. Nearly all successful rebellions were preceded by careful planning, and slavers were constantly on guard to learn of any plotting. Even if the dissent was not expressed toward the enslavers because of the danger, the small likelihood of success or fear of reprisals, slaves plotting resistance ensured that if an opportunity ever arose, it would be taken advantage of. Thoughts of resistance, plots planned but not taken to fruition, suicides contemplated but not accomplished and escapes attempts not realized also caused slavers to constantly be on their guard. Although lapses in vigilance did occur, crews were very much aware of the danger an unguarded moment posed. John Newton, a slaver for nine years, explicitly noted that "One unguarded hour, or minute, is sufficient to give the slaves the opportunity they are always waiting for."[6]

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[5] Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930-35), p. 327-8.
[6] John Newton, *The Journal*, 103.

The threat of slave resistance forced slaving vessels' crews to rely on an authoritarian and inflexible system of control. An erosion in authority could easily be expensive in financial terms, and more importantly from the perspective of the crew, their personal safety. Slaves on the middle passage were more desperate, and more immediately so than their counterparts on land, and any – even minor – compromises were more likely to be interpreted as weakness. The very fact that slave owners needed to and often did reach (tacit) agreements with their slaves on land implied the obvious - that actual enslavement was not a reflection of the philosophical ideal implied in the definition of a slave. On a slave ship, control was far more absolute. Slavers enforced their domination more overtly, and employed more guards and more overt violence. More than on land slavers worried that anything that suggested a division between them would be exploited by slaves and encourage resistance. Instructions to captains from financiers warn of this, and slavers themselves noted it. Newton, after having rid his vessel of two insurrectionary crewmembers, was "very glad to have them out of the ship." While they were on board, he felt that he "could not be but in constant alarms, as such a mark of division amongst us was a great encouragement to the slaves to be troublesome."[7] The power of the slavers to discourage resistance relied not only on the violence that they imposed on the slaves, but at least as importantly, on the perception of the slaves of that power and by extension, the slaver's invincibility and indivisibility. Thus to strike one crewmember was in effect an attack on all crewmembers and it was dealt with as such.

Shipboard resistance was both similar to, and in other respects, different from resistance on land. Resistance on slaving vessels was no less substantial or important than that on land. Nor did it have less of an effect on defining that particular condition of

[7] J. Newton, *The Journal*, 72.

slavery. The essence of both was the same. As on land, every act of resistance implicitly challenged the fundamentals of the institution. At its core, all resistance pitted a sense of individuality that insisted on a level of human dignity, against an institution that attempted to reduce individuals to the level of property. All acts of resistance, on land and sea, necessarily relied on the guidance of a deeply held value that had been violated. No matter where it took place, whether it was embryonic or organized on a large scale, slaves asserted themselves through resistance, and this constituted a rejection of slavery at its most fundamental level. By resisting, all slaves joined the battle over who owned them.[8] The basis of resistance and the need for constant vigilance on land and sea was the same. Most resistance, on land and sea, was directed against being enslaved oneself rather than the institution per se. This much resistance on the middle passage had in common with resistance on land. Resistance, however took substantially different forms depending on the nature of oppression, the circumstances it took place in, and the opportunities for it to surface.

More so than on land, the resistance on slaving vessels reflected African traditions. Slaves relied solely on African cultural norms to guide their actions and reactions in dealing with their circumstances. Captain Newton, for example, recorded that on his vessel, "we were alarmed with a report that some of the men slaves had found means to poyson the water in the scuttle casks on deck...." But on "enquiry" he found that they had only "conveyed some of their country fetishes, as they call them, or talismans into one of them, which they had the credulity to suppose must inevitably kill

[8] This is a question that has to do with the nature of human dignity, and indeed, with what the definition of "human" means. As Albert Camus noted, the slave cannot rebel "without the feeling that somewhere, in some way, you are justified. .... He affirms there are limits and also that he suspects – and wishes to preserve – the existence of certain things beyond those limits. He stubbornly insists that there are certain

all who drank of it." Newton was relieved, but he understood the sub-text well enough, and concluded that "if it please God thay make no worse attempts than to charm us to death, they will not much harm us, but it shews their intentions are not wanting."[9] The slaves on Newton's vessel had turned to their own culture and previous experiences to respond to a new threat. It was out of context, but people who were born and raised with little, if any, sustained contact with non-African norms, beliefs and cultures responded in a way dictated by their own worldview and cultural norms. Africa, of course, was not culturally homogenous, and the above example was only one from a much larger and often more effective repertoire. In the Americas, African cultural patterns shaped resistance too, especially among first generation slaves, or more strongly yet, recently arrived slaves.[10] However, this was mediated by the different cultural norms that they were confronted by, both that of their oppressors and existing slave-cultures. Neither was the case on the middle passage.

On the middle passage the dehumanization and the lack of individualism allowed slaves was very extreme compared to land, as was the coercion needed to sustain it. There was little room for, or point to, minor acts of resistance. When resistance on the middle passage occurred, it tended to be serious, and usually, violent. Usually resistance on the middle passage had as its goal to end an individual's enslavement outright, either

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things in him which are worth while.... and which must be taken into consideration." Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 19.

[9] John. Newton, *The Journal*, 56.

[10] See for example David Gaspar's study of the 1736 slave uprising on Antigua in *Bondsmen and Rebels: A Study Master-Slave Relations in Antigua with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 236. Not only was recently arrived slave's resistance more strongly shaped by their African background, they also tended to rebel more. See for example Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1978), who in his discussion quotes a contemporary source, John Brickell who explained that "The Negroes that most commonly rebel, are those brought from Guinea .... Few born here, or in the other Provinces have been guilty of these vile Practices," 301-2. Philip D. Morgan, in "The Cultural Implication of the

by escape, mutiny or suicide. There is little evidence to show that there was much resistance undertaken to ameliorate immediate conditions, gain more freedoms or other privileges, to insist on a level of individual respect, or to negotiate a more easily accommodated form of oppression.[11] Resistance on a slaving vessel also had a greater potential to spread, and it did so faster than on land. This was partly due to the contained nature of the stage, and partly due to the greater willingness of slaves to risk their lives. The transient nature of the middle passage also meant that slaves and slavers did not have the time or inclination to learn to know each other, or to adapt to each other. They shared no future together, and both sides were aware of it. All these factors set the stage for extreme forms of resistance.

On slaving vessels slaves were crowded in an undifferentiated mass where even the most basic signifier of individuality, the possession of a name, was not respected. As on land, the great inequities in the distribution of power between oppressor and oppressed led to slaves adopting a mask both as a form of survival strategy and to hide the potential for resistance that lay within. But slaves on board used different masks than those on land.[12] On a slaving vessel masks served primarily for slaves to blend in with the other

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Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997), 199 makes a similar argument.

[11] Resistance could on land and sea could have had immediate goals or intentions, such as the amelioration of living or working conditions, the expression of dissatisfaction with a certain event, or the attempt to save oneself from an immediate fate, such as rape. But such resistance was far more common on land. But exceptions did occur on the middle passage. Often this had to do with the lack of water. Mahomah Baquaqua, for example, recounted that on his voyage made in 1840 on a Brazilian slaver "We suffered very much for want of water, but was denied all we needed. ... There was one poor fellow so very desperate for want of water, that he attempted to snatch a knife from the white men who brought the water, when he was taken up on deck and I never knew what became of him. I supposed he was thrown overboard." However, incidents like this form the exception to the rule. As Baquaqua confirmed, the risks of confronting the slavers themselves were simply too high. R. Conrad, *World of Sorrow*, 27.

[12] There were some commonalties between masks on sea and those identified on land. On land such stereotype images as "Sambo," "Uncle Tom" and "Mammy" have been uncovered as masks used by slaves to hide their true selves. On a slaving vessels masks also served to hide the slaves, true selves from their oppressors. They also served to avoid attracting unwanted attention from the oppressors.

slaves on board, rather than for the creating of an elaborate persona for white consumption, as on land. It was potentially dangerous to stand out from the crowd on a slaving ship, and the opportunity to hide in the mass of other slaves was greater. On a slaving vessel successful masking led to invisibility, and projected, if anything, an apparent docility. On a ship the masks were not as refined or diverse as those built up after years of practice on land. Masks and self-control broke down more frequently on the middle passage. Unlike on land, there were no escape valves or opportunities to leave, even for a few hours, to recompose oneself. Slavers too tended to wear role-dictated masks. But the mask of power was thinner on the middle passage. There was little room for myths of paternalism, the "happy slave" and the "benevolent master" and the like. Slave-ship life was more dangerous, and of a shorter duration than that on land, and the masks reflected that; they were fragile, more susceptible to outbreaks of temper, and less well practiced. Occasionally slaves on board attacked crewmembers in a seemingly unpremeditated fashion, with what appears to be no clear motive other than the experience of enslavement. However, violence of this nature was more often directed inwards, for example through suicides, or if outwards, towards other slaves. Slaves fought often, and sometimes seriously, among each other on the middle passage.[13] On a slaving vessel the human being underlying the mask was closer to the surface, and more desperate, both of which were reflected in the violent nature and frequency of resistance on the middle passage. The incidences of suicides and full-scale mutinies on slaving vessels far outstrip the incidence of comparable acts of rebellion on land. Eric Wolfe has observed that "a rebellion cannot start from a situation of complete impotence; the powerless are easy victims" and this was as true on the middle passage as anywhere

[13] See chapter 6 "Survival Strategies" for more on this.

else.[14] The slaves on the middle passage were not easy victims. Compared to slaves on land, the slaves on the middle passage were generally more desperate, more numerous relative to their enslavers, and felt that they had less to lose. A large part of their power lay in their greater willingness to take extreme risks.

No oppression short of death is absolute; there is always a "gray area" between oppressor and oppressed which falls between total submission and total control. In slavery on land, there was always a sliding scale between 'allowable,' minor acts of resistance, and 'serious' forms of resistance that the oppressor would not tolerate. This was usually a tacitly negotiated space between the oppressor and the oppressed.[15] Several such understandings could be reached concurrently. The space allowed was different depending on the circumstances. It varied between place of enslavement, type of work, and the individuals a slave came into contact with. But the space was always characterized by a boundary that the slave was forbidden to cross, and did so at his or her peril. When that boundary was crossed, the oppressor felt either personally threatened or that the institution which he or she represents was being undermined. The middle passage was no different in this regard. But what was very different on the middle passage was the amount of space allowed, and the amount of room for negotiation. On a slaving vessel there was less room for the slaves to maneuver than on land, and minor acts of resistance had little point. There was no sophisticated and implicitly understood method of negotiation between slaves and crew. All that could be negotiated was the relative lack of

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[14] B. Gaspar, *Bondsmen and Rebels*, 256.

[15] Many writers on slavery have realized this, and have approached the study of this space and the dynamics informing it from different perspectives. See for an early example Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll. The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). For a more recent example, see Robert Anthony Olwell, "Authority and Resistance: Social Order in a Colonial Slave Society, the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1739-1782," (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1990).

overt violence on board and sometimes, sex.[16] And the space to negotiate even that much was very small.

There are several reasons why the negotiating room between slaves and slavers on board a slaving vessel differed to that between slaves and slave owners on land. One was the fact that the slaves had very little to negotiate with. There was little or no opportunity for work delays, the breaking of tools, establishing an acceptable level of insolence, and the like. 'Protest resistance' such as running away for a short period of time, or working too slowly and breaking tools, as has been identified on land was impossible on board a slaving vessel.[17] Nor were there the conditions or need to develop a long-term relationship between slaver and slaver. The middle passage was too short and too depersonalized for that.[18] The extreme imbalance of power on board, the desperation of slaves and the potential for escalation of protest on board also limited the space for negotiation.

Slave owners on land and crew on slaving vessels both appealed to their slaves' self interest in order to attempt to win their compliance. However, as there was a significantly less room for compromises on sea, the rewards slaves received for compliance nearly always centered around being subjected to relatively less overt

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[16] See Chapter 1, "Women" for more on sexual relationships on board. Many other things could of course be offered for negotiation by slaves, for example, whether or not they chose to eat well, the general atmosphere on board, the number of suicide attempts and the like. But the crew did generally not enter into such negotiations. Slaves could be and were forced to eat, whipped for insolence and chained or punished for suicide attempts. Ultimately the amount of overt violence on board was all the slaves could negotiate, and sometimes not even that.

[17] For a discussion of running away for a short period of time, see Drew Gilpin Faust, "Culture, Conflict, and Community: The Meaning of Power on an Ante-Bellum Plantation." *Journal of Social History* 14, 1 (Fall 1980), 91.

[18] However, as with many generalizations about the slave trade, there were exceptions. See chapter 3, "Crew" for a discussion on this.

violence.[19] Just as slaves had little to offer slavers other than obedience, slavers had little to negotiate with other than relatively less violence. On slaving vessels, this was often not an acceptable bargain for the slaves.

Some slavers hoped that the 'reasonableness' or 'justness' of their position and the 'fairness' with which they treated their slaves would curb the inclination to resist or rebel. Snelgrave, for example, asked his slaves why they had mutinied after the attempt was put down. Reasonably enough, the slaves "answered I was a great Rogue to buy them, in order to carry them away from their own Country, and that they were resolved to regain their Liberty if possible." Snelgrave then claimed to have justified his actions to the slaves by arguing that "they had forfeited their Freedom before I bought them, either by Crimes or by being taken in War, according to the Custom of their Country." But violence and threats of violence curbed resistance, not reasoning. Snelgrave, of course knew this, and concluded his debate with a threat: he told his slaves that "they now being my property, I was resolved to let them feel my Resentment, if they abused my Kindness."[20] From the slaver's perspective, mutiny and violent attacks against crew ranked as the most serious forms of slave dissent, followed by suicide and escape attempts. Actions that threatened white lives elicited the harshest punishments, followed by those that threatened white authority and the financial viability of the journey.

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[19] Or a variation on the theme – such as not being chained, or not being as heavily chained. Some slavers even offered "deck privileges" – the allowing of some slaves to make the journey on the deck instead of in the holds – to a small number of especially trusted slaves. But there were some exceptions. Some slavers attempted to use positive incentives, such as offering some tobacco to chew or smoke, some watered down liquor, or possibly beads for the women to entertain themselves with. There is, however, little indication that these were effective in controlling slave behavior to any degree. The rewards were too small to structurally change slave motivations.

[20] Snelgrave believed that his reasonableness had "served my purpose," and that "they seemed convinced of their Fault." There is little evidence to that this was a widely practiced technique of combating resistance on the middle passage, or in the least effective. In Snelgrave's case, his vessel suffered another (betrayed) mutiny plot. E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 354-5.

Suicide attempts did not threaten the lives of the crew, but they did threaten the economic success of the voyage. Suicide was, by my definition, certainly an act of resistance. Slaves, by the Western definition of slavery, did not have the right to end their own lives. Their lives did not belong to them, but rather to their purchaser. As such, self-killing amounted to stealing property from the slaves' owners: in short, resistance. Suicide differed from other forms of resistance in only one particular – when successful, it always led to the death of the slave. The observation may seem a trite, but the implications were not. Suicide was an act of desperation, which more forcefully than any other act of resistance demonstrated the slave's depth of rejection of the system that enslaved him or her, and the conditions of that enslavement. Suicide and suicide attempts had many catalysts, but ultimately the reason for slaves on the middle passage killed themselves was because they refused to endure their present slavery or accept the future it promised them.

It is not clear how common suicide was among slaves during the middle passage. Many of the accounts of suicides in the primary literature cannot be taken at face value. Often it is difficult to establish whether the cause of death was correctly attributed, and whether there were motives for over or under-recording losses on a voyage as suicides. Stein has argued that "Captains reported few ... suicides, even though such events would have made excellent excuses for poor trades."[21] His view is, however, problematic. First, "few" remains undefined, while suicides were relatively often reported in contemporary documents. Second, doubtful whether suicide would have formed "an excellent excuse" for a large mortality on a slaving voyage. If a voyage suffered many suicides, it would

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[21] R.L. Stein, ***The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business*** (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 94.

have reflected badly on the captain's ability to discharge his duties effectively. Slaving vessel crews took elaborate precautions to prevent loss by suicide, and the captains were responsible for making sure that they did so. Illness, over which the slavers had much less control, would have made a much better excuse. Only a few writers have ventured estimates of the number of successful suicides that took place on the middle passage. Given the problems with determining how many were (accurately) reported and, above all, the ambiguous nature of many suicides, these must be seen as very rough guesses. Postma, extrapolating from a small sample in the Dutch slave trade, has suggested that suicides accounted for 1% of all deaths on the middle passage.[22] This would total approximately 14,000 deaths by suicide over the entire trade after 1600.[23] The only other attempt to quantify suicides was by Pierson. He did not venture percentages, but was content to note the obvious – "Only a small minority of African emigrants willfully ended their lives." But he extrapolated this well beyond the bounds of possibility. He concluded that "since these suicides were part of one of the world's largest intercontinental migrations, their numbers were probably in the hundreds of thousands over the three century span of the Atlantic slave trade."[24] If "hundreds of thousands" were taken to mean two hundred thousand, one out of every seven deaths on the middle passage must have been due to suicide. There is no evidence to support this. Postma's figure is much more likely to approach the actual rate, though it remains subject to adjustment depending largely how suicide is defined.

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[22] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1990), 241.
[23] The calculation is based on a total embarkation figure of 11.4 million slaves and a disembarkation of 10 million slaves in the post 1600 Atlantic trade. This provides a mortality rate of 12.7%, or 1.4 million people.
[24] William Pierson, "White Cannibals, Black Martyrs: Fear, Depression and Religious Faith as Causes of Suicide among New Slaves," *Journal of Negro History*, 62 (1977), 155.

The number of suicides contemplated was certainly much higher than those that were committed or attempted. Even before the actual boarding of the slaving vessel, some slaves had made up their minds to commit suicide. Samual Ajayi Crowther, for example, while still on the coast of Africa had determined "that I would not go on ... but would make an end of myself, one way or another." For "several nights" he "attempted strangling myself with my band; but had not courage enough to close the noose tight." After those failures he decided that he "would leap out of the canoe into the river, when we should cross it."[25] He did not drown himself on the way to the ship, nor kill himself on the vessel. How many other slaves' nerve failed them, or how many could not find the means to commit suicide is an unanswerable question, but it will have been a very large number. Accounts by slaves who made the voyage often indicate that they or a number of other slaves on board were determined to commit suicide. William Thomas' account was typical in this regard. He recounted that "All cried very much at going away from their home and friends, some of them saying that they would kill themselves."[26] He gave no indication that any of the slaves actually did commit suicide. There are several records of slavers who made the middle passage without losing any of their slaves, but as death by suicide accounted only for a fraction of all save deaths, the number of vessels that did not suffer suicides was likely to have been much larger. It is, however, doubtful whether a single ship made the passage without some of the slaves seriously considering suicide.

It was often unclear whether a particular activity by a slave that led to his or her death was suicide. The *Memorandum of the Mortality of Slaves on Board the "Othello,"*

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[25] Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 307-8. Recently arrived slaves in the New World also had a higher suicide rate than slaves who had been born or spent considerable amounts of time in the New World. See William Pierson, "White Cannibals".

for example, tersely recorded that on February 6, 1769 "A Man Jumpt Over Board Out the Long Boat and Was Drowned."[27] There is no way to recover whether the act was an escape attempt, or a deliberate suicide. Recovering the intent of slaves from the surviving primary documentation is often difficult or impossible. Many actions that could have been suicide attempts could also have had other motivations. The shortage of water was one such possible motivation. The slave trader Dr. Joseph Cliffe testified that sometimes "the want of water is so great that if they were to see water alongside a great number of them no doubt would jump overboard, without considering that it was salt water."[28] Kipple and Higgins have argued that "the process of dehydration must have afflicted practically every slave on every voyage" and believe that the major factor of the lowered mortality in the eighteenth century was the carrying of more water.[29] Few slaves would have been desperate enough for water to risk death for it while the ship was close to land, but when out the vessel was out at sea for some time it was a different matter.

There were, however, enough unambiguously deliberate suicides to rank suicide as one of the three major forms of resistance on the middle passage along with escape attempts and mutiny. Isert, for example, recounted that after a failed mutiny attempt on his vessel, "when they saw that they could not succeed all sprang overboard into the sea." There can be no doubt that the slaves intended to die: "Some were stubborn even in the face of death, defiantly casting away the rope which had been thrown around their bodies from the ship in order to draw them up, and diving under with force". Sometimes slaves

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[26] John Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 227.
[27] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 235.
[28] Quoted in Robert Edgar Conrad, *World of Sorrow: The African Slave Trade to Brazil* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 35.

were so intent on committing suicide, that they deliberately murdered other slaves in order to realize their intent. On Isert's vessel the slaves were chained in pairs by hand and foot, and "there was a pair who had a difference of opinion, the one demanding that he be saved, the other, on the contrary" was "so desirous of drowning that he pulled the first one under water with him, with great force."[30]

Suicide was a form of resistance commonly used by women as well as men. The journal for the ship *Mary* contained the following entry for March 18: "Two Women Lost Over Board Out the Vessell in the Nit By Neglect of Sd. Mate Not Locking them up a bad Wach kept."[31] The suicide was deliberate: the women had clearly planned their leap overboard. They waited for the cover of darkness to take advantage of the fact that they were not locked up, and presumably had to move quietly in order not to be apprehended by the slavers. Children, however, committed suicide far less often than adults.

Whenever there was an opportunity to commit suicide, there was a greatly heightened risk that some slaves would seize it. In the illegal trade, for example, slaves sometimes jumped into the sea and drowned themselves after the capture of a slaving vessel, not realizing that the capture of the slaving vessel meant their freedom.[32] Some slavers claimed that they kept their slaves naked on board during the middle passage to prevent suicides. They claimed that the loincloths would present an opportunity to slaves

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[29] Kenneth Kiple and Brian Higgins, "Mortality Caused by Dehydration during the Middle Passage" in J.E. Inikori & S.L. Engerman (eds.) *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 330.
[30] Paul Isert, *Letters*, 179.
[31] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 235.
[32] See, for example, T.F. Buxton, *African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 154.

to hang themselves. Whether this is the real reason for not allowing slaves to cover their nakedness is debatable.[33]

Suicide attempts occurred during all stages of the voyage, but were most commonly reported while the ship was still in sight of Africa. As noted, to a degree this reflects the confusion in the sources between desperate, high-risk escape attempts and actual premeditated suicide. The pain and acute sense of hopelessness caused by the closeness of Africa and the knowledge that one was to be taken away from all that one knew and loved into an uncertain and dangerous future, however, also increased suicides. The time that slaves spent close to the coast was a critical one and slavers were aware of the increased risks at this time. Captain Philips, for example, wrote in 1693 that "The Negroes are so wilful and loth to leave their own country, that they have often leap't out of the canoes, boat and ship into the sea, and kept under water till they were drowned, to avoid being taken up and saved by our boats, which pursued them."[34] The slaver Savary agreed with Phillips, and advised that "the moment one has completed one's trade and loaded the negroes on the ship, one must set sail." Savary believed that "more Negroes die before leaving port than during the voyage. Some throw themselves into the sea and others knock their heads against the ship; some hold their breath until they suffocate and others starve themselves."[35] He also felt that severe depressions caused some slaves to give up the will to live as they "have such a great love for their land that they despair to see that they are leaving it forever, and they die from sadness." While slaves were unlikely to have died of depression, increased depression would have weakened their will to live. Some of the deaths resulting – such as some slaves who died as a consequence of

[33] Paul Isert, *Letters*, 176. See chapter 1, "Women" for a discussion on this.
[34] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 402.

refusing food – may not have been *deliberate* actions by slaves to end their own lives, and thus fall outside the purview of this chapter. Others though, will have been deliberate.

"Melancholy" was frequently cited as a cause of slaves not eating.[36] As with other forms of suicide, it is not possible to determine what percentage of slaves who died of starvation were deliberately starving themselves, and what percentage were not eating as a consequence of shock, illness or depression. It is very unlikely that intent did not play a role in some of these deaths. Death by starvation was, however, such a common occurrence on slaving vessels that the slavers had developed various means of force-feeding slaves. Illness and suicide were closely related on the middle passage. Slaves who were ill attempted suicide more often than those who were not. The entry in the journal of Captain Newton was typical. He recorded in 1753 that "When we were putting the slaves down in the evening, one that was sick jumped overboard." Newton's crew rescued the slave, but "he dyed immediately between his weakness and the salt water he had swallowed." The slave's illness probably weakened his will to live. The combination of the rigors of the middle passage and the lesser resilience caused by illness had a synergetic effect, and appears to have frequently tipped the balance between the will to survive and the will to die. Some slaves effectively committed suicide by refusing

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[35] Quoted in R.L. Stein, *The French*, 94.

[36] Many primary documents contain numerous references of slaves dying due to "melancholy." This was probably very severe form of depression. If so, it may have contributed to the deaths of slaves indirectly (for example by loss of appetite, or weakening of the immune system), and also increased the likelihood that slaves would commit suicide. Depression, from the perspective of the slavers, was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it could lead to a greater docility and even apathy among their slaves. As long as this did not threaten the lives or health of the slaves, this was all to the good, and unlikely to be remarked upon. But when it led to illness and suicides, it was very much against their interests. Kenneth Kiple and Brian Higgins have convincing argued that the "melancholy" which led to death on the middle passage may in many cases have been confused with dehydration symptoms. This argument cannot account for all the cases reported in the primary literature, particularly those occurring while the vessel was close to land, or

medicine while ill. The medicines of the day were often ineffective, but those were not the grounds on which they were refused.[37]

As with other forms of resistance, suicide attempts reflected African cultural patterns and expectations. This was true for suicide attempts on land as well as on sea.[38] Orlando Patterson, in his discussion on death and burial rites of slaves in Jamaica has noted that some slaves believed that they would return to Africa after their deaths. Plantation owners were aware of this, and some went as far as to display the bodies of those who committed suicide to demonstrate that they did in fact not return to Africa in an attempt to discourage further suicides.[39] Some contemporary writers believed that this belief encouraged slave suicides. Sir Hans Sloane, for example, believed that slaves, "imagining they shall change their condition by that means, from servile to free … often cut their own throats."[40] Similar observations were made by slavers in the African trade. When "about 12 negroes did wilfully drown themselves, and others starv'd themselves to death," Captain Phillips attributed the deaths to "their belief that when they die they return home to their own country and friends again." He also noted, as some of his contemporaries did, that many slaves believed that the integrity of their body after death was a requirement for their return to Africa. Phillips had been "been informed that some

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had just left Africa, but it is one which needs to be taken seriously. Kenneth Kiple and Brian Higgins, "Mortality", 328.

[37] For an example of such a case, see William Blake, *The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade Ancient and Modern* (Columbus (Ohio): H. Miller, 1861), 135.

[38] In fact, being on sea may have been an added motivation to commit suicide. Bolster has argued for a special significance for large bodies of water in some African religions, and suggested that several African religions espouse a transmigration of souls over or through water. W. Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 62-67.

[39] See also William Pierson, "White Cannibals" 152-4. Pierson's article deals with slaves newly arrived in the Americas. He gives several examples of slaves claiming that the dead would return to Africa as well as of an example of an owner in Barbados displaying a suicide's head on a pole in order to convince other slaves of the futility of this method of escape.

[40] Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 195.

commanders cut off the legs and arms of the most wilful … for they believe if they lose a member, they cannot return home again."[41]

The most common method of committing suicide on the middle passage was deliberate drowning. This forced the slavers to take elaborate precautions. Chaining and a close guard over the slaves were often not sufficient to prevent slave from jumping overboard.[42] Slavers frequently invested in netting strung around the sides of the vessel in order to prevent those slaves who did find the opportunity to jump overboard from reaching the water. The obstacle reduced, but did not prevent suicides. Olaudah Equiano related in his narrative that "two of my wearied countrymen, who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings, and jumped into the sea."[43]

Suicides, especially mass suicide attempts, were often catalyzed by rumours of cannibalism or failed mutinies. In an example of the former, Captain Japhet Bird wrote in the *Boston Weekly Newsletter* of Sept. 15, 1737 that on his vessel "we found a great deal of Discontent among the slaves, particularly the Men." This lasted for two days, "when to our great Amazement above an hundred Men Slaves jump'd over board." The slaves were adamant in their intent to die, and "out of the whole we lost 33 of as good Men

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[41] Snelgrave cut the head off the slave he executed on his vessel in order to demonstrate to the remaining slaves that they could not expect to return to Africa if executed. In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 403 and vol. 2, 359.

[42] Falconbridge described the chaining as follows: "The men negroes, on being brought aboard the ship, are immediately fastened together, two by two, by handcuffs on their wrists, and by irons rivetted on their legs …" and when brought on deck, "Their irons being examined, a long chain, which is locked to a ring-bolt, is run through the rings of the shackles of the men, and then locked to another ring-bolt, fixed also in the deck. By this means fifty or sixty or sometimes more, are fastened to one chain, in order to prevent them rising, or trying to escape." A. Falconbridge, *An Account*, 19 and 21.

[43] In H.L. Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 69. The authenticity Equiano's narrative has, however, recently been questioned. Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery and Abolition* 20, 3 (December 1999). However, perhaps the question of authenticity is not that pertinent in this case: even in a work of the

Slaves as we had on board, who would not endevour to save themselves, but resolv'd to die, and sunk directly down." The incident was "owing to one of their Countrymen, who came on board and in a joking manner told the Slaves they were first to have their Eyes put out, and then be eaten."[44] Fear of being cannibalized also caused some slaves to starve themselves, though whether this was a side effect of depression, an attempt to make themselves less palatable, or an attempt at suicide is often not clear. John Barbot wrote in 1723 that "many" slaves were "prepossessed with the opinion that they are carried like sheep to the slaughter, and that the Europeans are fond of their flesh." He implied that it was depression that caused them not to eat, and argued that the "notion so far prevails with some, as to make them fall into a deep melancholy and despair, and to refuse all sustenance, tho' never so much compelled and even beaten to oblige them to take some nourishment." Yet in spite of all attempts to force them to eat, Barbot admitted that "they will starve to death." He asserted that "I have had several instances in my own slaves both on board and at Guadalupe."[45] Whatever any given slaves motivation might have been to starve him or herself when rumors of cannibalism spread through the vessel, they often led to desperate and self-destructive actions by slaves. The large numbers of references in the primary literature leave no doubt that it was a recurring problem for slavers.

Suicide and suicide attempts frequently occurred in the aftermath of failed mutinies. On the *Albion*, for example, after a mutiny was suppressed, "Many of the most mutinous leaped overboard and drowned themselves with much resolution, shewing no

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imagination, the netting on ships were a force which slaves who contemplated suicide by drowning had to contend with.

[44] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 460.

[45] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 289-90.

manner of concern for life."[46] Partly this was because of a fear of repercussions, but it was also in part because the chaos and confusion that surrounded these events offered an opportunity to commit suicide. Like suicides, escape attempts were a common form of resistance.

Unlike suicides, escapes could only be attempted while the slaver was close to land. Slavers, however, sometimes spent several months along the coast of Africa attempting to load a full complement of slaves.[47] Slavers took extra precautions when they were close to land. Slaves were nearly always "put in irons, two and two shackled together, to prevent their mutiny or swimming ashore."[48] Women slaves were more likely to be chained while the vessel was on the coast than while it was out at sea. Nonetheless, slaves occasionally found or made the opportunity to effect their escape from the vessel. But escaping the slave ship was no guarantee of escaping slavery.

There was a very real risk of recapture by Africans on shore, and subsequent resale. This was such a large risk that Captain Atkins noted in 1721 that it was a major disincentive for slaves to attempt to escape. He believed that as the slaves had "no other Prospect ... but falling into the hands of the same Rogues that sold them" this "very much lessens the Danger."[49] If, and to what degree, this did in fact reduce escape attempts is not possible to recover, but the danger of recapture was real.

There are many accounts that relate the recapture of slaves after a mutiny or escape attempt. The slaver Nicholas Owen, while on the coast of Africa entered the

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[46] Reprinted in George F. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (Wesport, Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1970), 83-4.
[47] David Eltis, "Mortality and Voyage Length in the Middle Passage: New Evidence from the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 44, 2 (1984).
[48] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 402.

following in his diary: "Febery 3 1758 Lately we have the malloncoly news of Capt. Potter's being cut of by the slaves at Mano and the ship drove ashoar; the captain, second mate & docter are all killed in a barbarous manner by the slaves." In spite of the success of the mutiny – a rare occurrence – "The slaves are all taken by the natives again and sould to other vessells." His conclusion that "they have nothing mended their condition by thier enterpize" held true for many escape attempts.[50]

As with suicide, slaves were most likely to attempt an escape when the vessel was about to sail. Slavers knew that this was a risky time, and anticipated desperate last minute attempts from slaves. They generally tried to hide their departure time from slaves, but this was not always possible. On Falconbridge's voyage, "The night before our departure, the tent was struck." The slaves understood what this meant: it "was no sooner percieved by some of the negroe women on board, than it was considered as a prelude to our sailing." Consequently "about eighteen of them, when they were sent between decks, threw themselves into the sea through one of the gun ports." Success rates were low for escapees, and lower yet when the vessel was about to sail. Falconbridge's ship proved to be no exception. The slavers quickly recovered all the women, except one who made land. But she was "was not long after, taken about a mile from the shore."[51]

As with other forms of resistance, escape attempts could lead both to violent attacks on crew and suicides. On Snelgrave's vessel, a slave who attempted to escape confessed that "he had kill'd the Cooper, with no other view than that he and his

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[49] He had a point. Even if slaves managed to escape immediate recapture, they still faced an uncertain and dangerous future. They were usually a very long distance from their original homes, from their families and communities. They would have faced a future fraught with dangers. In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 281.
[50] Nicholas Owen, *Journal of a Slave Dealer: A View of Some Remarkable Axcedents in the Life of Nics. Owen on the Coast of Africa and America from the Year 1746 to the Year 1757.* Eveline Martin (ed.) (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1930), 106.
[51] A. Falconbridge, *An Account*, 31.

Countrymen might escape undiscovered by swimming on shore." He did not intend to kill the crewmember. As with most slave resistance, freedom was a far more important concern than revenge. After escaping the holds, the group the slave was with "observed, that all the white Men set to watch were asleep ... but passing by the Cooper, who was centry, and he beginning to awake, the Negro rashly struck him on the head."[52] The slave was executed for his deed. Attempted flight was linked with overt violence in another manner too.

Escape attempts, like suicides, frequently took place after a failed mutiny attempt. A failed mutiny on Snelgrave's vessel was one such case. He reported that after successfully putting down the mutiny, "the two Ringleaders were missing, having, it seems, jumped overboard as soon as they found their Project defeated." The slaves "were drowned," but whether they deliberately committed suicide or were desperately trying to escape cannot be established.[53] It is often difficult to distinguish between the two. Most mutinies occurred close to land, making this a common problem.

Sometimes, however, suicide, not escape, was clearly the intent. In 1785 the slaves on a Dutch ship mutinied "on the very day that the ship was to sail to West India." Initially, the mutiny was successful. "The Europeans were overpowered and beaten to death, except for a young cabin-boy who had climbed to the top of the main mast." However, "Before the Whites had been completely overpowered, they had shot off several alarm signals which had been heard on land, and a number of canoes manned with armed, free Blacks had been sent out to help. As soon as these approached the ship and the rebellious slaves saw that they had become the losers, they decided to do away

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[52] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 358.
[53] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 354.

with themselves. With this in mind, one of them ran with a firebrand to the powder magazine and blew it up." The devastation was enormous. After the explosion, "The canoes did not fish up more than some thirty Blacks, and the cabin-boy as well. The rest, more than 500 in number, fell victim to the waves."[54] This may have been the action of one individual who decided the fate of the rest of the slaves. Certainly unanimity was unlikely in such situations. Cuagano Ottabah, however, suggested that there was near unanimity in a similar incident on the vessel in which he made the middle passage. The slaves on his ship had conspired to blow up the ship, but were prevented from doing so by a betrayal by one of the women slaves.[55] But both cases were exceptions. Far more mutinies failed even after the slaves managed to take control of the powder room than there were vessels blown up by slaves. Ship-wide suicide pacts were very rare on the middle passage. Often if a mutiny failed and escape was not possible, a number of slaves attempted to commit suicide, while the rest sought to survive the aftermath as best they could. In addition, crew were on their guard for escape and suicide attempts after a failed mutiny.

Slavers were generally vigilant, and their precautions were critical in reducing opportunities for resistance and rebellion. For slaves there was an extremely fine line between a glimmer of opportunity that might just possibly lead to success, and a situation that offered no hope. Distinguishing one from the other was not easy, and the wrong choice was easily and frequently made. The actions that slavers took to prevent resistance were in direct relation to their assessment of the risks of the slaves resisting. The elaborate precautions that were standard on slaving vessels – which included carrying

[54] Recounted in P. Isert, *Letters*, 176.

large crews, public and violent punishment, chains, whips and guns, and shackling and chaining slaves, to name but the most obvious – testified to the willingness of slaves to rebel. Meier and Rudwick have found that on land "slave revolts tended to cluster in less oppressive slave areas."[56] This held true on slaving vessels too. But the stakes on slaving vessels were so high, that "relatively less oppressive" was still by land standards, very oppressive indeed.

There were many reasons for slaves on the middle passage not to resist. The low success rate of resistance attempts made the risk / benefit ratio very unattractive. It is not possible to precisely quantify the success rates, but the anecdotal evidence in the primary documents clearly indicates far more failures than successes. If one considers that successful attempts were far more likely to be recorded than unsuccessful ones, the evidence becomes overwhelming. Slaves rightly feared the consequences of failed attempts at resistance and rebellion. Life was cheap on board a slaving vessel – the exact value of a slave's life had very recently been determined, in purely pecuniary terms. It was easily risked, and easily lost. The slaves knew this, and not all by any means, were willing to risk their lives on a long shot at a successful mutiny or escape attempt. In spite of the relative commonness of suicide as a form of resistance, only a relatively small number of slaves had determined that their lives were simply not worth having.

Fear not only inhibited slaves from attempting or participating in acts of resistance, but also caused some slaves to betray the plots of their fellow captives. This was a common occurrence, though certainly not inevitable, as the multitude of resistance

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[55] Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments of the Evil of Slavery* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1787), 10.
[56] August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *The Making of Black America: Essays in Negro Life and History*, Rudwick, Elliot (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 178.

and resistance attempts that did take place demonstrate. Captain Newton, reflecting on his luck on a completed voyage remarked that "The slaves on board were likewise frequently plotting insurrections and were sometimes on the very brink of mischief, but it was always disclosed on the brink of time."[57] His experience was mirrored by many in the trade. Just as identifying the acts of resistance was not the same as identifying the spirit of resistance or the will to resist among slaves, so the identifying acts of betrayal does not amount to identifying acquiescence among the slaves. Motivations for betrayals could range from currying favour with the crew to an attempt to save fellow slaves from what the betrayer might have considered an attempt that was doomed to failure, and that could only have negative consequences for all on board. It did mean that among slaves, as among any other group of human beings, not everybody could be trusted. This inhibited some and doomed other resistance attempts. But serious forms of resistance and rebellion were still far more common than comparable acts on land were.

Schuler has noted that on land, African born slaves were more likely to rebel than those slaves born in the New World were.[58] Possible reasons for this included that first generation African slaves might have been more acutely aware of their loss of freedom, a lack of socialization in the New World tradition of slavery, and the effect of missing a homeland and community that they clearly remembered. It is also possible that the experience of the middle passage may also have contributed to their greater willingness to rebel. Slaves who had made the middle passage had been in circumstances in which the notion of a full scale mutiny against white domination was not only thinkable, but

[57] Quoted in Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 511.
[58] Monica Schuler, "Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas," *Journal of Social History* 3 (1970).

was probably planned, and possibly even attempted. The experience of the middle passage may thus have contributed towards a tradition of violent resistance by slaves who made the crossing. Slaves who were known to have rebelled or mutinied negatively effected their price on arrival in the Americas, which suggests that buyers equated resistance on sea with an increased chance of resistance on land, and sought to avoid it.[59]

In spite of the willingness of slaves to resist and rebel on slaving vessels, the middle passage was not a propitious location for resistance. Most slaves decided that their survival interests were not best served by engaging in overt resistance. Yet in spite of all the excellent reasons for not resisting on the middle passage, many slaves did do so. Their desperation led them to accept very bad odds, and they seized whatever opportunities arose or that they could create. Nowhere can this been seen more clearly than in the occurrences of mutinies on the middle passage, the subject of the following chapter.

[59] Snelgrave commenting on a mutinous group of slaves delivered to Jamaica that "... their former Misbehaviour coming to be publickly known, none of the Planters cared to buy them, tho' offered at a low Price.". Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 361.

CHAPTER 5: MUTINY

"I say, when thus circumstanced, it is not to be expected that they will tamely resign themselves to their situation. It is always expected that they will attempt to regain their liberty if possible."[1]

Slave mutinies on the middle passage, more than any other form of slave resistance, speak to the imagination and moral sensibilities of writers and readers alike. Slave insurrections on land have been extensively studied, but mutinies on sea have thusfar received more sporadic, and generally superficial attention.[2] Mutiny was, from the perspective of the slaver, without doubt the most serious form of resistance in which a slave could participate. It both posed a direct threat to white lives, property and ascendancy, and set a precedent of undermining the authority of the slaver. Mutiny was the only slave initiative that threatened the viability of the entire journey.

I define a slave mutiny on the middle passage as a violent attempt by more than one slave to overthrow the existing structure of command on a slaving vessel, with an end goal

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[1] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750-1754 (With Newton's 'Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade')*, Bernard Martin and M. Spurrell, eds. (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 103.

[2] The mutiny on the *Amistad* has received by far the most attention. See for example Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the "Amistad": The Saga of a Slave Revolt and its impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Sidney Kaplan, "Black Mutiny on the Amistad," *Massachusetts Review* 10 (1969) and William A. Owens, *Black Mutiny: The Revolt on the Schooner Amistad*. (New York: John Day, 1953). However, as the Amistad mutiny did not occur on the passage between Africa and the New World, it falls outside of the purview of this chapter. There have been very few academic articles that consider mutinies on slaving vessels, and no full-length works, in spite of Greene's call for more attention to be paid to the subject as early as 1944. L. Greene, "Mutiny on the Slave Ships," *Phylon* 5 (Jan. 1944). What work there is, is generally not of high quality: see for example Okon Edet Uya, "Slave Revolts of the Middle Passage: A Neglected Theme," *Calabar Historical Journal* 1 (1976). The best writing on mutinies is dispersed in larger works dealing with the trade as a whole – these often contain a few pages on slave mutinies. Sometimes they seldom amount to much more than an acknowledgment that they did occur, and a number of examples. Although quantification of the trade is his main concern, Joseph Inkori's "The Unmeasured Hazards of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Sources, Causes, and Historiographical Implications," *Unpublished paper, UNESCO conference on 'La route de l'esclave'* (Ouidah, Benin) (1-5 Sept. 1994) is among the best work on slave mutinies. An easily accessible primary source that contains many examples of mutinies is Elizabeth Donnan's *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, vols. 1 – 4. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930-35). Primary documents on mutinies are easy to locate, although they are often fragmentary

of controlling the vessel. The success of the attempt does not matter by my definition. For a mutiny to have taken place, however, a physical attempt must have been made to overthrow the current commanders of the vessel. Thus mutiny plots that were not carried out, or that were betrayed or discovered before actual action against the commanders of the vessel was undertaken, are not by my terminology mutinies. Nor was any violent attack against the commanders of a vessel a mutiny, though often the primary documents describe the defying of the authority of the existing power structure on a vessel as a mutiny. By my terminology, if there was no effort to take over the vessel, it was a rebellion.

Mutinies, mutiny attempts, and the constant threat of both were an integral part of the slaving experience for both crew and financiers of slaving voyages. The primary literature is replete with warnings by owners to their captains and officers to be on their guard against them, often accompanied by admonishments not to mistreat the slaves, as it was generally believed that such treatment heightened the chances of a mutiny occurring. The instructions to James Westmore by Thomas Starke, sent in 1702 were typical. Starke instructed Westmore to be sure that "no other of your Men abuse the Negroes and also be sure to you keep a continuall Centry to prevent your Negroes getting to your Armes or any riseing per them."[3] But few slavers needed such warnings. They were well aware of the danger of mutiny, and took elaborate precautions to prevent them.

Slaves were implicitly and explicitly intimidated. They were implicitly intimidated by their dehumanization and daily treatment on board. Both left them with

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descriptions.

[3] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 76. These kinds of instructions did differ in emphasis. Samuel Waldo for example, instructed Captain Rhodes in 1734 that, "For your own Safety as well as mine You'll have the needful Guard over your Slaves, and putt not too much confidence in the Women nor Children least they happen to be Instrumental to your being surprised which may be fatall." E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 45. Henry Laurens, writing in 1767, emphasized neither arms nor women and children, but placed his faith in stealth, counseling that his captains "be on their guard constantly without discovering to the Negroes they

few illusions about the value of their lives, or were they stood vis a vie their captors. They were also implicitly intimidated by the security precautions they were constantly subjected to. Overt intimidation came in the form of warnings on how to behave, and at its most overt level, harsh physical punishments and executions. Some measures intimidated on both levels – the carrying of a whip on the one hand, and the use of it on the other, for example.

The first priority of slavers was to create a situation that made a mutiny, if not impossible for slaves, at least exceedingly difficult. Leg and hand shackles were standard for male slaves, as was chaining to the sides of the vessel when they were permitted to come on deck. [4] There is disagreement in the primary sources as to whether women and younger slaves were chained, and whether slaves were consistently chained when out at sea, as excessive chaining could negatively effect the health and sometimes the survival chances of slaves. Powerful slaves, or those that the crew suspected posed a high risk of rebelling, were often chained and shackled more heavily than the average slave, in spite of the health risks for the slave. The same held true for slaves who had previously attempted a mutiny. This could lead to dissatisfaction from owners, as was the in 1680 when the agents for the Royal African company wrote from Barbados about Captain Butcher's voyage. They complained that "wee conceive many of the men are much the worse for being soe loaded with Irons as they have bin all the Voyage the Captaine sayng

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are so." E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 4, 418.

[4] Newton described the procedure as follows: "before their number exceeds, perhaps, ten or fifteen, they are all put in irons; in most ships, two and two together. And frequently, they are not thus confined, as they may most conveniently stand or move, the right hand and foot of one to the left of the other, but across; that is, the hand and foot of each on the same side, whether right or left, are fettered together: so that they cannot move either hand or foot, but with great caution, and with perfect consent. In the night they are confined below; in the daytime (if the weather be fine) they are on deck; and as they are brought up by pairs, a chain is put through a ring upon their irons, this is likewise locked down to the ringbolts, which are fastened, at certain intervals, to the deck." John Newton, *The Journal*, 103.

they are very unruly and once designed to rise and cut him and his People off."[5] But any time the slaves spent out of chains was dangerous for crew.[6] Chains, shackles, and leg-bolts formed a major and effective protection against mutiny attempts. The checking of the shackles and chains was a safety precaution that paid high dividends if conscientiously done.

Barricados were standard on slaving vessels of any size. A barricado, also called a bulwark, was a strong wooden wall built across the width of the vessel to prevent the male slaves crossing to the stern of the slaver where, among other things, the arms room was. It had a door built into it to allow crew to cross, and was, ideally, high and smooth enough to prevent mutinying slaves from climbing it. The barricado segregated the sexes, prevented the slaves from getting to the arms room, and offered the crew a secure location from which to fire into the slaves in case of mutiny. It was standard policy to allow a crewmember to be killed if caught on the wrong side of a barricado when an uprising occurred, rather than to allow them past the bulwark if there was a chance the mutinying slaves might cross too.[7] Falconbridge described a barricado as "a partition ... of inch deal boards, which reaches athwart the ship.... It is about eight feet in height, and is made to project two feet over the sides of the ship. In this barricado there is a door, at which a centinel is placed during the time the slaves are permitted to come upon deck. ... there are holes in it, wherein blunderbusses are fixed, and sometimes a cannon, it is found

[5] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 259.

[6] Slaves seized whatever opportunities they had. John Bell, reporting a slave mutiny to John Fletcher in 1776 wrote "We had 160 Slaves on board and were that Day lett out of the Deck Chains in order to wash, about 2 Oclock They began by siesing upon the Boatswain." E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 323.

[7] Paul Isert found himself in just such a situation. He wrote that after the attack had begun (and after he had received a blow to the head) "since they were also chained at the feet I was able to crawl away from them, and I reached the bulwark door. Here I now battered in vain, because, when the crew tried to let me in, such a number of Blacks seized the door that the crew had great difficulty in closing it. Furthermore, it is established policy that it is better to let a European be killed than allow the Blacks to gain control of that

very convenient for quelling the insurrections that now and then happen.[8] The building of a barricado was an effective precaution and one seldom neglected in the trade.[9]

Ship guns were often carried for defense against privateers and pirates. They also played a central role in the intimidation of slaves, and occasionally in the putting down of a mutiny. Financiers sometimes ordered that the guns be kept ready at all times. Captain Overstall, for example, was instructed to "Let your Great Guns and small Armes be Loaded and in readiness for use and Service upon any occasion that may happen." His financier worried about both eventualities, arguing that "by this means you may prevent being surprised by any Enemies whatsoever … and it may likewise be usefull to you should hereafter an Insurrection happen or be attempted amongst your Negroes."[10]

Sometimes the ship's guns were fired regularly in order to intimidate the slaves, as was the case on Isert's vessel. He reported that "On top of [the barricado] there are as many small cannons and guns as there is room for, and these are kept loaded at all times and are shot off every evening in order to keep the slaves in a state of fear."[11] But whether or not the guns were regularly fired, there were nearly always some on the barricado, in order to intimidate the slaves, and, failing that, to quell mutinies.[12] The use of the "great guns" guns was, however, a last resort. They could easily create carnage

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door." P. Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 178.

[8] Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 6.

[9] For example, the mutiny on Captain Clarke's vessel came to nothing after the crew insulated themselves behind the barricado. The ship's doctor wrote that after the uprising began, the slaves "Continued to threw Staves, billets of wood etc., and in endeavoring to get down the Barricado, or over it for upwards of 40 Minutes, when finding they could not effect it all the Fantee and Most of the Accra Men Slaves jumped overboard, in my opinion with an intend to get up abaft, but the Currant running to strong to leeward very few of them could fetch the Ship again ." E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 323.

[10] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 366.

[11] P. Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 177.

[12] This was standard policy. Captain Newton, for example, reports the same. He wrote in his diary "This day fixed 4 swivel blunderbusses in the barricado, which with the 2 carriage guns … make a formidable appearance on the main deck." He trusted that they would "be sufficient to intimidate the slaves from any

among the slaves, something that slavers were anxious to avoid if at all possible.

It made good sense for slavers to carry at least one swivel gun on deck in order to intimidate the slaves. Vessels for which no gun data is preserved, or who carried no guns consistently reported a greater number of insurrections than vessels that did.[13] This held true for both the English and French trade, the only ones for which sufficient data are available to generalize from, as the tables below show.

	No. of cases	No. of Insurrections	Insurrection per Voyage
No Guns Data	22112	278	1 per 79.5
Guns Data Available	5121	60	1 per 85.4

Table 5.1. Insurrections and Guns on Board Data (All Nationalities)

	No. of cases	No. of Insurrections	Insurrection per Voyage
No Guns Data	3877	142	1 per 27.3
Guns Data Avail	157	2	1 per 78.5

Table 5.2. Insurrections and Guns on Board Data (French Trade)

	No. of cases	No. of Insurrections	Insurrection per Voyage
No Guns Data	4747	56	1 per 84.8
Guns Data Avail.	6419	62	1 per 103.5

Table 5.3. Insurrections and Guns on Board Data (English Trade)

This finding is all the more remarkable as the vessels for which data on the guns are available tend to be the voyages about which more is known in general; that is, they

thoughts of insurrection." J. Newton, *The Journal*, 28-29.

form a set of better documented voyages. Thus surviving reports of insurrections should be more common. However, the evidence shows the opposite, further strengthening the conclusion that carrying guns on board did serve to reduce the number of slave mutinies. Slaves were not generally given to suicidal revolts, and slavers who exercised due precaution could reduce the incidence of mutiny considerably.

Active promotion of the sanctity of a white skin and of the aura of white invincibility were both important in preventing slave mutinies, as was the appearance of unshakeable solidarity between slavers. Though not often addressed explicitly in the primary documents, the actions of slavers clearly show this.[14] There was an implicit code between slavers to help each other quell mutinies when they occurred, regardless of nationality. The primary literature records several such incidents.[15]

In spite of all attempts to intimidate slaves, and all steps to prevent a mutiny occurring, they did take place, and regularly. But the inclination to mutiny was by no means universal. Not all slaves chose to risk their lives on a very small chance of success, with certain harsh physical punishment – often death – as the consequence of failure. The failed mutiny that took place on the *Robert*, under Captain Harding in 1721 was a case

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[13] The effect is probably much larger than shown below, as many of the vessels for which no data on guns is available will have carried them.

[14] Sometimes they were explicated. Snelgrave explicitly warned his slaves about the inviolability of a white skin in the primary documents. See for example E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 342 for Captain Snelgrave's warning to slaves who dared strike a white person, or John Newton's comments on the importance of an appearance of solidarity between crewmembers in *The Journal*, 72. See also Chapter 6, "Survival Strategies."

[15] Not all such interventions were entirely successful, though most were. For example, when the Dutch vessel the *Neptunis* was taken over by its slaves, an English vessel came to their aid. They fired into *Neptunis*, accidentally hitting the powder room, causing the vessel to explode. No crewmembers on board survived the explosion, though eight slaves out of an indeterminate number did. Reported in J.M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1990), 167. Bosman was more lucky; his slaves "would certainly have mastered the ship, if a French and English ship had not very fortunately happened to lye by us; who perceiving our firing our distress gun.... immediately came to our assistance with chalops and men." The mutiny was put down. E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 438.

point. While the vessel was at anchor off the coast of Africa, a male slave "Tomba" "had combined with three or four of the stoutest of his Country-men to kill the Ship's Company, and attempt their Escapes, while they had a shore to fly to." Slaves weighed their choices carefully, and did not always agree on what constituted an acceptable risk. Tomba "encouraged the Accomplices what he could, with the Prospect of Liberty, but could now at the Push, engage only one more and the Woman to follow him upon Deck."[16]

It is not clear who among the slaves was most likely to mutiny, or to organize a mutiny. The fact of enslavement, the conditions on the vessel, and the treatment of the slaves cannot alone account for any given mutiny. Mutinies on sea, as on land, required a catalyst in the form of one or more slaves who dared to plan a mutiny, who had the force of personality to convince other slaves to join, and who had the courage to put their plans into action. The ethnic group to which these leaders belonged, a previous position of authority, their charisma and oratorical skills, and even their physical stature may all have been relevant elements.[17] The primary sources, however, too seldom provide information detailed enough to determine any of the above with any degree of confidence, and certainly not often enough to allow generalizations. There is evidence that on land slaves were sometimes coerced to join plots. The evidence for this on sea, too, is much less due to more sporadic documentation, but it is safe to assume that coercion will have played a central role in combating the central threat that any mutiny plot faced: that of betrayal.

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[16] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 266.

[17] See David Barry Gaspar, *Bondsmen and Rebels: A Study Master-Slave Relations in Antigua with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), August Meier & Elliot Rudwick, *The Making of Black America: Essays in Negro Life and History*, (New York: Atheneum, 1973) and Monica Schuler, "Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas," *Journal of Social History* 3 (1970). All have identified various characteristics that they believe leaders of rebellions to have had on land. Their work all concern rebellions on land, but several might be extrapolated

Betrayal was a major hazard to slaves plotting a mutiny. A large number of plots were betrayed; possibly more mutinies were betrayed than were attempted. In spite of the fact that betrayed mutiny plots were less likely to be recorded than actual mutinies, references to betrayals are extremely common in contemporary documents. Betrayal of plots on sea as on land could come from a variety of individuals, and for a host of reasons. Crews sometimes appointed slaves to betray their fellow slaves, linguists are frequently reported as having betrayed plots, and sometimes slaves who were accorded special privileges while on board betrayed their fellow captives. Sometimes children betrayed plots, and sometimes women did. Sometimes the betrayals were inadvertent or coerced, and sometimes they were deliberate. The reasons for betrays by slaves varied; ethnic rivalry, fear of the consequences of a failed mutiny, the hope of a reward, or the honestly held conviction that they were saving their fellows from an attempt doomed to failure could all led to the betrayal of a mutiny plot. In spite of the risks of betrayal and the consequences of failure, the number of mutinies that occurred has been considerably under-reported, and under-estimated by scholars.

Neither modern scholars nor contemporary observers have satisfactorily addressed the frequency of mutinies and mutiny attempts. Mutinies were under-reported for several reasons. It was not in the slaver's interests to disclose information about mutinies. Slaves who were known to have engaged in uprisings at sea could fetch lower prices at their destinations, thus motivating captains and owners to suppress such information. Snelgrave, commenting on slaves (not his own!) who were landed in the Americas after several failed mutiny attempts, noted that "with their former Misbehavior becoming publickly known,

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to include mutinies on sea, though not enough is known about the instigators of mutinies to be certain.

none of the Planters cared to buy them, tho' offered at a low Price."[18] That this was a structural rather than an incidental problem is confirmed by a Bristol slaver who, in 1788, sued his insurance company to claim compensation for the lower price he received for his slaves in the West Indies after they had mutinied twice during the middle passage. He reasoned that, by being insured against a mutiny, he deserved compensation for the lower sale price too, as it had been as a direct consequence of the mutinies.[19] Additionally, as ship captains were only very infrequently the owners of either ship or cargo, their reputations were important to them. A reputation for suffering too many mutinies was not advantageous when seeking later employment.[20]

Mutinies that were nipped in the bud or quelled without serious damage were often not reported. When they were, the off-hand manner in which they were often referred to suggests that they may even have been considered too common to merit reporting. Sometimes they were mentioned *en passant* an entirely different matter and sometimes they merited only a few words in the captain's report. Mutinies that were publicly reported, perhaps catering to the sensationalist taste of readers, tended to be bloodier, and result in the loss of the vessel far more frequently than the average mutiny. Though this type of mutiny, particularly those that resulted in the loss of white lives or of the vessel were uncommon, most newspaper accounts of mutinies report crew casualties. Far more mutinies were put down quickly with no loss of life, or the loss of a small number of slaves. And these are not nearly as well preserved in the historical record.

Records of mutinies and mutiny attempts written by those in the trade tend to treat

[18] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1. 361.

[19] He lost his case. Helen Catterall, vol. 1, *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926), 19 - 22.

[20] That reputations counted in the slave trade, was confirmed by Barbot, who started a discussion on the

the subject as an everyday business, unremarkable, and as an expected part of the trade. Snelgrave, for example wrote that "I have been on several Voyages were no attempts by Slaves was made to mutiny", implying that this was exceptional, and that such attempts occurred on the majority of vessels.[21] And of course, for every mutiny that occurred, far more were plotted, only to be betrayed or not put into action for other reasons.

Insurance records offer further evidence that mutinies were a major risk in the trade. Vessels only insured themselves against serious loss. Even though mutinies that resulted in the loss of a large number of slaves, or less frequently yet, the loss of the vessel were relatively rare, mutinies were considered enough of a risk factor to be taken seriously when calculating the financial prospects of a slaving voyage.[22] The rate of insurance against insurrection was generally about 5% of the value of the cargo.[23] This would have been a very excessive rate if mutinies were not extremely common, as it assumed (minus the profit margin) that one out of twenty voyages would be entirely lost due to mutiny. This was not nearly the case: of the mutinies of which records have survived, most were put down without loss of life, and those that did cause loss of life usually cost only a small fraction of the slaves on board their lives. Very few resulted in the loss of the entire cargo and / or the

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care of slaves on board, with "if they [the ships' officers] value their own reputation and their owners advantage" in a discussion on slave management on board a slaver. In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 464.

[21] He also suffered several mutiny attempts on a number of his voyages. E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 354. Stein, writing on the frequency of mutinies in French trade, accurately summed up the matter when he wrote "it seems likely they were common, so common in fact that they scarcely merited mentioning in the captains' reports." R.L. Stein, *The French*, 103.

[22] The *Boston NewsLetter* of September 9, 1731, for example, while commenting on the decline of profitability in the trade explicitly mentioned slave revolts as one of the primary culprits. After relating a detailed account of a mutiny, and complaining about mutinies in general, the piece concludes with the remark that "What with Negroes rising, and other Disappointment, in the Voyages thither, have occasioned a great Reducement in our Merchants Gains." E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 431.

[23] See E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 216-7 and 222 for two typical insurance policies. The first insured against loss only by insurrection at 5%, the second provided a more comprehensive coverage for 8%, but specified that 5% was the rate for insurance against insurrection. See also H. Wish, "American Slave Insurrections Before 1861," *Journal of Negro History* XXII (July 1937), 302-303 for further confirmation in the primary literature of the 5% figure.

vessel. But even assuming a healthy profit margin, the cost of insurance clearly suggests that the risk of mutiny was high, and that they occurred much more frequently than has been assumed.

Few writers on the trade have ventured to give firm estimates of how many mutinies occurred on slaving vessels. Of those that have ventured estimates, most report very low figures, in keeping with the records of the vessels they have at hand. This documentation is, as noted above, likely to be very incomplete, and to contain a disproportionate number of mutinies that had serious consequences, which though better reported constituted only a very small fraction of all mutinies.[24] Postma is an exception to this trend. Using a small but unusually well-documented set of 55 voyages of Dutch slavers he found that one in five reported mutinies on board.[25] And in even this dataset, his findings must be assumed to be a minimum figure, as not all mutinies were reported, especially minor and attempted ones. It is impossible to ascertain with any degree certainty how many mutinies and mutiny attempts took place on slaving vessels, but it seems unlikely that fewer than one in three or four vessels made the crossing without some attempt by the slaves to mutiny. It is possible that fully half experienced mutiny attempts. If the definition of mutiny attempts includes betrayed plots, or plots that were otherwise discovered before they could be carried out, the figure was probably higher yet.

The Atlantic slavery dataset is not a reliable source for quantifying the incidence of revolts that took place on the middle passage, or the number of slave deaths caused by revolts, as the table below shows. Rather, it illustrates the lack of reliability of the

[24] See for example Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 151 and James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 299-300. See also Joseph E. Inikori, "Measuring the Atlantic Slave Trade: An Assessment of Curtin and Anstey," *Journal of African History* 17, 2 (1976), 2 for an example of concentrating on only those mutinies

reporting of mutinies.

	Size of Dataset	No. Reported Revolts	Per 1000 Voyages	Ave. no. slaves died in revolts	Total no. died
All Nationalities	27233	338	12.4	1.87	632
English	11166	118	10.5	(No Data)	(No Data)
French	4034	144	35.7	4.39	632
United States	1791	35	19.5	(No Data)	(No Data)
Portuguese	5149	0	0	(No Data)	(No Data)
Dutch	1236	27	21.8	(No Data)	(No Data)
Others	3857	14	3.6	(No Data)	(No Data)

Table 5.4. Overview of Revolts as Reported in the Atlantic Slavery Dataset

The enormous disparity between the number of reported insurrections per nation indicates that the dataset is far from complete. All the nationalities, including the French, are certain to be understated. But even if the French data is used as an absolute minimum, there will have been at least 1,285 to 1,400 mutinies on the middle passage, a figure that demands attention from historians.

Several identifiable factors contributed to the likelihood of a mutiny taking place, and some factors, though it would seem logical that they increase the possibility of a mutiny occurring, did not. There were also several factors that had the potential to lead to a mutiny, but were sufficiently guarded against to make them minor risks when taken over the trade. Sometimes a mutiny occurred through such an unusual lack of care by the slavers, something that happened so seldom, that it is difficult to consider it a structural risk to the trade. The American slaver, the *Albion*, for example, suffered a bloody mutiny that can only be ascribed to the incredible shortsightedness of the crew. Many of the

that resulted in a great loss of life.

slaves "were provided with knives which we had indiscreetly given them two or three days before, not suspecting the least attempt of this nature from them."[26] Complacency by crew was always dangerous. There are examples of slaves mutinying because of guards slept on their watch or did not check the slaves' shackles regularly.[27] But negligence of such basic safety precautions was rare.

The relative freedom slaves had on board played an important role in determining whether a slaver would suffer a mutiny. Slavers knew this, and nearly always restricted them accordingly, which made this a minor overall contributing factor to the incidence of mutinies. Slaves could sometimes engineer relatively more freedom for themselves and take advantage of that freedom, as occurred on Newton's vessel. There, a "young man ... who has been the whole voyage out of irons, first on account of a large ulcer, and since for his seeming good behaviour gave them [the slaves] a large marlin spike." The slaves in the hold then used this to free themselves; Newton reported that in an hour's time he "found nearly 20 of them had broke their irons."[28] But it was far more common for slaves to be without irons due to other reasons than "good behaviour."

There is conflict in the primary accounts about the relative freedom slaves had on board when out of sight of land. At least to a degree, this reflects the differing policies of captains. Women generally had greater liberty of movement on board than men did. Men were virtually always chained while the ship was close to the coast, and were usually – though not always – confined for the duration of the middle passage. It is difficult to

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[25] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 166-167.

[26] Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 456.

[27] Financiers and crew alike knew this was a risk; Captain Barry was warned in his instructions from his financiers in 1726 to keep his slaves shackled and bolted, and to see that the crew took their guarding duties seriously, because "sleeping in their watch has often been fatall and many a good voyage (which otherwise might be made) entirely ruind." In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 328. See for further examples Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*, 156-7 and Okon Edet Uya, "Slave Revolts," 80, 91.

establish with any certainty what percentage of slavers unchained their male slaves during the Atlantic crossing proper, but it appears to have been a minority. Sick slaves were relatively safe to leave unironed, but occasionally healthy slaves were let out of their irons to aid the crew, which posed considerably more risk.[29]

Just as freedom from irons posed a risk to crew, so did the times when the male slaves were above deck. This was usually at mealtimes though it could also be when slaves were permitted to wash themselves, or simply to escape the stifling hold of the vessel. Again, slavers were well aware of this danger, and the primary sources contain several examples of both warnings to be cautious at these times, as well as examples of mutinies occurring in these circumstances. Slavers took extra precautions when it was necessary to have large numbers of slaves on deck simultaneously, even if the slaves were ironed. The guard was sharpened and the guns on the barricado were manned. Captain Phillips, for example, wrote that at meal times "therefor all that time, what of our men are not employ'd in distributing their victuals to them, and settling them, stand to their arms; and some with lighted matches at the great guns that yaun upon them, laden with partridge, till they have done."[30] Some captains allowed only a limited number of slaves to come above decks at a time, preferring to feed, wash or exercise the slaves in

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[28] John Newton, *The Journal*, 55.

[29] This could, and did, lead to mutinies, though they were far from inevitable. The *Newport Mercury* of September 16, 1765, provided just such a case. The newspaper related that "soon after he [Capt. Hopkins] left the Coast, the Number of his Men being reduced by sickness, he was obliged to permit some of the Slaves to come upon the Deck to assist the People: These Slaves contrived to release the others, and the whole rose upon the People." E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 213. The *Boston NewLetter* of Sept. 6, 1750, in a similar example, reported that "The Insurrection was contrived and begun by 15 that had for a considerable Time been treated with the same Freedom as the white men; and a great many of the latter dying, encouraged them in the Design ... knowing the small Strength of the white men, they at once flew into the Cabin, and secured Arms in a few Minutes, kill'd the Captain and five of the People." E. Donnan *Documents*, vol. 2, 486. See also J. Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers*, 234.

[30] He noted that "they are fed twice a day, ... which is the time they are aptest to mutiny, being on deck." In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 406. For an example of a mutiny that took place at this time, and when the guns were used, see Donnan, *Documents*, v. 2, 360.

shifts rather than to run the risk of a mutiny.[31] There are several examples of mutinies that occurred at such times, but they were not unusually common.[32] Additional precautions and the added watchfulness of the crew generally sufficed to offset the increased risk.

While there can be no doubt that the middle passage was a nightmare, the treatment on board varied from ship to ship, and, more particularly, from captain to captain. Klein has argued that a given captain's 'humanity' was not germane to the incidence of mortality on the middle passage.[33] This held true for the chances of a mutiny occurring too. Yet slavers and contemporary commentators frequently ascribed slave mutinies to excessively harsh treatment of slaves. Captain Snelgrave, for example, believed that most mutinies were caused by "the Sailors ill usage" of the slaves.[34] It is possible that those who suffered a mutiny did not record unusually cruel treatment very often, not wishing to implicate themselves. But the sources that do specify an unusually harsh regime on the vessel, suggests that if anything, such actions offered a protection against mutinies. There was, however, an exception to this observation. When a vessel had an extremely harsh regime, and violence and punishments were administered in an obviously unfair and inconsistent manner, the chance of a mutiny occurring was heightened.[35] The harshness of the treatment *per se* was not related to the incidence of mutinies, the uniformity and perceived

[31] For testimony on the subject, see R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 34.
[32] Captain Viale's ship, the *Nancy*, experienced a mutiny "four or five Days after the voyage commenced, "as the Slaves were all together messing one Day, the Males and Females apart." In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 400. Captain Snelgrave experienced an insurrection "at four a clock in the Afternoon, just as they [the slaves] went to supper." He also related the account of the mutiny aboard another slaver, the *Ferrers*, whose slaves killed the captain of the ship"when they were eating their Victuals" in a particularly gruesome manner; they "beat out his brains with the little Tubs, out of which they eat their boiled Rice." In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 353, 361.
[33] H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton: Princeton U.P, 1978), 125.
[34] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 352. Issert, for example, was of the opinion that "the too strict treatment these unfortunates not infrequently are forced to suffer at the hands of barbaric captains often results in a conspiracy among them." Paul Isert, *Letters*, 176. Examples of this kind can easily be multiplied.

'justness' of the treatment was. In situations where slaves were subject to disciplinary measures or cruelty which they perceived to be inequitable or otherwise unfair there was a heightened risk of a mutiny occurring. A mutiny in these cases was seldom pre-meditated, and it was highly personal in nature. It was not so much the condition of slavery that the slave was fighting, as the immediate oppressor. At least initially there was little thought of escape involved.[36] Due to the lack of planning and co-ordination of forces, this type of mutiny was nearly always unsuccessful; it often took place disproportionately often on the high seas, where there was little possibility of the slaves escaping with their lives, even if they were to master the vessel.

In spite of the probable worse conditions and greater discontent that an extremely crowded vessel would bring with it, as well as the potentially greater fighting strength, there is no evidence to suggest that greater crowding influenced the incidence of mutinies in any way. The reason for this was probably related to the reason that brutal treatment per se did not have had a large impact either. The added hardship suffered in a crowded vessel was experienced equally by all slaves; while harsh, it was not perceived as being prejudiced or inconsistent. The reason the slaves did not take advantage of their greater numbers is explained, at least partly, by the fact that mutinies tended to be planned in relatively small groups. The total fighting strength of all slaves was not an issue in the planning of a mutiny when only a relatively small number were likely to have been privy to the plot in the first

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[35] See for example P. Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, 108.
[36] This was the case on the *Ruby*, where a number of the slaves, after unsuccessfully attempting to kill a particularly brutal sailor, instigated a serious insurrection. See J. Arnold's testimony in *Report to the House of Lords on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. Reprinted in G.F. Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1927), 175. A similar process took place on board the *Corallinne* in 1808, when an unusually cruel guard, on being struck by a slave who subsequently jumped over board, "became furious and rushed down the hold cutting right and left with his whip. By some means a gang got loose and broke off the iron rod that fastened their ring bolts. They at once attacked Shakoe and beat his brains out and succeeded in liberating half a dozen other gangs and got on deck all together" *Memoirs of the late Captain*

instance. If a mutiny was unplanned (i.e. spontaneous), the very nature of the mutiny assured that the slaves would not desist if their ship was not extremely crowded. Statistical evidence supports this contention. The Atlantic Slavery dataset contains 322 vessels that are known to have suffered an insurrection on board, and for which it has been possible to inpute the number of slaves on board. The minimum number of slaves on board when a mutiny took place was 19 (the *Epaminodos* in 1787 under Captain Isaaic Din Bass), and the maximum was 1,350 (an unnamed slaver in 1852 under Captain Antonio Capo).[37] The average number of slaves on a vessel suffering an insurrection was reasonably close to the average carried by all vessels over the trade.[38] The number of slaves on board was irrelevant to the chances of a slaver experiencing a mutiny.[39]

There are a tremendous number of accounts in the primary literature that argue that a particular people, when held on board as slaves, were more likely than average to mutiny. Atkins and Snelgrave both identified slaves from the Gold Coast as particularly dangerous; Conneau, disagreeing, found slaves from north of the Gold coast and east of the Cape of Good Hope particularly likely to mutiny.[40] In Barbot's opinion, Fidra and Ardra slaves from

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H. Crow of Liverpool, in G. Dow *Slave Ships*, 207.

[37] D. Eltis et al *The Trans-Atlantic*, record nos. 33,708 and 4,162. The standard deviation for the number of slaves aboard taken over the 322 voyages was a very high 162.2.

[38] The average number of slaves on a vessel suffering an insurrection was 268.86, somewhat less than the average slaver.

[39] It seems logical to suppose that insurrections on ships carrying a large number of slaves might have been successful more often than those that took place on a vessel carrying a smaller number of slaves. The Atlantic Slavery dataset does not contain enough records to determine whether this is the case, especially as it does not define "success," a problematic task. If one looks at the number of vessels that have the inputed number of slaves on board and suffered an insurrection, and were captured by Africans (nearly always slaves), it becomes possible to speculate very loosely. The average number of slaves on board these vessels was to 157, the maximum to 420, and the minimum, 19. Thus if anything, the opposite appears to be true. It is possible that the large numbers on a crowded ship might have inhibited efficient mobilization and that in a full-scale confrontation the advantage of larger numbers may have been offset by a lack of coordination.

[40] E. Donnan, *Documents*, v. 2, 264, G. F. Dow, *Slave Ships*, 121 and T. A. Conneau, *Slaver's Logbook, or 20 Year's Residence in Africa*, (Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice-Hall), 85.

the Angola region were "the most apt to revolt aboard ships."[41] None of these opinions can be confidently supported by an examination of the primary documentation.. The evidence is too thin, and slavers did not agree amongst themselves which slaves were the most dangerous. It was, however, likely that the plotters of a particular mutiny would be of the same origin.[42] Slaves of a common ethnic background tended to plot insurrections together primarily due to safety considerations. This explanation accounts for both the lack of agreement among slavers as to which particular groups of slaves were more likely to mutiny as well as for the prevalence of ethnic stereotyping. A consideration related to the ethnicity of the slaves was that of language.

The speaking of the same language or a mutually intelligible one would seem to have conferred a decided advantage on the slaves. The advantages of mutual comprehension in planning, co-ordinating and staging an insurrection are obvious. Little, however, indicates that a common linguistic composition on board a slaver in any way increased the incidence of slave insurrections. Nor do the primary sources very often make claims in this regard.[43] Given the demographic nature of the trade, it was unlikely that the captives on board a given ship would all be of one language. Both the 'cruising' along the coast while a ship sought a full complement of slaves and the great distances slaves were sometimes procured from made this unlikely.[44] The reason that the lack of a single language on board did not

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[41] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 295.
[42] The ethnicity of mutineers is seldom readily identifiable; however, where it can be ascertained it supports the notion that mutinies frequently tended to be plotted among slaves of the same ethnicity. Only occasionally was ethnicity referred to explicitly, as in the account of the particularly bloody insurrection on the *Don Carlos*. Barbot wrote that "The next day we had them all again on deck, where they unanimously declar'd, the Menbombe slaves had been the contrivers of the mutiny." In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 457. Generally ethnicity must be inputed from the port of embarkation, an uncertain method.
[43] There are exceptions; see E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 264 and vol. 3, 360.
[44] Philip Morgan has, however, recently argued that the ethnic composition on slavers was far more homogenous than previously supposed. See his "The Cultural Implication of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.).

significantly inhibit slaves from mutinying lay in the dynamics of slave-ship insurrections. Insurrections were of two kinds; spontaneous and planned. Spontaneous, unplanned mutinies were the result of any number of circumstances: an unusual provocation, a unique opportunity or the escalation of a rebellion all led to spontaneous mutinies. In none of the circumstances that led to an unplanned insurrection, was a common mode of communication required for it to have been instigated. An unplanned mutiny might have had a better chance of success if instructions and warnings could have been called out with the confidence that they would be understood, but the lack of a common language did not prevent them from taking place.

Planned mutinies, plotted among a number of people, required the conspirators to speak either the same language, use a lingua franca, or to make use of translations. This type of mutiny tended to be plotted among a small number of conspirators who trusted each other, as the risk of betrayal was always present, even though often more slaves participated when it actually took place.[45] In even the most ethnically mixed ship, it was exceedingly unlikely that there would not be any group of slaves who could not speak the same or a mutually intelligible language. Slave multi-linguism and the fact that the plotting of a mutiny required only a rudimentary linguistic commonality further made it unlikely that language problems prevented many planned mutinies from occurring. Thus in neither of the two categories of mutinies – planned and unplanned – did language play a central role in determining whether or not a slaver would suffer an insurrection.

Three elements were, however, especially significant on board slaving vessels that

[45] Evidence that small groups of slaves planned and instigated insurrections is provided below. It is likely that the initial group of slaves plotting an insurrection would be of the same ethnic background, and hence language. The mutiny that took place on Isert's vessel, for example, was started by a group of slaves from the same background. Isert spoke a number of African languages, and was able to establish this

suffered insurrections. The number of active crew on board, the proximity of land, and fear of cannibalism among slaves were all substantial risk factors. It is unusual to find a mutiny or mutiny attempt that did not have at least one of them present. Frequently more than one of these three factors was present. There was an especially strong synergetic effect between the proximity of land and the number of active crew on board.

The most important of the major factors increasing the risk of a mutiny taking place was the proximity of land. The actual trans-Atlantic crossing was frequently the shortest leg of the journey for a recently purchased slave. Slave ships sometimes spent many months waiting or 'coasting' along the slave routes of the African shore while the captain struggled to acquire a full complement of slaves. This part of the journey showed a very strong correlation with mutinies and attempted mutinies. It was, however, not the length of time spent on board the ship that increased the likelihood of a mutiny occurring. Rather, it was the proximity to land that provided a strong incentive to mutiny. There are an abundance of accounts of mutinies taking place within sight, and most often, within easy reach of land. Slavers were aware of the increased risk of mutinies that lying close to land brought with it. Francis Moore, for example, suggested that "a great Mart of exchange .... at James Fort" would be beneficial to slave traders, among other reasons, because of, "the Uncertainty of getting the Cargo, and when [the slaver] has sometimes got half a Cargo, he may lie some Months before he can be able to Compleat it." Moore sought to protect captains from "the Hazards of Sickness and Rebellion of those Slaves he already has" as they were "apter to rise in a Harbour than when out at Sea."[46]

Insurrections close to land occurred as easily while the slaver was lying in a river

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unambiguously. However, it was not common for slavers to speak an African language, and the evidence is seldom as solid as that provided by Isert. P. Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 177.

attempting to fill its quota of human cargo, as they did on the coast. The *Massachusetts Gazette and NewsLetter* of August 28, 1766 reported, for example, an uprising in the Gambia river that resulted in the death of all the ship's crew. The newspaper advised its readers that "Capt. Harris, in 6 weeks, from the river Gambia on the coast of Africa.... informs us, that the slaves on board a brig, ... then lying in the river, rose on the crew, and killed the master and all hands."[47]

The reports of insurrections on board vessels lying just off the coast are even more common than reports of mutinies in a river. The *Boston Post Boy* of June 25, 1750, for example, reported that Benjamin Clarke's ship, after suffering a mutiny by the slaves on board was "run ashore a little to the southward of Cape Lopez, and [the slaves] made their escape."[48] Many surviving accounts of mutinies are fragmentary. Often, however, it is possible to ascertain whether the ships were at sea or close to land, even if little else is discernible. The insurrection that occurred on board the *Thames* in 1777 is one such account. In a protest – a formal declaration of damage – in this case written to document extensive destruction caused by a storm and insurrection, Charles Barnard testified that while "at Ancor in Cape Coast Roade, at half past two Aclock in the After Noon An Insurrection on Board begun on Board By the Men Slaves."[49] Sometimes it was not explicitly recorded that an insurrection occurred close to land, but still easy to deduce. In a brief comment on a mutiny, for example, Moore concluded by noting that it was "with great Difficulty he [the captain] escaped being killed, which he did in swimming ashore."[50]

Just as many mutinies occurred when a slaving vessel was either anchored on the

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[46] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 402.
[47] *Massachusetts Gazette and NewsLetter* of August 28, 1766.Reprinted in E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 4, 232.
[48] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 485.

coast or in a river, so examples of insurrections which occurred just after the ship left Africa's shores are also common. These kinds of mutinies were desperate last-minute attempts by slaves fighting against being carried away from Africa's shore. Slavers recognised this as a particularly dangerous time and sometimes tried to conceal their departure time from the slaves, even leaving at night to do so. Being close to land, and the knowledge that they were soon to leave it, combined to cause slaves to take risks they might otherwise not have. Because these mutinies were often not well planned, and were watched for by the crew, they were seldom, though not always, unsuccessful. The desperation of slaves could make these last-minute mutinies unusually bloody. On James Barbot's voyage in 1701, the slaves on board staged an unsuccessful insurrection when they were about five leagues away from the coast that resulted in great loss of life.[51] The mutiny on the *Clare* was one of the few successful ones. The vessel "was not got 10 Leagues on her Way, before the Negroes rose and making themselves Masters of the Gunpowder and Fire Arms." The slaves managed to "run the Ship on Shore....and made their Escape."[52]

But most mutinies that occurred close to land were not desperate last moment attempts. The proximity to land itself, not the closeness of the departure time was the most important incentive to mutiny. The land did not need to have been the shores of Africa for the chances of a mutiny occurring to increase. Even when a ship was close to land after having left Africa, the incidence of mutinies increased. The *Diamant*, for example, suffered an insurrection in September 1774 when forced to anchor off Corsico, a small island on the Gabon coast, due to adverse sailing conditions. After a bloody battle and "Finding it

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[49] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 331.
[50] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 410.
[51] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 451.
[52] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 274.

impossible to resist further.... the captain embarked in the dinghy with fourteen of his crew."[53] There was even an increased risk of an insurrection when a slaver was in sight of its destination, though this was not nearly as common as when the vessel was in sight of Africa. The *Boston Post Boy*, for example, reported that "a Ship belonging to Liverpool coming from the Coast of Africa, with about 350 slaves aboard ... when in sight of the Island Guardoloupe, the slaves .... kill'd the Master and Mate of the Ship and threw fifteen of the men overboard."[54] The examples could easily be multiplied many more times, as the vast majority of known mutinies occurred close to land.

Slaves may have suffered less from apathy and a sense of hopelessness than they would while out at sea, but most importantly, the prospects of a successful escape were much higher when mutinying close to land. Moore specifically noted this when he wrote "if they once get Masters of a ship, in the River, their Escape to Shore is almost certain, by running the Ship aground" This was not true – the slaves' escape was by no means almost certain – but the point is nonetheless valid. Even if slaves did reach the shore, there was a large chance that they would be recaptured by the surviving crew, or by Africans. The available data confirm that the success rate (i.e. the incidence of slaves taking over the ship, and subsequently making good their escape) of mutinies that took place close to land, while extremely low, was much higher than that of mutinies which took place on sea. As there was a distinct advantage to mutinying while on the coast, so there was a definite disadvantage to doing so while at sea. As Moore noted, "at Sea it is otherwise, for if they should surprize a Ship there, as they cannot navigate her, they must have the Assistance of the White Men, or

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[53] They landed near the St. Benito river where they were, ironically, enslaved by Africans. R.L. Stein, *The French*, 104.

[54] Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 485.

perish."[55] The slaves were unlikely to have known how to sail a large slaving vessel, and less likely yet to know how to navigate. After having been at sea for some time, very few slaves had would have had any idea of where they were. Slaves did mutiny at sea, but not nearly as often as when they where close to land. When they did so, the mutinies were frequently unplanned.[56]

There were a few exceptional cases when slaves managed to overcome their lack of navigational ability after a mutiny at sea, but they were extremely rare.[57] The *New York Packet* reported in 1750 that "a schooner, which sailed about 12 months since from New-Port, for the coast of Africa .... was lately met with at sea, by a vessel bound to Bristol, in England." The vessel was found "without Sails, had only 15 negroes on board and those in very emaciated and wretched condition, having doubtless been long at sea." For lack of any other plausible explanation, the newspaper concluded that "The negroes it is supposed had rose and murdered the Captain and crew."[58] It is impossible to ascertain how many ships that were reported lost at sea, and never heard of again, were lost on account of a mutiny. Most mutinies at sea in which the slaves overcame the slaves resulted in the deaths of both slaves and crew.

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[55] Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 402.
[56] There is some evidence from slaves that only the lack of sailing and navigation skills prevented them from mutinying. William Thomas, a slave who made the middle passage, wrote in his narrative that "after being three weeks at sea, some of the men proposed to rise and kill the captain, and take the ship back to Africa. I told them that they did not understand 'sailor palaver,' and if they took the vessel, 'big wind would come, and she would capsize, and then all of us would die.'" The slaves did not mutiny, and the vessel docked at Havana. In John Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 227.
[57] The insurrection aboard the *King David* was one such. After killing a number of the crew, the slaves managed to seize control of the vessel while it was out at sea, and "About 8 o'Clock the same Evening, they threw over-board nine of the white men alive with their irons on: The chief Mate was also bro't on the Gunnel to be served in the same Manner: but one of the Head Negroes interpos'd, and said, Who must take Care of the Ship? and withal declar'd that if they destroy'd him, he would kill the first that attempted it: whereupon they saved his Life." The slaves did make land, but what happened after that is not known. Reported in the *Boston NewsLetter*, September 6, 1750. In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 486-487.
[58] In the *New York Packet*, February 14, 1785. E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 341.

One of the strongest mutual myths prevalent in the slave trade was that of cannibalism. Both Africans and Europeans seem to have held that the other commonly attained slaves to supplement their diet. The idea that some Africans were cannibals whenever there was an opportunity became an integral part of the slave-traders' mythology, and this may have augmented the Africans' own misgivings about European slavers. The question of the veracity of any accounts of cannibalism is not relevant here. Aaron points out that, as human nature will have it, "A New Guinean or African group is as prone to debase another with the cannibal label as quickly as any European."[59] My investigation into the phenomenon in connection with slave-ship mutinies has not contradicted him. The issue was the belief in cannibalism, not whether it occurred or not. There can be little doubt that some Africans, both slave and free, believed that the European traders bought slaves for later consumption. A literate African, Job Ben Solomon, was kidnapped from Africa and held as a slave in Maryland for a year before being bought and freed by an Englishman, Mr. Oglethorpe. After spending over a year in England, Solomon returned to Africa in 1727 and "took away a great deal of the Horror of the Pholeys for the State of Slavery among the English; for they before generally imagined, that all who were sold for slaves, were generally either eaten or murdered, since none ever returned."[60]

The testimony to the British Select Committee of the House of Lords by Augustino, an African who was twelve years old when enslaved, indicated that fear of cannibalism existed in the minds of some enslaved Africans. He testifies that "The young ones had the right of coming on deck, but several of those jumped overboard, for fear they were being fattened to be eaten." On being asked what caused them to believe such a thing, Augustino

[59] W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 142.

simply replied that "They do not know for what object they are taken, and the idea comes into their head that it is from being made food of."[61] In accounts that deal with the middle passage and are penned by Africans themselves, many references to the supposed cannibalism of whites can be found. Ottobah Cugoano, for example, wrote that on his travels to sold into the Atlantic trade "Next day we travelled on, and in the evening came to a town where I saw several white people, which made me afraid they would eat me, according to our notion."[62] The narrative penned by Samual Ajayi Crowther who was enslaved in 1822, in a more oblique manner, also indicated that Europeans were supposed to be cannibals; he wrote that "we six were conveyed into the *Myrmidon*, in which we discovered not a trace of those who were transhipped before us. We soon came to the conclusion of what had become them, when we saw parts of a hog hanging ... a number of cannonshots were arranged along the deck. The former we supposed to be the flesh, and the later the heads of the individuals who had been killed for meat."[63]

Joseph Wright feared of being eaten when he was carried away in a canoe by Portuguese slavers because "we had heard that the Portuguese were going to eat us when we got to their country."[64] The accounts that have survived which were written by Africans

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[60] In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 417.
[61] In R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 39.
[62] In J. Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 32. Perhaps the best-known slave narrative that includes an account of the middle passage is Olaudah Equiano's. The authenticity of the early part has recently been questioned. See Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery and Abolition* 20, 3 (December 1999). But even if this part is fictional, it is remarkable that Equiano still referred to the supposed cannibalism of whites. Equiano wrote that "When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace or copper boiling and a multitude of black people, of every description, chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted my fate." Later, Equiano claimed, after having landed at the port of destination, "at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten." In H.L. Gates (ed.), *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 33, 37.
[63] Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 313.
[64] P. D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, 331.

tended be written by formally educated or unusually talented slaves. If they initially lent credence to the supposition that whites were cannibals, less-educated slaves probably did so even more readily.

There is some evidence that there may have been some practical explanations for the belief by some Africans that whites were cannibals. Bucher has argued that the Mpongwe of the Gabon estuary and other coastal peoples engaged in the slave trade actively encouraged the belief in order to safeguard their monopoly on the slave trade from societies living in the interior. Similarly, they successfully encouraged the belief among the traders that the societies of the interior were cannibals. Both rumours were intended to discourage the slavers to trade directly with the interior societies and vice-versa in order to protect their positions as middlemen.[65] The explorer Mungo Park provided evidence that there was a fear of being cannibalised among slaves from the interior. Commenting on a coffle that he encountered on the way to the coast, he wrote that there existed "A deeply rooted idea, that the whites purchase Negroes for the purpose of devouring them, or selling them to others, that they may be devoured hereafter, naturally makes the slaves contemplate a journey towards the coast with great terror." Because of this, "the Slatees are forced to keep them constantly in irons, and watch them very closely, to prevent their escape."[66]

The mutual belief in cannibalism would logically have contributed greatly to the risk of a mutiny having taken place on board the slaving vessels in which it occurred. If true, slavers should have learned to recognise it. Numerous references indicate that slavers did. The selection below, all originally penned by slavers, illustrates the point:

[65] H. Bucher, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Gabon Estuary: The Mpongwe to 1860" in P.E. Lovejoy, *Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade* (University of Wisconsin Press Ltd.: Wisconsin, 1986), 150.
[66] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 557. The process sometimes used in assessing slaves before purchase did

John Barbot believed that "Fida and Ardra slaves.... are the most apt to revolt aboard ships, ... for being used to see mens flesh eaten in their own country, they are very full of the notion that we buy and transport them to the same purpose; and will therefor watch all opportunities to deliver themselves, by assaulting a ship's crew, and murdering them all if possible: whereof we have almost every year some instances."[67] John Atkins, in his consideration of mutinies, implied that once a ship had departed from the coast, the only reason it would be likely to suffer an insurrection was the fear of cannibalism. He wrote that "When we are slaved and out at Sea, it is commonly imagined, the Negroes Ignorance of Navigation, will always be a Safeguard; yet, as many of them think themselves bought to eat .... there has not been wanting Examples of rising and killing a Ship's Company, distant from Land."[68] Many insurrections that took place distant from land probably occurred because of such a fear. The desperation required to mutiny in such unpropitious circumstances needed an exceptionally powerful catalyst.

Captain William Bosman noted that the fear of cannibalism was most common among slaves from the interior. He believes that two of the mutinies that he suffered – both of which he attributed to the slaves' fear of being eaten – were caused by slaves from the interior. He wrote that "We are sometimes sufficiently plagued by a parcel of slaves, which come from a far in-land country, who very innocently persuade one another, that we buy them only to fatten and afterwards eat them as a delicacy." Unsurprisingly, the slaves then "resolve and agree together to run away from the ship, kill the Europeans, and set the

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not help either; slavers would sometimes taste the sweat of the slave in order to determine if they were healthy. M. Burnside, *Spirit of the Passage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 115.

[67] James Barbot, also a slaver, agrees with his uncle's assessment, stating that "It has been observ'd before, that some slaves fancy they are carry'd to be eaten, which makes them desperate... so that if care be not taken they will mutiny." E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 295 and 451.

[68] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 264.

vessel ashore; by which means they design to free themselves from being our food."[69]

Some slavers attempted to reassure their slaves that they were not to be eaten in the hope that this would reduce the risk of insurrection. Captain Snelgrave, for example, informed his slaves via an interpreter that "That, now they are become my Property, I think fit to let them know what they are bought for, that they may be easy in their Minds." He did this because "these poor People are generally under terrible Apprehensions upon their being bought by white Men, many being afraid that we design to eat them."[70] It is doubtful that slaves who believed that they were to be eaten would have been much reassured by a promise made by a slaver, or one under his influence – the perceived cannibals or his agent.[71] It might even have worsened their apprehensions, if they reasoned that if a slaver were to go to pains to deny the matter, then perhaps it might well have had some foundation in truth. The slaves from the interior that met with Mungo Park while they were in the hands of an African trader suggest that this did happen. Upon meeting Park, "They were all very inquisitive." However, "they viewed me at first with looks of horror, and repeatedly asked if my countrymen were cannibals."[72] The word "repeatedly" indicates either that the slaves wished to make very sure that their question had been correctly understood, or, more likely, a strong initial disbelief of what they were being told.

Exactly how many mutinies occurred because of this belief cannot be accurately

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[69] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 438.

[70] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 352. He was not the only one. An eighteenth century Dutch handbook for slavers that urged them to "assure the slaves, after they have been purchased, that they should not be afraid; that white people were not cannibals." J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 165. Captain Penny, giving (a very favorable) testimony on the slave trade before the British parliament notes that many slaves fear being cannibalized, and that it is "the business of the Traders" to remove that fear. In Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 35.

[71] Further evidence was provided by Isert. When he told slaves that they were being bought to work the land he was not believed, because in the slaves' experience so many people were not used in agriculture. He was also asked if his shoes were made from the skin of slaves. In spite of his reassurances, his voyage suffered a mutiny. P. Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 175-176.

[72] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 634.

reconstructed. Too few of the surviving accounts of mutinies record the slaves' initial impetus to revolt. The stresses of their enslavement and the manner in which they were examined, bought and treated while in the hands of their oppressors probably all contributed to their ascribing the universal ultimate level of debasement to enslavers: that of man-eaters. And in these circumstances, they were willing to take desperate risks to avoid that fate. Being enslaved was one thing and dying another, but to be eaten was a horror that to many slaves transcended both.

The third major risk factor in determining whether or not a mutiny would take place was the ratio between slaves plotting a mutiny and the number of active crew on board. As was the case with fears of cannibalism, slavers were aware of the danger. Snelgrave, commenting on what he felt were a particularly hostile group of slaves, wrote that "Our Ship's company consisted of fifty white People, all in Health: And I had very good Officers; so that I was easy in all respects."[73] It did not matter why the number of active crew of a particular vessel was diminished; in all such circumstances mutinies were more likely to occur. Problems with crewmembers themselves could reduce the strength of the crew through, for example, desertion while in Africa. While a ship was attempting to fill its quota of slaves the number of active crew on board was also frequently severely reduced when a part of the crew was ashore, leaving a depleted guard to watch over the slaves. This was a particularly risky period; the vessel was close to land, and the number of active crew onboard was depleted.

Reports of mutinies in these circumstances surface very often in the literature. The slaver John Bell, for example, wrote from on board the *Hope* in 1776 to acquaint his financier John Fletcher, that "we had the misfortune to lose 36 of the best slaves we had by

an Insurrection of a mutiny." He explained that "this unlucky affair happened ... when there was only the Boatswain, Carpenter, 3 White people and myself on board."[74] The remaining crew were busy onshore – acquiring slaves, securing water for the voyage, and other necessary tasks.

Aside from crew being on shore, the most common reason for an inadequate number of crew available to offset an increased risk of mutiny was sickness. Illness was at least as important in reducing the effective guard as death was. By far the majority of crew who died or sickened on the voyage did so while the vessel was on the coast of Africa.[75] The consequence was that "whilst the ships lie in the River, the Crews are apt to be sick, and consequently not able to guard their Slaves; of which several Instances have been, and Ships lost thereby."[76] Moore's remark holds equally true for ships anchored in a river and those anchored at the coast. James Barbot agreed. After relating the deaths of a number of crew, and the illness of several others, he laid the blame for the depletion of his crew on "the air of Cabinde being very unwholesome." This, he believed was what "gave an opportunity to the slaves aboard to revolt."[77]

Not all the insurrections that took place when the crew was decimated by illness took place on or relatively near the coast. The *Boston Post Boy* of August 13, 1750 for example, reported a successful insurrection that took place "when having 60 Negroes aboard, and the most of their white men being sick, the Negroes got to the Powder and Arms" while the vessel was at sea.[78] The residual effects of the unhealthy effects of the conditions in Africa often lasted through the middle passage. However, the vast majority of mutinies that

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[73] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 354.
[74] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 323.
[75] See Chapter 3, "Crew" for details.
[76] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 402.

occurred in these circumstances did so while the vessel was close to land.

A common reason of having too few crewmembers on board was due to the fact that not all slavers took on the same amount of crew in an attempt to keep expenses low. This is not often mentioned in the primary sources, as few responsible for ships that suffered mutinies so directly put the blame on themselves. It is, however, possible to access the information indirectly. Mungo Park noted that "the mode of confining and securing Negroes in the American slave ships, owing chiefly to the weakness of their crews" was much more restrictive and severe than average in an attempt to prevent mutinies.[79]

Donnan has noted the increased risk associated with a smaller crew, and in a footnote stated that "There is little question but that they [mutinies] became more common as the trade fell in the hands of independent traders, who .... carried smaller crews in comparison with the size of their cargoes than the company vessels."[80] She identified the ratio of crew initially taken on board to the total number of slaves on board as the salient element. However, the matter was not quite as clear-cut as she suggests. Taken over all slaving nations and over the entire period of the trade, the initial ratio of slaves to crewmembers is 11.66 slaves per crewmember. For vessels that did suffer a mutiny, the ratio is only 9.68 slaves per crewmember.[81] Thus there were actually *more* crew relative to slaves

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[77] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 457.
[78] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 486.
[79] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 641. The Atlantic dataset suggests that Park was correct. On average, an English vessel carried 29.76 crewmembers taken over the entire trade (calculated over 6798 voyages), while the Americans averaged only 13.3 crewmembers (calculated over 180 voyages). American slavers thus carried about 45% of the crew of English slavers. But this does not take into account vessel size or the number of slaves on board (though neither was as important as the absolute number of crew, as argued below). A somewhat better way to approach the question with regard is to mutinies is to check the initial slave / crew ratio for both. I used the number of crew at the outset of the voyage and the number of slaves disembarked, as this provided the greatest number of voyages to generalize from. The English had a ratio of 10.95 slaves per crewmember (6557 voyages), while the American vessels had a ratio of 15.52 slaves per crewmember (156 voyages) – a difference of nearly 30%. Clearly the Americans took a greater risk.
[80] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 361.
[81] No insurrection reported: 297,226 crewmembers divided by an inputed 2,588,118 slaves disembarked =

on vessels that did suffer a mutiny. However, she is nonetheless correct in noting that there is an increased risk of mutiny when a vessel carried a smaller crew. Her error was implicitly assuming that all the slaves on board a vessel cause an insurrection on the one hand, and on the other, that all the crewmembers were always available to counter such the attempt. Both assumptions are incorrect. Another reason to suspect such a reductionist approach is that there is no evidence showing that ships carrying larger numbers of slaves experienced more mutinies than average, as might be expected to have been the case, if Donnan's statement were to hold true. Again, the data contradicts her. Vessels that reported no mutiny embarked an average of 309.86 slaves, while those that did suffer a mutiny embarked an average of only 271.21 slaves.[82]

Slave ship insurrections were usually plotted by a fairly small number of slaves. A group of more than twenty slaves conspiring simultaneously to take over a ship, though not unheard of, was rare. Given the relatively small number of slaves who instigated an insurrection at any given time, any reduction in the number of crew who would actively attempt to thwart them was vitally important to the chances of the mutinying slaves realising their objective. It was the instigators of the insurrection who were in the first instance confronted by resistance from crewmembers, not all the slaves. And the instigators decided whether or not to mutiny according to their calculation of the chance of success. Thus it was

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11.66. Dataset size = 9,728 voyages. Insurrection reported: 6,369 crewmembers divided by an inputed 45,293 slaves disembarked = 9.68. Dataset size = 185. Both figures are calculated using initial crew employed and the inputed number of slaves disembarking (the later to maximize the size of the dataset and so to arrive at more reliable averages). Mutinies are not reliably reported in the Atlantic slavery dataset. However, what is reported can be used to calculate ratios, some averages and the like, as there is no reason that the under-reporting favoured any particular circumstance (other than the nationality of the slaver) above any other. Thus while the figures offered above would no doubt need to be adjusted if more complete data were available, it is very likely that the conclusions would be substantiated.

[82] The 24,524 voyages for which no record of a mutiny attempt survives that allow the number of slaves embarked to be inputed, embarked 7,598,935 slaves, or 309.86 per voyage. The 305 voyages that suffered a mutiny that allow the number of slaves embarked to be inputed shows that 82,720 slaves embarked, or 271,21 per voyage.

the ratio of active crew to the number of slaves who were involved in *plotting* a mutiny that was important, not merely the ratio of crew to slaves. This solves the apparent inconsistency as to why the number of slaves on board had no impact on the incidence of mutiny, while the number of active crew did. This does not entirely deny Donnan's point that slavers who carried a smaller crew to begin with were more likely to experience an insurrection. The reasons that Donnan has identified them as at heightened risk for suffering a mutiny, though she does not analyse it were, presumably, twofold. In the first place, from the point of view of the slaves plotting an insurrection, there existed an already more favourable ratio between themselves and their enslavers. However, this ratio was generally favourable enough to the slavers to inhibit a mutiny. Second, and more importantly, when a crewmember of an undermanned vessel was incapacitated for whatever reason, the ratio between the number of slaves plotting an insurrection and the number of crew capable of resisting changed to favour the plotters to a much greater degree than it would have on a fully manned ship. This was because any one reduction in the numbers of the crew of an undermanned vessel constituted a greater percentage of reduction of the total crew than it did on a fully manned ship. This discrepancy was compounded as more crew members were incapacitated, while there is no reason to suppose that the number of plotters would have been similarly reduced, as they had a much larger pool of people from which to draw. In sum, a slaver with a larger crew spread its risks more effectively; they were able to absorb a greater amount of adversity and still retain a more intimidating force than an undermanned slaver.

In a related point, expressed in percentages, crew mortality on the middle passage was roughly equal to that of slaves. This worked in favour of the slaves, as a given percentage reduction in crew, even when matched by an equal reduction in slaves created,

from the point of view of the slaves plotting a mutiny, a more favourable ratio between themselves and the remaining crew. This was compounded as a greater percentage of crew fell ill, or was otherwise incapacitated. The data support this interpretation. On voyages that suffered no insurrection, but reported at least one crew death, an average of 7.12 crewmembers died, while on a voyage that did suffer an insurrection, an average of 9.42 crewmembers died per voyage.[83] This is a difference of about 25%.

Another way of looking at the data is, using the same data as above, to compare the distribution of crew deaths on vessels that did suffer an insurrection with those that did not. The table below clearly shows that vessels that did suffer an insurrection suffered losses in a distribution that favored slaves far more than those that did not.

Order	Insurrection reported	No insurrection reported
Most common	7 deaths reported	2 deaths reported
2nd	6	3
3rd	5	1
4th	3	4
5th	4	5
6th	11	6
7th	1	7
8th	10	8
9th	8	9
10th	14	10
11th	2	11
12th	15	13

Table 5.5. Distribution of Crew Death on Voyages Reporting and Those Not Reporting An Insurrection

[83] With no insurrection reported, there were 28,525 deaths taken over an average of 4,005 voyages where at least one crewmember died. The same calculation for voyages that did suffer an insurrection shows 1,243 deaths over 132 voyages. The actual difference is probably much higher, as the deaths are probably overstated for voyages that suffered no insurrection. They are likely to have suffered fewer deaths on average, as the calculation made above excludes voyages on which no crewmembers died, as it is nearly always impossible to distinguish between voyages that suffered no crew mortality, and those for which no information is preserved.

Deaths are only a part of the story as far as the reduction of crew is concerned. Vessels reporting a high number of deaths were also likely to have a higher number of crew incapacitated because of illness. This made the ratio of active crew to plotting slaves even more favourable to the slaves than the table and the argument above would suggest.

The greater chances of a successful mutiny afforded by a small number of active crew on board combined with the greater chances of making a successful escape due to the proximity to land created a strong synergetic effect between the two. Thomas Phillips, though overstating the case somewhat, nevertheless summed the matter up succinctly. He wrote that he had "never heard that they mutiny'd in any ships of consequence, that had a good number of men, and the least care; but in small tools where they had but few men, and those negligent or drunk, then they surpriz'd and butcher'd them, cut the cables and let the vessel drive ashore."[84] Crewmembers tended to be incapacitated due to illness, or otherwise reduce their presence on board, for example by spending time ashore, when just off the coast. In a typical example of this, Captain Luc Jolly left his vessel, the *Bienfaisant*, with 116 slaves on board and only six people to guard them while he and the rest of the crew went ashore. The slaves mutinied, killed the six guards, and most made good their escape.[85] The mutiny on Snelgrave's vessel, the *Eagle*, in 1704 followed the same pattern. When the slaves mutinied, the vessel was in a river. There were "four hundred [slaves] on board, and not above ten white Men who were able to do Service: For several of our Ship's Company were dead, and many more sick; besides, two of our Boats were just then gone with twelve People on Shore to fetch Wood." Snelgrave was correct in supposing that "All these

[84] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol 1, 407.
[85] Stein, *The French Slave Trade*, 88.

Circumstances put the Negroes on consulting how to mutiny."[86] It was a circumstance that was unusually propitious for the slaves. Only while on the coast could they realistically hope to escape to their native shore, and it was just at this time that a ship was likely to be at its weakest in terms of the number of active crew on board.

My findings only hold true for averages, not for all individual instances. The factors discussed above do not cover all insurrections; but they were the major elements determining the *risks* of a mutiny occurring. Mutinies also occurred when there was no other discernible cause than, of course, the slaves' enslavement. There were also examples of mutinies not occurring when, on the face of it, there was every reason for them to occur. In a bizarre incident, Captain Conneau "picked ten strong men from the slaves, whom I armed with a cutlass each" in order to put down an imminent mutiny among his crew. He succeeded.[87] There are even a few primary documents that indicate that the slaves mutinied only after being encouraged to do by crewmembers.[88] But these were atypical; they nuance, but do not negate the general trend identified above.

There are many possible ways to define success: killing or injuring a number of the crew, taking control of the vessel, or, most difficult of all, regaining one's freedom. By any definition, the chances of a mutiny attempt succeeding were remote. The slavers were armed, they controlled the strategic positions on the vessel, and were prepared for an uprising. The slaves were restrained, had no weapons, and were carefully watched over. Slavers held every advantage. Mutinying was nearly always the taking of a

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[86] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 353.
[87] Conneau, *A Slaver's Logbook*, 183.
[88] For example, on the *Wolf*, a crewmember who bore the captain a grudge instigated a mutiny by the slaves. In order to convince them to rebel he had not only promised to return them to Africa, but also encouraged "a notion of their being to be eat in Europe." Darold D. Wax, "A Philadelphia Surgeon on a Slaving Voyage to Africa," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92, 4 (1968), 485. See chapter 3, "Crew" for other examples.

calculated risk on the part of the slaves who engaged in it. As such, several of the factors determining whether a vessel would suffer a mutiny, were also those that determined the likelihood of it succeeding. But once the decision to mutiny had been made, and the battle had been joined, there were two additional important factors in determining the success of the attempt.

The first of these was capturing the powder room. This was where the small arms as well as the ammunition for the larger ship's weapons were kept. In order to gain control of the powder room, the slaves first needed to cross the barricado.[89] From the slaves' perspective, capturing the powder room was essential on two counts. In the first place, and most importantly, they needed to deny the crew access to the guns. Secondly, but less vitally, they needed the small arms to fight successfully. Sometimes the guns were not directly conquered, as was the case on the *Virginie* where the "women who, from the incommodious size of the vessel had been placed in the apartment containing the arms, which they managed to convey unperceived to the men."[90] But this was highly unusual. There are very few reports of successful mutinies without the slaves having managed to obtain some form of weapons with which to fight. Often slaves mutinied using only small improvised weapons, such as chains they had managed to break off, or pieces of wood lying about the vessel.[91] But to succeed, they nearly always needed to

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[89] Depending on when the insurrection occurred, they might also first need to kill the sentry guarding the hatches to the ship's holds. Crossing the barricado to get to the arms was not always a battle; Stein recounted a mutiny in which "the black men who were below, having broken through the partitions separating the men and women's quarters" managed to cross under the barricado. Stein, *The French*, 104. Another, albeit very dangerous, method sometimes attempted, was to jump overboard, and try to catch the back part of the vessel, and climb back on board behind the barricado.
[90] P. Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, 108.
[91] If slaves managed to obtain improvised weapons before a mutiny began, it was often due to the carelessness of the slavers. Cautious captains, such as Barbot, searched their vessel conscientiously while slaves were on board to prevent them from finding anything that might be used as a weapon, but this was not an easy task. His crew "used to visit them daily, narrowly searching every corner between decks, to see whether they have not found the means, to gather pieces of iron, or wood, or knives, about the ship." But as

control the powder room. Slavers knew the importance of the powder room, and few were as shortsighted and greedy as the captain of the *Virginie*. Barbot claimed that on his vessel "We cause as many of our men as is convenient to lie in the quarter-deck and gun room ... being thus ready to disappoint any attempt our slaves might make on a sudden."[92] If true, this represented an unusual amount of caution. But it was standard to immediately go below and secure the powder room when a mutiny broke out.

If the crew reached the powder room before the slaves, the mutiny was usually put down fairly quickly. But if the slaves reached it first, or if they had crossed the barricado in large numbers, a ferocious battle often raged for control of the room, as was the case on the *Africain* on November 27, 1738. According to Lieutenant Dom Jeulin, after the mutiny started, "the Negroes headed in a fury to take the room in where the arms were held." The crew managed to gain control of the room, and "We barricaded the door well with trunks and boxes piled up to secure it." Juelin admiited that "we certainly would have had trouble containing them if we had not taken the arms room." In a flourish of bravado though, he added "We succeeded in taking it at the beginning of the revolt when we were half asleep."[93] If the slaves managed to hold the arms room, their chances of success increased dramatically, but it was no guarantee of victory.[94] However, it was a

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he acknowledges, "notwithstanding the great care we take not to leave any tool or nails, or other things in the way: which however, cannot always be so exactly observ'd, where so many people are in the narrow compass of a ship." Yet if taken, the precaution did help; it might uncover something the slaves might use in a mutiny, but more importantly, it emphasized the vigilance of the crew. E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 462.

[92] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 462.

[93] R.L. Stein, *The French*, 105. See also the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of May 16, 1754. It provided an example in which the crew managed to gain control of the arms, and repulse the slaves who had attacked the room in force. After being repulsed, they found the slavers' aim to be sufficiently bad to stage another attack, and they consequently managed to take the vessel.

[94] The mutiny on the vessel *Ann* in 1750, and that on the *Clare* in 1729 are examples of successful mutinies after the slaves captured the arms room. In both cases the slaves secured the vessel, and made good their escapes. See Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 486 and vol. 4, 274. But even if the slaves captured the powder room, there were still numerous ways in which the mutiny could fail. The mutiny on Captain Hope's

virtual guarantee of a bloody battle, often resulting in many deaths on both sides.

Both at the start of a mutiny and while the mutiny was being fought out, slaves tended to deliberately focus their attacks on persons in authority, particularly the captain. In a disproportionate number of successful mutinies the captain was killed in the beginning of, or during the course of the mutiny. Perhaps the death of the captain tended to lead to a breakdown of discipline among the crew, or to a loss of morale. That slaves targeted influential people deliberately cannot be doubted. The slaves mutinied on Isert's vessel while he "was exchanging pleasantries with some of them" in their own language. He was the first person they attacked (and injured seriously), because they incorrectly "concluded that I was the owner of all the slaves, and that it would be best to send me into the other world first, after which the Europeans, like mercenaries, would surrender all the sooner."[95]

Experienced captains were aware of this and took due precautions when going among the male slaves. Captain Snelgrave, giving advice to an inexperienced fellow captain on the African coast who was in the habit of walking among the slaves while they were eating, warned him "How imprudent it was in him to do so." Snelgrave recommended that he "have a good many of his white People in Arms when he went; or else having him so much in their Power, might incourage the Slaves to mutiny." He

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vessel, for example, failed because even though 6 or seven slaves had taken the powder room, they were not supported by the other slaves. After holding the vessel for several hours, they were defeated. See Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 480. There are also several accounts that indicate that the slaves' unfamiliarity with the weapons in the powder room caused them to blow it up, nearly always at a great cost in human lives, both slaves and crew. For an example of such a mutiny, see the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of June 16, 1763. Sometimes these may have been deliberate suicide attempts by the slaves, but this is unlikely to have been the case in all circumstances. See P. Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 177 and Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments of the Evil of Slavery* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1787), 10.

[95] P. Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 179-181.

concluded by informing the captain that "he might depend on it, they always aim at the chief Person in the Ship, who they soon distinguish by the respect shown him by the rest of the People."[96] The slaves did indeed mutiny, and attacked the captain.

As disproportionate number of mutinies began with an attack on the authority figures, they had higher chance of dying or being wounded in an insurrection than the average crewmember.[97] If a mutiny succeeded, and the captain was not killed during the engagement, his chances of survival improved considerably, though they were far from certain. Slaves tended to either kill him in an act of revenge, or to preserve his life either as a bargaining chip, or in order to navigate the vessel if the mutiny took place out of sight of land.[98] No matter which the case was, he was assured of special attention.

There were other factors that played a part in the chances of a mutiny attempt succeeding. The initial surprise with which an attack was launched, the number of slaves who joined in once the mutiny was under way, the determination of the slaves not to concede and just plain luck could all played an important role. Luck was a necessity, in nearly all the stages of a mutiny, and if the definition of success is to include the successful escape of the slaves, as well as the seizing of the vessel, more luck yet was required. The slaves needed to reach land, and once on land, they needed to avoid capture by other slavers and Africans.[99] This was by no means a certainty; most slaves were

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[96] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 360.
[97] Examples of mutinies starting after the captain had been attacked are legion. The governor at Sierra Leone reported to the Sierra Leone Company in 1795 that in a vessel from Boston "the slaves rose and put the Captain 1st and 2d Mates and one man to death." This neat order of the ranks killed was exceptional, but the tendency was typical. In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 101. See also vol. 3, 400.
[98] The *South Carolina Gazette* of December 9, 1732 reported a clear case of revenge killing. It reported to its readers that "the Slaves on board a Guineamen belonging to Bristol, rose and destroyed the whole Crew, cutting off the Captains Head, Legs and Arms." In Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 222.
[99] For an example of a mutiny in which the slaves were unable to reach land, see E. Donnan, *Documents* vol. 3, 341. The slaves were found adrift and starving. There are many examples of slaves being recaptured after successful mutinies. See vol. 4, 232 for an example of slaves being picked up by other slaving vessels,

recaptured and either brought or sold back to their original vessel, or else to another slaver.

Mutinies and just as importantly, the threat of mutinies, shaped the passage in many ways. Not only did they dictate the restraints and the general security arrangements on board, as well as the coercive strategies slavers employed, but they also determined the daily interaction between slavers and slaves to a large degree. But caution easily changed to nervousness and even outright fear if the slaves had given evidence of being a greater threat than they expected. A court case contesting the taking of an American slaving vessel *Nancy* in 1807 by the British navy provided an unusually detailed account of a mutiny in which this was the case. The crew feared a slave mutiny, and indeed, four or five days after the vessel had departed Africa, the slaves attacked the captain while they were eating on deck. The mutiny was put down with the loss of one slave who committed suicide by jumping over board, and the injury of a number of the remaining slaves. The captain decided to make for the nearest safe port, and "a few Nights before they discovered Land, he heard the Report of a Pistol, and found that it was one of the Crew on Watch, who had fired the Pistol." The crewmember fired because he imagined "that the Slaves were about to rise." They did not. Nonetheless, "the next Morning one of the Male Slaves was taken from below dead, and thrown overboard, who had been shot by the Pistol." The incident repeated itself: "the same Man stabbed another of the Slaves the following Night, supposing that they were again going to break out."[100] Again, the slaves did not mutiny. But the atmosphere on board was far tenser and more threatening

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and vol. 3, 321, 324. For examples of slaves being recaptured (and resold) by Africans, see P. Isert, *Letters from West Africa*, 177, Nicholas Owen, *Journal of a Slave Dealer: A View of Some Remarkable Axcedents in the Life of Nics. Owen on the Coast of Africa and America from the Year 1746 to the Year 1757.* Eveline Martin, ed. (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1930), 106 and A. Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two*

from both sides than it was before, and than it typically on vessels that had not suffered mutiny attempts.

A slaving vessel that suffered a mutiny attempt was more likely to suffer another mutiny attempt than a vessel on which the slaves had not mutinied previously, particularly if either crew or slaves had been killed in the first attempt.[101] Partly this is because of because of the bitterness and resentment that a first, foiled, attempt inevitably left the slaves with. It may also have had to do with how crew interacted with slaves who had proven themselves willing to risk their lives in violent confrontation. In addition, to slaves had mutinied once, violent opposition to their enslavement became not only thinkable, but a very real option. A single mutiny attempt eroded the image of white hegemony that slavers were at pains to maintain, and once lost, the aura of invincibility was not easily regained. Extremely harsh punitive actions and an increased vigilance were both attempts at regaining their lost status, but both were, and were interpreted by slaves, as actions born of weakness. Both were often effective – overt terror often did work; without it slavers would have been lost – but not often enough to overcome the damage done by the first mutiny attempt, or to reduce the chances of a second attempt to the initial level. Salvers could and did make sure that they protected themselves better – the chances of success for mutiny attempts subsequent to the first one were even lower than the first one – but they could not regain the previous *status quo*.

Voyages, 54.

[100] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 400.

[101] See the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of August 16, 1764 for an example of such an uprising. On the first attempt, the slaves killed the captain and two crewmembers, and on the second they killed the carpenter. Both were unsuccessful. The first was foiled without the loss of slave lives as the crew secured the arms, and the slaves fled below. On the second the crew were better prepared, and shot eight slaves dead. There is also a possibility that slaves on vessels where a mutiny attempt was betrayed tended to mutiny more often than on vessels were neither a mutiny occurred, nor mutiny plot was betrayed. However, there are too few detailed studies establish this categorically. See for an example E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 374.

Aside from an epidemic on board, insurrections are the best predictor of a high mortality on a voyage. Vessels that reported a mutiny or mutiny attempt suffered a much higher mortality on average than vessels that did not, as the table below shows.

	No. Voyages	Deaths	Total Slaves	% Mortality	Ave. deaths
Insurrection	123	7,834	37,348	20.97%	64.21
No insurrection	4731	208,845	1,710,030	12.21%	44.14

Table 5.6. Comparison of Slave Mortality between Vessels Reporting and Those Not Reporting an Insurrection[a]

[a] All samples are based on vessels that contain data on the inputed number of slaves on board, and the inputed number of deaths. It is important to note that the vessels in the dataset "No insurrection" contain no *report* of insurrections in the Atlantic slavery dataset; there are certain to be vessels included that did have insurrections. Thus the effect is probably stronger than shown here. In relation to the vessels reporting no insurrections, the sample size of those reporting insurrections is small. However, it is still a substantial number, and all the voyages are certain to have suffered insurrections.

The figures are unambiguous – slaves died in much larger numbers when a vessel had an insurrection on board. But slaves who were killed in the mutiny only account for a small fraction of the difference. Slaves executed by slavers in the aftermath of a mutiny also added only a small number to the total. One of the risks of a mutiny was that in the suppression of the mutiny was that slaves, sometimes in large numbers, committed suicide when it became clear that the attempt would fail. These suicides often accounted for more deaths than the number of slaves killed by crew. But it is probable that these are still insufficient to account for enormous discrepancy shown above. It is possible that the extra chaining of slaves, fewer deck privileges, more refusals to eat and a generally grimmer situation on board all contributed to the higher mortality.

The first conclusion that can be drawn from mutinies on the middle passage is that a slaving vessel was not a place well suited to insurrectionary activity by slaves. Slavers

knew slaves constantly looked for opportunities to free themselves, and the threat dictated much of crew behaviour. For slaves, the risks were extremely high, and the chances of success extremely low. Yet in spite of the odds, slaves did mutiny, and far more commonly than history has given them credit for. But for slaves mutinying was a rational process. They knew the odds, they knew they would most likely fail, but if an opportunity shifted the odds even slightly, they seized the moment. This led to identifiable patterns emerging from mutinies, mutiny attempts, and the factors contributing to the success or failure of them. Resistance, rebellion and mutiny did as much to shape the middle passage as the oppression brought forth by the enslavers. But both were mitigated by the desire of slaves and crew to survive the middle passage.

CHAPTER 6: SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

"In a slave society the mere possession of personal freedom is a valuable privilege."[1]

On a slaving vessel life itself was a valuable privilege. Notwithstanding the suicides and the extreme risks that some slaves were willing to take to regain their freedom, or the risky nature of the business slavers were engaged in, most slaves and crew wanted above all to survive the middle passage. High average mortality rates ensured that the knowledge that death could come easily and without warning was universal among slavers. Nor were the slaves generally under any illusions about the value of their individual lives to the crew. The confinement conditions on board and the harsh regime left the slaves with little room to doubt this. The imperative to survive was as formative of the shape the middle passage took as oppression and resistance to oppression were. It was the interplay of these three forces in the context of the physical constraints inherent on a slaving vessel at sea that ultimately determined the form that slaving voyages took.[2] Each influenced the other in both subtle and overt ways. It was a sub-text that took place on every slaving vessel.

The dynamic created by these forces can be difficult to discern from primary sources, as they were nearly always the public transcripts of the interaction between those on board. This transcript was incomplete, and intentionally and unintentionally censored

[1] Cyril James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 38.

[2] The "physical constraints" referred to included the limited surface area of the vessel, the number of people in that area, the health circumstances on board, and the limited amount of food and water available, but also the cultural gap between slaver and enslaved, and the transient nature of the voyage that prevented it being bridged.

to make it suitable for the intended audience.[3] The public record fails to contain much of what was considered obvious or otherwise unworthy of remark but is essential to historians attempting to reconstruct a social history of the middle passage. It is, on the other hand, very detailed with regard to quantitative matters – prices paid, numbers of slaves bought food purchased and the like. Nonetheless, contemporary descriptions of the interaction between slaves and slavers, though limited, do allow at least a partial reconstruction of the survival strategies chosen by both sides.

Slave survival was important to the crew, and this influenced their behaviour in certain ways, and thus the structure of the voyage. But slave survival was important to the crew only in the aggregate. Individual slaves' lives were only important insofar as they represented a percentage of the total cargo carried. Slaving was a business, and it made no sense to enter such a business, and then to try to conduct it on sentimental grounds. Financiers structured their plans purely in accordance with business principles, and expected their employees to do likewise. Captains were expected to understand this, and to ensure that the voyage operated under that philosophy. It was the captain's responsibility to see that those under him functioned accordingly.

As with most businesses, the risks of a slaving voyage could, for a price, be reduced. Insurance could be purchased to cover many risks, but not all. Instructions to an unnamed captain in 1785 were explicit about this. His financier made the point of reiterating that "on the health of your slaves, almost your entire voyage depends." The

[3] Galenson has noted that the power that captains wielded on board placed them in a position to enforce a conspiracy of silence among crew. This is but one example of the censorship that took place, and not all censorship was so obvious or overt. For example, depending on the audience, crew may not have wanted to speak of some unpleasant happenings, while other things may seemed too obvious to merit comment, or they may not have had or been able to reach an audience for their experiences. Slaves were silenced by language barriers and a lack of interest among their enslavers, or the lack of ability to write, among others.

financier had taken out insurance "for all other risques, but mortality, seizures and bad debts." Thus the captain was instructed to "particularly attend to smoking your vessel, washing her with vinegar, to the clarifying of your water with lime or brimstone, and to cleanliness among your own people, as well as among the slaves."[4] In short, the only reason the financier gave to the captain to carefully attend the slaves was a financial one.

Financial considerations formed the only structural incentive to preserve slaves' lives. Individual sentiment did occasionally occur, but not structurally. When it occurred, it tended to do so only when it did not pose a risk the financial viability of the voyage. Slavers did what they could to deliver as large a percentage of their cargo alive as possible, and this (other-directed) group survival impetus determined their interactions with slaves to a large degree. Slave's lives were commodities, and not to be destroyed lightly, or to be neglected.

If preserving slaves' lives required dehumanizing means, or violence, that was totally irrelevant. If a slave determined to commit suicide, for example, slavers would do everything in their power to preserve the slave's life. Falconbridge, an ex-slaving vessel doctor wrote that "Upon the negroes refusing to take sustenance, I have seen coals of fire, glowing hot, put on a shovel, and placed near their lips, as to scorch and burn them." So strong was the impetus of the crew to ensure slave survival – when it did not directly threaten their own – that some would, out of frustration and impotence, resort to torture. Falconbridge continued "I have also been credibly informed, that a certain captain in the

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D.W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behaviour in Early English America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 180.

[4] Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930-35), vol. 3, 79.

slave trade, poured melted lead on such negroes as obstinately refused their food."[5] Whippings were a much more common method of course, and many slavers carried a *speculum oris*, an instrument with which to force open slaves' mouths. These could, and on occasion did, break the teeth of slaves determined not to open their mouths. Postma reproduced a Dutch slaver's account in which "a man slave died who refused to eat, no matter what I tried. He bit so hard on the 'mouth screw' that the teeth fell out."[6] In this case the slave managed to prevail, but it was more common that the slaves were kept alive against their will. To the point of physically damaging slaves, their physical survival mattered, and did so far more than the methods used to gain the end.

The commodification of slaves' lives was the driving force behind slavers' actions; preservation of the "stock" remained was the whole point of the voyage. Occasionally slavers were quite explicit about how they conceptualized their human captives. Captain Irving, a Liverpool slaver wrote to his wife 1786 and concluded his letter as follows: "I think I'll desist [writing] as our black cattle are intolerably noisy and I'm almost melted in the midst of five or six hundred of them."[7] Whether or not this was a common manner of referring to slaves, it was almost certainly an accurate way of describing how slavers conceptualized their cargo in the aggregate. And it was accurate. It laid bare the commodification of humans and the complete de-individualization of the slaves on board. Irving's sentence also indicated that he considered his cargo to have value only in the aggregate, and that the lot of individual slaves interested him not at all.

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[5] Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 23.
[6] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 241.
[7] Suzanne Schwartz, *Slave Captain - The Career of James Irving in the Liverpool Slave Trade* (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1995), 67.

This too was accurate. It was a conceptualization that allowed individuals to justify their actions. It made very good sense on at least two levels.

First, it was entirely consistent with the basic rationale of the trade. For the slavers, the trade in humans was a means to an end – profit. Anything that increased profit was good management, and anything that threatened profit was bad management. Anything that did neither was irrelevant. Sentimentality and concern for the humanity of one's trade goods was not profitable, and could adversely affect good management decisions. Second, the conceptualization of slaves as "black cattle" or a similarly dehumanizing construct was a (perhaps subconscious) survival strategy for the slavers themselves. By distancing the people they enslaved and transported as much as possible from an humanity similar to their own, they could in their own mind justify – legitimize even –their treatment of the slaves.

Intellectual constructs made slaving possible at least as much as the market forces that made the trade profitable. The large social, racial and cultural gap between slaves and slavers provided a firm basis for them to be built on. This, and practice, led the chasm of understanding and empathy that characterized the trade. The more distance slavers could create between their own selves and that of slaves, the more justifiable their actions seemed to themselves and outsiders. It is difficult to establish from written sources to what degree slavers as a group truly believed the dehumanizing constructs they applied to those they enslaved. But most seem to have had few doubts. They were products of their time, and subject to the racist attitudes of their day, and these generally supported their views. There was a difference in degree between individuals, but it is safe to state that the vast majority of those involved in the trade slaves considered a slaves'

humanity to be quite distinct from their own. The conceptualization was hierarchical, with the slaves regulated to the bottom. This may have allowed some slavers to more easily keep possible doubts and weaknesses suppressed. No less important, it contributed to slavers being able to create and project an image of dominance and power towards slaves and one of confidence towards their superiors, both prerequisites in the trade.

As the dominant and oppressing group, part of their very survival strategy required them to play a role that supported their function in the trade. Their roles required that they appear assured, inviolable and superior. Even the lowliest crewmember defined himself in terms of power and societal standing against the slaves he transported; his power over the slaves formed his public identity on board, and at least a part of his private identity. The perception that the slaves had of white power was at least as important as physical restraints and safeguards in preventing slave resistance. If the slaves believed the crew to be weak, even if they were mistaken in doing so, resistance and mutiny became far more likely. From the perspective of the slavers, of course, all resistance attempts, including failed ones, were unwelcome. They were dangerous, tended to invite more resistance, and could cost both crew and slave lives. For all their superiority in control of the tools of violence on board, slavers lived in fear of their captives.[8] They all knew the stories of sailors on other slavers being killed in battles with mutinying slaves, and veterans of the trade on board were likely to have experienced an attempted slave uprising first hand. As such they constantly monitored the slaves'

[8] A quote from the slaver Adkins illustrated this neatly. Although he disdainfully refered to slaves as "natural cowards," he recommended "civil treatment." "Civil treatment" to slaves, particularly on the middle passage, did not come naturally or easily to many slavers. The fact that Adkins advised it was an indication that it was a code of behaviour that has been forced upon him by the slaves, in spite of his (and other slavers') inclinations. Adkins is quoted in Michael Craton, James Walvin et. al., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Longman, 1976), 27.

attitudes towards them and implicitly and explicitly sought to convince the slaves of the futility of resistance. They were constantly on guard for any sign that the perceptions that the slaves had of them were changing. They could not allow the slaves to develop any collective sense of confidence.

If the crew suspected unrest among the slaves, a spirit of mutual distrust could easily develop and escalate to bitter and open hostility. Such was the case in 1807 on Captain Viall's vessel the *Nancy* which had suffered and successfully put down a mutiny attempt by the slaves. Thomas Bartholomew, a passenger, testified that "He frequently heard the Master and Crew say, they were apprehensive the Slaves would break out" and that a crewmember on watch had fired into the hold, killing a slave, erroneously suspecting that the slaves were about to mutiny a second time. The following night "the same Man stabbed another of the Slaves ... supposing that they were again going to break out."[9] The fear that crew had of their slaves was not often discussed in the primary documentation, but whether implicit or explicit, as above, it determined the crew's attitude towards the slaves, how the slaves were restricted, and how slaving vessels were designed and equipped. A balance between fear and confidence dominated both the slaves and slaver's lives, and an increase of either usually came at the expense of the other party.

The relation between crew and slaves was a contradictory one. On the one hand the slaves' welfare was of primary importance to the slavers, and on the other they were a direct threat to slavers' survival chances. Nowhere was the contradiction in slaver interests more clearly expressed than in letters from financiers to captains. The instruction issued to Captain William Barry in 1725 to "see the sailors dont abuse [the

slaves] which has often been the done to the prejudice of the Voyage" was typical.[10] The order itself was understandable; financiers were anxious to obtain the greatest possible return on their investments, and anything that might adversely affect the value of the slaves they disagreed with in principle. Being far removed from the actual physical threat that slaves posed to the lives of crewmembers, they could afford the attitude expressed above. For crew, however, the matter was different.

Crew realized that they needed to walk a narrow line between a strict discipline that would prevent uprisings, and indulgences that might make the slaves healthier, but that exposed them to personal risk. Some financiers realized this, and took it into account, such as the instructions issued to Captain Caesar Lawson in 1803 made clear. He was ordered to "allow them [the slaves] every indulgence Consistent with your own Safety"[11], Captains, of course, understood this balance very clearly – they realized that there was a conflict of interests between crew and financiers on this point. Reminiscing about his experience as a slaving captain, Newton wrote that he had had "no concern, in point of conscience, but to treat the slaves, while under my care, with as much humanity as a regard to my own safety would admit."[12] This reflected the attitude of many conscientious slavers.

Less conscientious slavers tended to err on the side of personal safety. Behrendt, writing about crew mortality in the eighteenth century, concluded "The primary aim of merchants in the late eighteenth century was to minimize slave deaths in the middle passage to ensure a profitable voyage. Minimizing crew mortality was a secondary

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[9] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 401.
[10] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 327.
[11] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 651.

consideration."[13] If the slaves were – or were perceived to be – unusually dangerous, the restrictions imposed by crew could lead to complaints by financiers or their agents. Such was the case on the *Convert* that delivered 180 slaves out of the 213 slaves embarked to Barbados in 1680. The agents complained that "As wee conceive many of the men are much the worse for being soe loaded with Irons as they have bin all the Voyage the Captaine saying they are very unruly and once designed to rise and cut him and his People off Soe durst not trust them otherwise."[14] Restrictions were usually not so harsh, but if the crew felt themselves threatened, they had no qualms about increasing the harshness of restrictions on slaves. Usually only slaves that crew suspected of posing an above average threat were more heavily confined, not all the slaves, as on the *Convert*. Some captains allowed children and women to roam free on the vessel, and most seem to have unshackled slaves who were very sick. This balancing act was reflected in the confinement routines of slaves when they came on board; usually when there were only a few slaves on board, the confinement conditions were much less strict than when there were a larger number on board. As the number of slaves increased, so did the threat they posed, and the confinement became increasingly restrictive.[15] This policy had its risks, and captains did not always get away with it. There are several recorded examples of such laxness leading to mutinies. The captains and officers bore the responsibility for this. Much less, if any, blame was attached to ordinary crew. Such actions did not always reflect the views of the crew.

[12] John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader, 1750-1754 (With Newton's 'Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade')*, (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), Bernard Martin and M Spurrell (eds.), 99.
[13] Stephen D. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality in the TransAtlantic Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.), 66.
[14] E. Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 1, 259.
[15] For examples, see Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 153 - 154.

As a rule of thumb, the higher the rank of a crewmember, the more important it was to him to preserve the lives of slaves. This was because the financial incentives to do so were higher, and because with rank came both more responsibility and increased accountability. Ordinary crewmembers certainly wanted to deliver as many slaves alive as possible, but they were not willing to compromise their own safety to the degree that their financiers, or even sometimes their captains and officers were. But they lacked power on the vessel; captains set policy and officers were responsible for the implementation of the policy. The lower in rank, the less one had to contribute to this. Crew, regardless of rank, tended to value their individual lives not only above that of slaves, but also above that of their colleagues, regardless of rank. Slavers were, in terms of survival, not homogenous as a group. Collective crew survival certainly dictated many aspects of the how the middle passage was structured, but there also existed an intragroup tension, often but not always, along rank lines. This was well nigh universally true, and financiers were aware of it as much as the crew themselves. The instructions received by Captain William Berry in 1725 illustrated the matter succinctly. His owners, in a jointly signed letter, urged him to "See your Officers does their Duty in their severall stations and with them and the Men keep a good Harmony and decorum without to much familiarity or Austerity seeing the Voyage depends on good Conduct."[16] The captain was a closer ally to the financier than the crew was. This internal friction, which had negative implications for the survival chances of the crew as a whole, can only be partly accounted for by conceptualizing it in terms of individual crew survival strategies. The potential returns and the pressures of the voyage also need to be taken into account.

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[16] E. Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 2, 328.

Surviving the middle passage was still to a large degree a matter of luck for all on board, but the risks and rewards favored those in the higher ranks.[17] Ordinary crew knew this, and lived with the pressure of that knowledge, as much as with the pressure of the knowledge that the slaves, given the opportunity, would attempt to regain their freedom. The lapses in discipline were to a degree an escape valve for the double pressures that they were under. The strict discipline was a reaction to their insubordinate tendencies, but was also a means to regulate them to their subordinate positions. Unsurprisingly, this could threaten crew solidarity. All slavers balanced both their collective and personal survival chances against the benefits to be gained by keeping as many slaves alive as possible.

Contrary to the popular descriptions of the middle passage slavers, as a general rule, did not mistreat slaves to the degree that it endangered slaves' lives or well-being unnecessarily. When such mistreatment did occur, it nearly always focused on an individual slave or a small group of slaves, not all the slaves onboard. The irrational mistreatment of slaves was also nearly always committed by an individual crewmember or a small group of crewmembers rather than the crew collectively, even though the typical treatment on board vessels could vary considerably. The number of deaths of slaves due to deliberate and willful mistreatment accounted for only a very minor fraction of slave deaths on the middle passage. Indeed, many slavers believed that mistreatment was a major cause of mutinies, something they strove assiduously to avoid.[18] If a violent reaction was elicited from slaves by usual cruelty, it usually took the form of rebellion –

[17] See chapter 3, "Crew" for a breakdown of mortality and typical remuneration by rank.
[18] As discussed in chapter 6, "Mutiny," the surviving evidence does not bear this out. This has been observed in the case of land-based slavery too. See August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *The Making of Black America: Essays in Negro Life and History*, Rudwick, Elliot (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 178.

violence directed to the immediate oppressor, and not planned action undertaken with the taking over the vessel in mind. This too set a precedent that slavers were anxious to avoid. Consequently generally slaves were treated strictly – even harshly – but not irrationally so.[19]

There are many possible explanations that may account for the incidences of abuse that did occur. Some was mistreatment meted out by a particularly sadistic individual, but such individuals though perhaps more common in the trade than elsewhere, were exceptions. Captains often disciplined crewmembers prone to abusing slaves for either reason. Other mistreatment was simply 'normal' treatment meted out by particularly hardened individuals, who, all evidence to the contrary, would not have considered their actions blatant abuse, even by the standards of the trade. There was among slavers, as everywhere, a spectrum of behaviour that was considered normal. But this does not explain the extreme abuses that did occur on some ships, usually with the knowledge, and often participation, of the captain. Financiers warned against this, as did Captain Lawson's financier who ordered him to "not suffer any of your officers or Crew to abuse or insult them in any respect."[20] The captain set the standards on a slaving vessel on what was and what was not acceptable behaviour towards slaves. Such abuses may have been a form of survival strategy that a minority of slavers employed. By (over) emphasizing their power to the slaves, they may have reaffirmed their own power to themselves. Wanton mistreatment and dehumanization of slaves might have served to justify the slaves' generally miserable treatment in the minds of some crewmembers,

[19] Irrational cruelty and inconsistent harshness on slaving vessels *did*, however, pose an additional risk to crew. As noted, this usually led to rebellion, but these could escalate to mutinies. It also created a more dangerous atmosphere on board, increasing the chance of further resistance or rebellion.
[20] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 651.

contradictory as it appears. By treating slaves as sub-human, even when not dictated by economic motives to do so, the notion that they deserved no better was reinforced, as was the abuser's sense of superiority. It was the physical equivalent of the dehumanizing mental constructs that many slavers had of slaves. It relied on attempting to blame the slaves for their degraded circumstances by degrading them physically further. It may have created a more comfortable distance between the slaves and the abuser. But as a general rule slavers did what they could to ensure the survival of as many slaves as possible without extreme abuse, insofar as it was consistent with their own personal safety and that of the vessel.

All slavers were acutely aware of the danger that slaves posed to them, and realized that unanimity among themselves, or at least the appearance of it, was important to their personal safety. This was expressed toward the slaves implicitly and explicitly. Implicitly, they strove to present as much of a united front towards the slaves as possible. When Newton was confronted by two mutinous crewmembers, he worried that "such a mark of division amongst us was a great encouragement to the slaves to be troublesome."[21] More explicitly, Captain Penny tried to avoid whipping the crew as much as possible, "as it might alarm the Negroes and discredit the crew with them."[22] Slavers realized that their situation demanded that both individual and collective weakness, or appearances of them needed to be hidden from slaves insofar as possible. An apparent,

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[21] John Newton, *The Journal*, 72.

[22] Penny quoted in Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (London: Temple Smith, 1974), 36.

and preferably actual, united front was a survival necessity for the crew.[23] Part of this crew solidarity relied on racial solidarity.

The aura of power symbolized by a white skin, and the sanctity of a white skin needed to be unquestioned. Some captains, such as Captain Snelgrave, made explicit what was always implicit, and warned slaves that if "they offered to strike a white Man, they must expect to be severely punished."[24] Hegemony of white power on the middle passage was a prerequisite for survival, given the imbalance in numbers between slave and enslaver, and the imbalance in stakes – freedom and remaining in Africa on the one hand, and profits on the other.

Punishment of slaves, and the various forms that it took was another expression of crew survival strategies. Nearly all captains executed slaves who killed a white crewmember. To return to Snelgrave – after his vessel suffered a mutiny, he informed the slave who had killed a white person through an interpreter that "tho' I knew it was customary in his Country to commute for Murder by a Sum of Money, yet it was not so with us; and he should find that I had no regard to my Profit in this respect: For as soon as an Hour-Glass, just then turned, was run out, he should be put to death." Snelgrave then had a rope tied around the slave's chest to hoist him up in the air to be shot, and was later informed by his linguist that "Some of his Countrymen.... would not have him be frightened; for it was lain that I did not design to put him to death, otherwise the Rope would have been put around his neck, to hang him." The slave was shot publicly for his 'crime,' and more importantly, for the lesson it was intended to teach the other slaves.

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[23] In this regard the middle passage was no different to land-based slavery. As Monica Schuler noted "The Europeans in turn pursued a deliberate policy of spreading the notion of their supremacy in order to strengthen their position: 'Opinion governs the world, and the moment the Negroes shall lose their opinion

After the slave was executed, Snelgrave ordered his linguist to inform the gathered slaves "that now they might judge no one that killed a white Man would be spared".[25] The slavers' projected image of unity and invincibility could only be sustained by the harsh reinforcement of that image whenever challenged.

The same "crimes" by slaves could elicit wildly different retribution on different vessels. Extremely cruel and clearly excessive punishments were unusual, but did occur in the trade.[26] These incidents of extreme sadism and cruelty reveal more about the crew's fears and the lengths some went to assuage them, than about the transgressions of the slaves. The slaves' pecuniary value was usually – but not always – a protection against irrational violence by members. But if a slave was already condemned to die, this protection fell away. All punishment, extreme or less so, served first and foremost as an attempt to intimidate the remaining slaves and to impress on them the futility of resistance. Punishment was a public spectacle, and aimed at the witnesses at least as much as at the victim. Retribution and rehabilitation were secondary concerns, especially in the case of serious transgressions, such as mutiny.[27] As such punishments were where

of the Superiority of the White Men, the authority of the White Men will become precarious'." M. Schuler "Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas," *Journal of Social History* 3 (1970), 384.

[24] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 352.

[25] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 352 and 359.

[26] These could take *very* barbaric forms. For an example of a crewmember's description of the execution of 46 slaves which included strangulation and the chopping off of a leg of a slave still living after being shot (in order to separate the condemned slave from the slave he was shackled to) among other horrors, see R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 41. A case of mutinous slaves being forced to eat body parts of executed slaves, is reprinted in E. Donnan, Documents, vol. 2, 266. For a primary example of very harsh punishment – by mutilation – of a living slave in the Dutch slave trade, see J. Postma, *The Dutch*, 168.

[27] Punishments for very serious transgressions on land – for example, organized rebellions that resulted in the death of whites (the land-based equivalent of mutinies) – also took extremely barbaric forms. The dynamic was the same, but such acts by slaves were much less common on land than on sea. For examples of the horrific tortures inflicted on slaves on land in these cases, see David Barry Gaspar, *Bondsmen and Rebels: A Study Master-Slave Relations in Antigua with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 23-24 and Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 283-4. See also Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University

the most horrific abuses of slaves occurred. When directly threatened, crew did not hesitate to sacrifice slave lives, and sometimes, even a remote semblance of humanity.

Punishment of slaves on board was first and foremost a protective strategy for the crew. While punishments were calculated to maximize crew survival chances, slavers knew that terror and harsh confinements alone could not ensure their survival, at least not without adversely effecting the slaves' market value to an unacceptable degree. Thus slavers also sought to reassure slaves, and at times, to bribe them. Crewmembers understood that desperate people will take desperate measures, and some captains tried to reassure slaves as much as was in their power. Many slaves came on board under the misapprehension that they had been purchased in order to be cannibalized. This added greatly to some slaves' desperation. Some slavers realized this, and explicitly explained to their slaves that were not to be eaten, but had been purchased for their labor.[28]

Some captains offered small rewards or treats to the slaves in an attempt to conciliate the slaves to some degree. These could take the form of a little rum or tobacco after meals, or of deck privileges, or of beads for the women. Stein has noted that captains in the French trade regularly relied on bribes to encourage good behavior, and instruction manuals for the trade recommended the practice.[29] Whether these measures were effective and if so, to what degree, is not clear.

Press, 1990), 70 and Sylvia Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 236.

[28] This was indicative of how many Africans conceptualized their enslavers; the ultimate debasement of the other among many cultures (the enslavers' included) was to cast the other as cannibals. By the breaking the nearly universal human taboo against cannibalism, the other was dehumanized, and removed from any common humanity. See chapter 5, "Mutiny" for more on the role of fears of cannibalism in slave ship insurrections, as well as the attempts of some captains to remove those fears. For an in depth discussion of cannibalism, real and imagined see W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[29] R.L. Stein, *The French*, 103.

All captains, however, relied first and foremost on strict discipline to keep the necessity of using physical violence to a minimum, and, though they may not have realized it, to provide some form of structure and predictability to the slaves' lives. Order and regularity, of whatever form, allowed the slaves to adjust their behaviour to their circumstances, no matter how bad they may have been, and this in turn was in the interests of the crew. The use of positive incentives, when used, was an attempt to supplement discipline and restrictive measures. When everyday coercive measures failed, overt violence was resorted to.

As crew and slaves spent more time together, particularly if there were not a very large number of slaves on board, a routine and a form of understanding tended to develop between the two. This did not mean that the slaves resigned themselves to their fate, or that the crew became more tolerant, but a routine of sorts did develop. The development of this understanding was beneficial to both parties, and could reduce tensions and misunderstandings. Very occasionally this kind of relationship between slaves and slavers could appear remarkably amicable on the surface as it did on the *Elizabeth*, described in chapter 3. But it was always a surface understanding that did not change the basic conflict between the parties, or the survival prerogatives of either side. The slaves understood this, as did Snelgrave. The ship's cooper on the *Elizabeth* did not.[30] If the crew felt that slaves threatened their survival chances, they did not hesitate to sacrifice them.

Slavers sometimes sought to protect themselves from non-violent and involuntary threats slaves posed at the expense of slaves' lives. The primary literature records several instances of the slavers throwing overboard living slaves who were suffering from

smallpox.[31] Some vessels carried poisons to dispatch sufferers before disposing of them overboard. In the case of the vessel the *Polly* under Captain De Wolfe in 1788, a woman was thrown overboard as the captain "was afraid the disease would spread itself among the other Negroes and the crew which consisted of 15 men of whom ten had not had the smallpox. Consequently, with the consent of the ship's officers and men, a conclusion was reached to sacrifice the life of one person."[32] This case was unusual in that the captain reported the matter, and in that it later came to trial. One of the supporting reasons given in the trail for making the decision was that "the slaves they had on board were of a nation famed for its valour and inclination to revolt. If the crew were attacked with this disease, it would afford the slaves an opportunity to execute any plot they might form." But in the final analysis, "Many of the crew were under apprehension for their own personal safety."[33] The judge found in favor of the defendant, and all charges were dropped. The incident illustrates the quandary that slavers sometimes found themselves in. They put themselves in extremely dangerous circumstances, fully knowing the risks they ran. But when the risks became, in their view, too high, they generally chose to reduce their own risks at the expense of the slaves.

Crew could be expected to argue that if the well-being of the entire vessel's occupants, black and white, depended on sacrificing a few, it was reasonable to sacrifice the few. Smallpox epidemics were the terror of slaving voyages, and could decimate the

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[30] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 357.
[31] See Theodore Canot, *Adventures of an African Slaver: Being a True Account of the Life of Captain Theodore Canot, His Own Story as Told in the Year 1854 to Branz Mayer* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1928) for a graphic description of two such incidences.
[32] Isidor Paiewonsky, *Eyewitness accounts of Slavery in the Danish West Indies, Also Graphic Tales of Other Slave Happenings on Ships and Plantations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 65.
[33] Isidor Paiewonsky, *Eyewitness accounts*, 67.

vessels on which they broke out.[34] Yet there are, to the best of my knowledge, no recorded incidents in which a living crewmember who had contracted smallpox was thrown overboard. While some uninfected crewmembers may have favored such an action, the value that crew placed on their own humanity far exceeded that which they granted slaves, and such actions would have threatened crew solidarity. Crew sought to minimize as many of the risks they faced as the nature of the trade would allow, and were always far more willing to compromise the lives of the slaves than one of their own number. This can be clearly seen in times of emergency or distress. In such circumstances crewmembers were much more likely to survive than slaves were. The more slaves a vessel had on board, the more likely this was to be true. If an emergency struck, crew did not only give their own escape priority, but at times deliberately thwarted the slaves' attempts to escape, either to avoid being surrounded by hostile slaves after escaping the vessel, or to facilitate their own escape. Such was the case on the Dutch slaver the *Leusden* in 1738. After the ship ran aground due to bad weather, the crew closed the hatches, locking the slaves in the holds, and made good their escape on the ship's boats. The slaves drowned or suffocated over the course of the day and the following night. According to Postma "The crew excused their callous action on the grounds that if they had let the slaves out pandemonium would have broken out and no one would have survived because the life boats could barely carry the crew and the few slaves that were

[34] Postma has found that in the Dutch trade smallpox was the second most common cause of death (after dysentery), accounting for approximately 15% of all slave deaths. J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 244. See E. Donnan, *Documents* vol. 1, 409 for a description of a voyage that lost 320 slaves and 14 crewmembers to an epidemic.

on deck."[35] Seventy-three crewmembers and fourteen slaves survived the wreck, 702 slaves did not.

The Atlantic slavery dataset supports the contention made above. Of the 183 voyages known to have suffered a shipwreck while slaves were on board, fully 70% (129 cases) are known to have resulted in slave deaths. On average, each vessel had 243.5 slaves on board, but an average of only 29.07 are reported to have disembarked from those voyages – a mortality of approximately 82%.[36] Thirty-five voyages resulted in the loss of all slaves on board. The data do not allow a calculation of the percentage of crew who perished with the vessel in these cases, but it may be confidently assumed that it did not even remotely approach that of slaves. Qualitative evidence supports this. The Newport trader Godfrey Malone dispatched three vessels to Africa to trade for slaves between 1736 and 1740. All met with disaster; the first was "over-set and intirely lost", the second was "consum'd by lightning on the Coast of Guinea, with a great many Negroes on Board", and the third was also wrecked. In the first two cases, all the crew survived, while in the third case, the captain and eight crewmembers survived.[37] In none of the cases did any of the slaves survive.

The crew of slaving vessels did not risk their own safety for that of slaves no matter how many lives were at stake, least of all when the financial motivation to do was absent or substantially reduced. The stranding of the *Griffin*, described by Barbot illustrated the point well. After having run aground in 1697 with 350 slaves on board,

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[35] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch,* 243.
[36] Only 40 of the 129 voyages allow the number of slaves embarked to be inputed. Thus the figures are unlikely to reflect the averages over the entire trade; the data is too fragmentary and flawed to generalize with absolute confidence. However, the trend identified here is virtually certain to hold over the entire trade.
[37] See Sarah Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen: Newport Slavers, 1735-1774," *The New England Quarterly* (Boston, Mass.). See also E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 301.

"the crew all got in the long-boat, and ran ashore at Bandy." They left "the ship with all her sails out, and all the slaves in her, to be tossed to and fro for three days in the channel, till at last it was split in pieces." The slaves were lucky – "the king of Bandy ... sent several canoes aboard her, which took out all her slaves."[38] Usually they could not rely on either the crew or some other savior in times of distress. The crew knew the risks of their business, and if they exceeded a certain level, they generally chose to live to sail another day. This is not to suggest that the slavers did what they did out of sadism.

When rescuing the slaves did not imperil their own lives overly much, slavers would generally do so. Captain Perry's vessel the *Nancy,* for example, suffered a leak with 59 slaves on board "which encreased on them so much, that they were glad to quit their vessel, taking with them all their slaves ... and went on board a Marblehead vessel."[39] In this case there was no extreme haste, there were relatively few slaves on board, and a vessel spacious enough to accommodate everyone. In short, there was little extra risk, and the crew could, in terms of their own survival, afford to salvage what they could of their trade.

The coast of Africa was sufficiently dangerous to encourage solidarity between slavers that extended beyond the crewmembers of any particular slaver. The closest cooperation took place between slaving vessels that belonged to the same company, group of financiers, or owner. Cooperation, however, was not limited by a shared financial interest. It also occurred between slavers of the same nation that had little else in common, and even between slavers of different nations. This mutual support, even among competitors, made good sense. It allowed all parties to spread their risks more

[38] Donnan, *Documents* vol. 3, 121, 131, 134.
[39] Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 459.

effectively. Supporting other slavers in times of distress was a sound survival strategy for all parties. Stein has recognized the cooperation between slavers, and writing about the French slave trade, remarked that "The oppressive atmosphere along the coast helped foster a spirit of camaraderie among slaving crews working on different ships from France or even from abroad." He noted that in times of peace in Europe, "slavers from different countries could deal with each other amicably, and food, merchandise and slaves were exchanged without problem between ships flying different flags."[40] This type of aid was partly a business transaction between the parties, but more importantly, it set a precedent that could be looked to in times of emergency.

Such emergencies could take many forms. For example, when the crew of the English vessel *Mary* became unruly in 1796 and "Knocked the Capt. Down with a Hatch bar and wounded him in Several places, (particular two dangerous wounds on the head) and would have murdered him no doubt", the captain of a nearby vessel sent his chief mate and some crew who assisted in putting down the mutiny. But the real reason Captain Ambrose of the *Whim* (also an English vessel) came to Captain Henry's rescue was because he was "allarmed at the Noise and suppos[ed] that our Slaves had got loose."[41] When on a later date the *Mary* actually suffered a slave insurrection, a Portuguese captain came aboard with twenty armed men to aid in the suppressing of the uprising.[42] Fear of slave uprisings lay at the heart of cooperation between slavers on the coast of Africa. They were the cement that held white collaboration together on the coast of Africa.

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[40] Robert L. Stein, ***The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business*** (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 88.
[41] E. Donnan, ***Documents***, vol. 3, 369.

There are many references in the literature which unambiguously confirm that slavers of all nationalities came to each others' aid in suppressing slave mutinies without any evident self-interest other than the implicit assumption that, should it ever be required, they would be similarly helped. The Dutch slaver Captain Bosman, suffering an uprising among his slaves in 1699 who "would certainly have mastered the ship, if a French and English ship had not very fortunately happened to lye by us" was relieved by the two vessels. He actually called upon his rescuers "by our firing a distress'd-gun", thus indicating that aid was not given only in a haphazard manner, but that there was an informal understanding between slavers.[43]

Such actions could be risky to the vessels offering aid. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* of May 16, 1754, for example, reported to its readers that the slaves on board the English vessel the *Thomas*, after having taken the vessel, used the ship's swivel gun "in experienced Manner" to fight off two other slavers who tried to retake the vessel. The vessels "held an Hour's Engagement with her very hot" until they were forced to retire by the failing light and the need to tend to their own slaves.[44] The newspaper was unable to establish how the conflict ended. Offering aid could be risky in other respects too; in 1785 the English vessel the *Vigilantie* accidentally hit the powder room of the Dutch vessel the *Neptunis* which had been taken by the slaves on board. The resulting explosion killed all seventeen crewmembers on board the vessel, and only eight slaves out of an indeterminate number on board survived.[45] These were both exceptional cases. Usually the aid worked out well for all parties, the slaves excepted. But cases like them did mean

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[42] E. Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 3, 375. Mutinous slaves were the cause of most emergencies that led to the intervention of another slaver.
[43] E. Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 1, 443.
[44] The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 16, 1754.

that while slavers would aid each other in times of distress, there were sometimes limits to the aid they were prepared to offer. On the 12th of January 1759 Captain Potter's vessel the *Perfect* suffered an insurrection while he was onshore with a number of his crew. The slaves captured the vessel, and Captain Potter appealed to Captain Cooke of the *Spencer* to help him regain his vessel. Cooke was prepared to help, but only to a degree; in Potter's words, "he fired his guns into her for about an hour, but I could not persuade him to board her."[46] Nonetheless, in spite of the risks involved, and in spite of the fact the intervention was not always successful, the solidarity among slavers in this regard was real, and a clear part of their survival strategy. The survival benefits of cooperation clearly outweighed the risks.

Slaves on board were threatened by many different things, most of which were beyond their power to control. Foremost among these were illnesses, especially infectious diseases that could cripple a vessel.[47] Ships' doctors – though they varied considerably in quality and dedication – generally did what they could, but the unhygienic shipping conditions and the limited medical knowledge of the day handicapped them severally.[48] Other risks that slaves had no control over included the quality and the quantity of food and water, the level of care the crew devoted to them (or abuse they engaged in), and the

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[45] J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 167.
[46] Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 492.
[47] For works that deal with the diseases slaves and crew were at risk for during the middle passage, see H.S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton: Princeton U.P, 1978), 93; Raymond L. Cohn, "Maritime Mortality in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Survey," *International Journal of Maritime History* 1, 1 (1989), 174; James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 291 and J.M. Postma, *The Dutch,* 244. See also Stephen. D. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality in the TransAtlantic Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.)
[47] R.L. Cohn, "Maritime Mortality", 174; J. Rawley, *The Transatlantic*, 291 and J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 244.
[48] For a discussion on the medical equipment a doctor on a slaving vessel generally had on board, see R.L. Stein, *The French,* 61 and J. Rawley, *The Transatlantic,* 295-7.

risks associated with sailing – storms, wrecks, navigation errors and the like. All of this, and the knowledge that they had been enslaved for life, contributed to a sense of lack of control about their own lives and destinies. Yet there were certain aspects of their lives that they could control to a greater or lesser degree while on board. They could choose to undertake certain actions that could increase or diminish their chances of survival. In other words, there was room on board for slaves to develop survival strategies. The journey was too short and the relationship between slave and enslaver was too transient to develop sophisticated survival strategies that paralleled those that slaves formulated while enslaved in the Americas; survival on a slaving vessel required a different response. But because of the principles on which the middle passage was based, and because of the great similarity of the physical environments on board slaving vessels, recognizable patterns did emerge.

The first order of priority for slaves was to formulate a mental response to their situation. Slaves understood that while their enslavers wanted them to survive as a group, their individualism meant nothing to those that had the power of life and death over them. One of the first adaptations slaves needed to make was to accept of the fact that the image he or she had of themselves was important only to themselves, not to those who held power over them. To their oppressors they had only pecuniary value. They could not expect, and seldom got, any recognition of their humanity or suffering on an individual basis. Accepting this went against the grain of human nature, but survival demanded that they act accordingly, for to do otherwise was to invite personal suffering and unwanted attention from their oppressors. This required that they release all the expectations that they might have had in their previous life, and not allowing those, insofar as was

possible, to interfere with how they dealt with their present circumstances. This was not the same as accepting its permanence, or legitimizing it in any way.[49]

The slave Baquaqua, who made the middle passage to Brazil in 1840, described his reactions in the following way: "I did not know my destiny ... All I knew was, that I was a slave, chained by the neck, and that I must readily and willingly submit, come what would, which I considered was as much as I had any right to know."[50] His reaction was probably extreme; many slaves would have developed a realistic picture of their circumstances in order to have determined the best way to survive in them without showing the submissiveness that Baquaqua claimed to have shown. But they would have adopted a dual consciousness. The essence of the dual consciousness that they needed to adopt to maximize their survival chances was developing a realistic acceptance of their circumstances, while retaining and drawing on an inner reservoir that insisted that their enslavers were wrong, and that they were more than their circumstances dictated they were. The former was necessary to protect them and the latter was necessary to sustain them. Recognition and a realistic acceptance of their status were important, but if a door was to be kept open for resistance it was also important to not internalize the knowledge, and or believe in its necessity. Most slaves remained very much open to opportunities to

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[49] Nazi concentration camp survivor and psychologist Viktor Frankyl put it as follows "At that moment I saw the plain truth, and did what marked the culminating point of the first phase of my psychological reaction: I struck out my whole former life." Viktor Frankyl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), 27. More than slavery on land, slavery and survival on a vessel can be compared to a total system. Even though the goal of those involved in the slave trade was the preservation of as many slave lives as possible, unlike the death camps in Nazi Germany, the extreme dehumanization and utter disregard of slaves' individuality makes the comparison appropriate on some levels. See Stanley Elkin's controversial comparison of southern slavery to the death camps in Nazi Germany in *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Public Life* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959, 1976). See also his critics Eugene Genovese, "Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis," *Civil War History* XIII, December (1967) and Earl Thorpe, "Chattel Slavery And Concentration Camps," *Negro History Bulletin* XXV, May (1962).
[50] R.E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 27.

change their circumstances, remaining alert for chances to escape or mutiny.[51] Resistance and mutinies were far more common on sea than on land.

Mental resilience and the determination to endure and survive were important factors in determining a slave's chances of surviving the voyage and its stresses. This required a mental adjustment that not all slaves were capable of. Some slaves retreated into a deep depression, and attempted to shut out the reality in which they found themselves; some even became mentally unbalanced due to the stresses they were under.[52] Other slaves dwelled on the torments of the present and the probable torments of the future. Ottobah Cugoano, writing about his experiences as a slave in a slaving vessel recalled that "All my help was cries and tears, and these could not avail; nor suffered long till one succeeding woe, and dread, swelled up another" after reminiscing about his parents.[53] While these reactions were natural, and could to some degree inure slaves from actively engaging their new surroundings, they could be dangerous too. Reading between the lines of contemporary slaver accounts, it is appears that some slaves became so despondent and disengaged that they hardly cared what happened to them. They had, in effect, given up. They became passive and did not struggle as hard as they might have to survive the ordeal. This was true only of a minority, but it was a real phenomenon.

Very little is known about what actually happened in the holds of a slaving vessel, and less yet about what slaves thought and talked about. The interior lives of slaves on

[51] Circumstances could sometimes change very rapidly. A case in point was the initially successful mutiny on the English vessel the *King David* in 1750. According to the *Boston News-Letter* of September 6, 1750, "The insurrection was contrived and begun by 15 that had for considerable Time been treated with the same Freedom as the white men; and a great many of the later dying, encouraged them in their Design. As the Chief of these Slaves spoke very good English, he often convers'd with the Captain in his Cabbin, where all the arms were loaded ... they at once flew into the Cabin, and secured the Arms in a few Minutes, kill'd the Captain and five of the People ...." In E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 486.
[52] For a brief discussion on this, see J.M. Postma, *The Dutch*, 242.

the middle passage are nearly completely lost, and very likely to stay that way. Yet with the fragmentary evidence that does exist, some observations can be made. The first point that must be made is the sense of loss, fear and alienation that was pervasive in the holds. In the words of Baquaqua, "Our sufferings were our own, we had no one to share our troubles, none to care for us, or even to speak a word of comfort to us."[54] Slaves on the middle passage had interior lives that were completely out of the realm of white observation. Just how diverse they were, what forms they took, and how they effected survival chances cannot be precisely recovered. The closest we can come is to examine the close friendships that could develop between slaves on the middle passage. Forged in common suffering, danger and the need for human support, these ties could last a lifetime and transcended the limits of everyday friendship. Several writers have recognized these friendships, and occasionally compared them to familial ties.[55] A slave who was released from a slaving vessel after its capture by the Royal Navy in 1818, Samuel Crowther, confirmed this. He wrote, "we were divided into several of the vessels around us. This was now cause of new fears, not knowing where our misery would end. Being now, as it were, one family."[56] The phenomena was well known throughout the slave trade dispersal area; in Jamaica it was referred to as "shipmate", in Surinam "sippi", in Brazil "mulongo", and "malongue" in Trinidad.[57] These relationships were likely to have been a

[53] Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments of the Evil of Slavery* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1787), 10.
[54] R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 27.
[55] Orlando Patterson has written that "so strong were the bond[s] between shipmates that sexual intercourse between them was considered incestuous" and that shipmates "looked upon each other's children as there own." Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 149-150, 163.
[56] Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 313.
[57] Okon Edet Uya, "The Middle Passage and Personality Change Among Diaspora Africans," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora (2nd ed.)*, Harris (ed.), 93.

source of not only comfort, but also strength to the slaves. While they were powerless to change much about their circumstances, the act of sharing their suffering may have allowed them to draw on reservoirs of strength that they might not otherwise have discovered. Both the giving and the receiving of support will have been important. It was important to feel that one was not alone in one's suffering, and to know that someone else cared. The act of giving might have made an otherwise unbearably hard life livable. The sense of purpose and agency this created can only have had a positive effect on the mental and physical survival chances of the slaves.

There is some evidence that these kinds of friendships were particularly likely to form among individuals of the same ethnic group. There is direct evidence, such as presented by Chambers, that slaves tended to rely on their own ethnic group, and there is indirect evidence from the trade itself.[58] Captains used different ethnic origins to control the slaves by appointing overseers from particular ethnic group to control and betray slaves from other groups.[59] That the practice worked is not surprising; in nearly any group of individuals, some will seek to better their position at the expense of their fellows. The greater the distance between the individuals, the more likely one would be willing to profit at the expense of the other's suffering. Conversely, it is not too much to speculate that slaves who spoke the same language, or who knew each other from the barracoons, would have been more likely to form close friendships.

While the friendships formed between some slaves on board was real, it is important not to romanticize slave solidarity on the middle passage. While considerable

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[58] Douglass B. Chambers, "'My Own Nation': Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora," *Slavery and Abolition* (June 1997, Spec. ed.), 73, 87.
[59] For examples, see E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 1, 361 and 407. See chapter 3, "Crew" for a more detailed consideration of this phenomenon.

attention has been paid to shipmate ties on the middle passage, virtually none has been accorded to the frequent quarrels and fights among slaves. This reflects what scholars consider important, but does not present a balanced picture of the reality of slave life in the holds of slaving vessel. In actuality, both occurred on the middle passage, and on the same vessel. The primary literature abounds with references to fights between slaves in the holds, some mere squabbles, and others ending in the death of a slave. The slaver Barbot, wrote that "those poor wretches, the slaves of New Calabar, are ... always quarrelling, biting and fighting, and sometimes choaking and murdering one another, without any mercy, as happened to several aboard our ship."[60] Barbot was far from alone in his views. Even some of the few surviving accounts written by slaves refer to slaves fighting amongst themselves. Crowther, a boy when enslaved, wrote that "Very often at night, when two or three individuals quarrelled, the whole suffered punishment, without any distinction."[61] The point here, of course, is the phrase "Very often."

The circumstances slaves found themselves in determined that slaves would quarrel and fight amongst themselves. Being held as a slave under horrendous conditions, about to be taken away from one's homeland on a dangerous voyage with an unpredictable but certainly unpleasant end, without hope of redemption, understandably did not bring out the best in many individuals. Tempers ran short, and were easily lost. There was no possibility solitude to collect oneself, like there was on land. The risk of attacking a crewmember – the direct oppressor – was too large, and so it was fellow slaves who suffered. It must be emphasized that not all slaves turned their fear and anger into violence directed at their fellow captives, but a minority did. Wilberforce, the

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[60] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 15.
[61] Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, 311.

abolitionist, observed that "when men of different countries and languages, or of opposite tempers are linked together, [] such scenes take place as are too nauseous for description."[62] While it is impossible to recover, it seems plausible that fights were more likely to occur between individuals who had little in common other than their slavery. Personal and ethnic animosities were likely to come to a head in the dreadful conditions and the stresses of life onboard a slaving vessel.

Purely practical considerations could also lead to fights breaking out. After describing the buckets placed in the holds that served the slaves as toilets, the slaving ship surgeon Falconbridge noted that "It often happens, that those who are placed at a distance from the buckets, in endevouring to get to them, tumble over their companions, in consequence of their being shackled. These incidents, although unavoidable, are productive of continual quarrels, in which some of them are always bruised. In this distressed situation, and unable to proceed, and prevented from getting to the tubs, they desist from the attempt; and as the necessities of nature are not to be repelled, ease themselves as they lie. This becomes a fresh source of broils and disturbances."[63] It does not require much imagination to understand and accept Falconbridge's point.

Competition for scarce resources was also a major cause of disputes and violence among slaves. It was also a part of the survival strategy that some slaves chose to adopt. Water – especially unspoiled water – was often in short supply, and slaves could easily lose a considerable amount through perspiration in the hot and stuffy holds, through seasickness, and the dreaded "flux" (diarrhea). Thirst was a serious problem on many voyages, and the lack of water was frequently mentioned by slaves as being a major

[62] Quoted in T.F. Buxton, *African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 134.
[63] A. Falconbridge, *An Account*, 20.

source of suffering. Baquaqua recalled that "We suffered very much for want of water, but was denied all we needed. A pint a day was all that was allowed, and no more." It was safer to steal water from a fellow slave than to attack a crewmember. Baquaqua related that on his vessel "There was one poor fellow so very desperate for want of water, that he attempted to snatch a knife from the white man who brought in the water, when he was taken up on deck and I never knew what became of him."[64] Wilson and Grim have argued that the ability to withstand dehydration was a major factor in selecting those slaves who survived the middle passage, and that because of this, their descendants today have an increased chance of suffering from hypertension.[65] Water was a resource worth fighting for.

Access to fresh air too, was a source of disputes. The holds were hot, fetid and had a nauseating stench that pervaded the entire vessel. Several of the few surviving accounts written by slaves indicate how desperate they were for fresh air. After arriving in Brazil, Baquaqua, referred to above, relates that "I felt thankful to Providence that I was once more permitted to breathe pure air, the thought of which almost absorbed every other."[66] So desperate were slaves for fresh air that fights for access to it could lead to deaths. Commodore Bullen of the Royal Navy captured the vessel *Le Daniel* in 1826 for engaging in the illegal trade in slaves. He reported to his superiors that "in consequence of the heavy rain which commenced shortly after I brought him to, the slaves quarelled among themselves regarding the right of precedence of those below to get on deck for

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[64] In R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 27.
[65] Thomas W. Wilson, and Clarence E. Grim, "Biohistory of Slavery and Blood Pressure Differences in Blacks Today: A Hypothesis," *Hypertension* 17, 1 (Suppl.) (1991).
[66] R. E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 29.

fresh air, and those who had already the possession of it, when, shocking to relate, 19 fell victims."[67]

Competition for resources that was part of the survival battle on a slaving vessel. We know very little about the power groups in the holds, how they were formed, or who tended towards these actions and who did not. Perhaps ethnic groupings, or brute physical strength, or previous standing were important in determining status in the holds, or perhaps other factors were involved. The exact dynamics cannot be recovered. What may be safely deduced is that there must have been such groups, and that whatever success they had, came at the expense of their fellow slaves. As in any closed society were survival was at stake, some individuals dominated the weaker among the slaves, and did so in order to maximize their survival chances, regardless of the lot of their fellows.

An important part of the slaves' survival strategy was avoiding actions and situations that were or had the potential to negatively effect their survival chances. Blending in with the mass of slaves was an integral part of surviving the passage. This cannot simply be reduced to compliance with slaver dictates. From the slave's perspective, the crew was an unknown quantity: unpredictable, untrustworthy and potentially dangerous. As there was not enough time on the middle passage to articulate a fully-fledged structure that balanced accommodation and the need to retain a sense of individuality and own agency, however limited, discretion was the safest option. The physical environment of the vessel was well suited to this strategy. The slaves greatly outnumbered the crew, and the crew did not generally need to have a working relationship with any of the slaves. Thus attempting to blend into what was for the crew a more or less homogenous mass was far more practical than on land. Outward compliance

[67] Reprinted in T. F. Buxton, *African Slave Trade*, 149.

on the middle passage was a complex balancing act, and tended to take the form of accommodation combined with a concealing of the self, both of the physical body and of one's character. The balance between blending and compliance was in most circumstances an effective survival strategy in a situation that offered few promising alternatives.

While the strategy was a general one, it was probably adapted to take into account good' and 'bad' crewmembers as the slaves learned to recognize and take into account individual crewmember's characters. In the case of a sympathetic crewmember – that is, one who might positively influence any given slave's survival chances – the strategy of blending might be discarded entirely in favor of a dissemblence strategy more closely related to that of slaves on land.[68] On both land and sea the true self was kept hidden by the creation of a public persona, and in both cases the slave relied on a strict internal discipline to keep the two separate. Self-control and constant watchfulness were essentials for any masking activities, and this was even more overtly the case on the middle passage than on land. However, the middle passage did not last long enough for the mask to become well-practiced or to learn the ways of one's oppressors nearly as well as on land, and the physical environment was different.

It was occasionally in the slaves' best interests to actively cooperate with their oppressors. This was particularly the case in situations where the survival of the vessel itself was at stake. For example, the slaver on which Mungo Parks sailed in 1797 "after having been three weeks at sea, became so extremely leaky, as to require constant exertion at the pumps." Given this, "It was found necessary, therefor, to take some of the

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[68] For more on dissemblence, see D. Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblence," *Signs* 14 (Summer, 1989).

ablest of the Negro men out of irons, and employ them at this labour." Even though it was in the slaves' interests that the vessel remained afloat, "they were often worked beyond their strength."[69] But slaves generally did not need to be coerced to aid the crew when it was in their best interests to do so, or could be made to be in their interests.

Sometimes an incentive was offered to gain the slaves' cooperation, as was the case on a slaver owned by the slave traders Godfrey and John Malbone. When attacked by privateers Godfrey Malbone offered "freedom to all the slaves who would join in defending the vessel."[70] The vessel was successfully defended, and the slaves consequently freed. Sometimes, however, the crew falsely convinced the slaves that it was in their interests to join with their oppressors, for example, by convincing them that their lives would be forfeit if the vessel were taken.[71] Both these types of incidents were, however, very unusual. Usually survival strategies that involved the cooperation of one or more slaves with their oppressors were of a more unpalatable variety, particularly from the perspective of their fellow slaves.

Crew knew that their vigilance and the restrictions that they placed on slaves could not always be relied upon to prevent uprisings. As such they sometimes recruited slaves to watch over their fellow captives and to betray any plotting or lapses in discipline. These slaves had a hazardous job. On the face of it, it appears to be a very risky survival strategy. They were subject to the dangers of the holds, and if conflict broke out between the regular crew and the slaves, they could expect no mercy from the slaves. The evidence suggests that they were effective, both in betraying plots and in

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[69] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 2, 641.
[70] E. Donnan, *Documents*, vol. 3, 131. See chapter 3 "Crew," for a discussion of this and other instances when slaves joined crew in fighting for the vessel.
[71] For an example of such a case from a primary document, see G. Williams, *History of the*, 560.

keeping order among the slaves. These slaves voluntarily betrayed their comrades' interests in order to better the survival chances of their oppressors, and possibly their own. But the privileges they received – better rations, more water, the right to carry a whip, or greater freedom of movement perhaps, or even a greater familiarity with the wielders of power, the crew – was sufficient to persuade at least some slaves to accept the task, and to carry it out faithfully. Whether they ultimately improved their own survival chances while on board cannot be conclusively determined, but it is probable that they did. What is evident is that regardless of how they might have felt about their position, they were ultimately survival tools for the regular crew, and if they bettered their own survival chances, they did so at the expense of the remaining slaves.

Slaves who were not appointed agents of the crew also sometimes betrayed their fellows. These betrayals worked to the betrayers' benefit on two levels. In the first place, it ensured that the plot would not come to fruition, or if it did, that the fighting would be of short duration. Thus the slave could avoid the risk of injury or death during the confrontation, and the risk of punishment after the confrontation if the attack failed, as was usually the case. Not all slaves were prepared to risk joining a conspiracy, and some were so adverse to the risks, that they would betray the conspirators. In the second place, there was the possibility of a reward by the slavers; perhaps better accommodation, or food.[72] The temptation to choose personal safety and possible rewards over the risky strategy of one's fellow slaves was large, and in many cases irresistible. The betraying of

[72] The crew encouraged slaves to betray their comrades. Even those who saw the betrayal for what it was, such as Newton, were forced in the interests of their own survival encourage it. In Newton's words, "Sometimes, when the slaves are ripe for an insurrection, one of them will impeach the affair; and then necessity, and the state policy, of those small but most absolute governments, enforce maxims directly contrary to the nature of things. The traitor to the cause of liberty is caressed, rewarded and deemed an honest fellow. The patriots, who formed and animated the plan, if they can be found out, must be treated as

plots by fellow slaves did not necessarily mean that the informer identified with his or her oppressor. Nor did it mean that they had necessarily conceded the struggle against slavery. It was a personal choice, often made with the slave's personal survival chances in mind. And in this sense, it could easily be a wise choice. I know of no account that explicitly indicates that a slave who betrayed a plot was subsequently murdered by fellow slaves for the deed.

Acts of resistance and rebellion, when considered in terms of pure physical survival, were not sound choices. The chance of betrayal and failure was too high, as was the risk of injury or death both in the actual battle and in the aftermath of the battle, when the slavers, if victorious, attempted to identify and punish the leaders. The fact that actions that on aggregate reduced the slaves' physical survival chances were so regularly attempted tells volumes about the extent to which they rejected their enslavement. Given the (lack of) future prospects, the terrible current conditions, and the abrupt break with the past and all that they knew and held dear, many slaves were willing to grasp at straws. Their estimation of the value of their present and future lives had ebbed to such a degree that the risk – losing one's life – often did not weigh as heavily as the projected benefits – freedom.[73]

Survival imperatives determined that slaves dynamically balanced accommodation and resistance, constantly adapting their choices to changing circumstances. Slaves on the middle passage did what they could to survive mentally and

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villains, and punished, to intimidate the rest." See chapter 5, "Mutiny" for more on the betrayal of plots by slaves.

[73] It is possible to view acts of resistance, rebellion and mutiny as survival strategies of a sort, if one is willing to conceptualize the slave as a whole person, body and spirit. To some slaves it was more important have themselves as they conceptualized themselves survive, rather than their physical body. In this context rebellion and mutiny made sense, in spite of the risks. And of course, there was always the possibility that the attempt might succeed. Hope too, was a survival response.

physically in extremely confined circumstances. They had little room to maneuver, but what room there was, they exploited. Some of their actions were in solidarity with their fellow sufferers, and some even with the crew. But survival on the middle passage for slaves depended heavily on individual survival strategies, and those were the ones that dominated slave behaviour. The structure of the voyage determined that slaves would emphasize personal survival in their survival strategies, even though there were, paradoxically enough, a greater number of slaves than crew who did not care for their personal survival.

Group survival was the primary guiding principle for crew when formulating their survival strategies, even though they attached no less value to their individual lives than the slaves did, and often more. The reason for this was that crew could better ensure their personal survival by group cohesiveness than slaves could. The slavers had a greater imperative to form a united front than the slaves did. This was first and foremost a function of the relative numbers of each group on board, and second, a function of their roles. Oppression called forth resistance, and the only way to counter the resistance was to form a cohesive united front, particularly when outnumbered. For slaves, mental resilience was more important than for crew, as was careful self-control. Dissemblence and blending was far more important to slaves for their personal survival than it was for crew. Slaves needed to avoid the attention of crew as much as possible, while crew needed to emphasize their presence and power to slaves as much as possible. In the final analysis, the complex interplay between individual and group survival strategies among slaves and slavers, the facts of oppression and resistance to oppression, and the physical microcosm of the slaving vessel caused slave voyages to be structured as they were.

While not accounting for all individual experiences, this interplay of fundamental forces accounted for much of the experiences of crew and slaves alike.

CONCLUSION

The middle passage was peculiar form of slavery that had its own dynamics, and its own system. It is as amenable to study as slavery on land is. Much work remains to be done on the social history of the middle passage, but my work demonstrates that it is a feasible undertaking. The experiences of those on board were not homogenous, but the actions of all parties on slaving vessels were informed by rational responses to particular environmental pressures. All parties acted and reacted within the constraints of their circumstances. There were structural forces that can be recovered that influenced the experiences of those on board, and it is possible to construct a theoretical framework that explains the context in which both slaves and crew took the decisions they did, and how those effected the interactions between them.

Using quantitative data to supplement the qualitative sources traditionally used to write social histories is an effective method to recover aspects of the social history of the middle passage that are otherwise inaccessible. It allowed me to establish, for instance, that contemporary observers were incorrect to place an added value on having experienced captains command their vessels, and to establish that the ratio of plotting slaves to active crewmembers was one of the primary risk factors for mutinies to occur. It is a useful method, and more intensive mining of the large body of quantitative data that are available will allow almost certainly allow historians to find other patterns that shed light on the social history of the trade. At least as important, a careful exploration of the data will result in findings that will raise questions that requires historians to look to qualitative sources for answers. Both will enrich the social history of the middle passage.

The comparative approach between slavery on land and on sea used has isolated both differences and similarities between the systems. On a macro-level there were several similarities. The nature of the oppression was the same; violence and the threat of violence were the main formative factors in both. On a micro-level, however, the differences were numerous. The transient nature of the voyage, the imbalance between the number of slaves and slavers on board, cultural differences and the restricted nature of the location all caused the form that slavery took on sea to differ from land. Slavers on the middle passage were, to a much greater degree than on land, a law unto themselves. They were part of a closed – male – society that was far less under the influence of the mores of the larger society. Slavery on sea commodified slaves to a far greater extent than on land, and often tended towards the extremes described for slavery on land. A comparative approach between the two promises to allow the form of slavery that took place on slaving vessels to be integrated into the various systems that took place on land, and to provide a greater understanding of both. It brings both into sharper focus, and contributes to the understanding of Atlantic slavery as a whole. The areas I chose to focus on in my study of the middle passage were chosen, among other reasons, because of the lack of work on them. Most have been much better documented for land-based systems. Women in slavery, in particular, have drawn a considerable amount of attention in the past two decades.

Women on the middle passage have not been the subject of nearly so much attention. Other than quantitative studies, they have been almost ignored. My work shows that this is not justified. While it is probable that fewer adult women than has generally been supposed made the middle passage, their lives on slaving vessels showed both

similarities and substantial differences to those of the male slaves. Slavers conceptualized them differently, often treated them differently in terms of confinement and other matters, and sometimes sexually abused them. Women resisted on the middle passage, as did their male counterparts, but they did so differently. The middle passage was not a stage that favored resistance strategies preferred by most women, and this was reflected in their actions. When they resisted, they were, however, subject to the full penalties of failure. Some women were pregnant on the middle passage, and many came on board with infants.

While much work remains to be done on children and infants on slaving vessels, it is already clear that they were a deliberate target of some slavers. Infants were more common on slave ships than has previously been suspected. The middle passage children experienced by differed from both that of male and female adults. Their conditions of confinement could vary considerably – sometimes they were segregated, and sometimes they were confined with the adults – but they remained under the influence of adults on the middle passage. They were not only subject to the authority of the crew, but also relied upon (and were sometimes abused by) the adult slaves. In matters of resistance they were very much agents of the adults on board, both slave and crew.

Resistance and rebellion on the middle passage was in many respects different from that which took place on land. The dynamics of the slaving voyage determined that the type of slave dissent that took place on slaving vessels was nearly always of a serious nature, and very often violent. The incidence of such acts far outstripped the incidence of comparable acts on land, as did the serious contemplation of them. The actual deeds and the threat of them led to slave dissent being one of the main formative forces of the

middle passage. Resistance on the middle passage was, however, nearly always doomed to failure. The only relatively common exception to this was suicide. While it can be very difficult to recover the motivations of slaves for any particular type of action, deliberate suicide and escape attempts were the most common form of resistance. Both occurred more commonly when the vessel was close to land, when rumors of cannibalism spread through the vessel, and in the aftermath of failed mutiny attempts.

Mutiny was by far the most serious expression of slave dissent. It was plotted and occurred far more often than has hitherto been recognized. There were several minor factors that could influence the chance of a mutiny occurring on board, but most mutinies occurred either when the vessel was close to land, when rumors of the cannibalism of their enslavers swept the vessel, or when the ratio of slaves plotting a mutiny to the ratio of active crew changed to increase the chances of success. There were distinct patterns in mutinies, and factors that determined the likelihood of success or failure. The most important of these factors was whether the slaves managed to cross the barricado, and whether they managed to take control of the powder room. While mutinied far more often on sea than on land the incidence of mutinies was moderated by slaver precautions, at least as importantly, the survival imperative of slaves.

Both crew and the majority of slaves wanted, above all, to survive the middle passage. This informed most of their actions and interactions, both with each other and amongst themselves. Paradoxically, while slaves heavily outnumbered crew, their survival strategies emphasized individual action. Some slave survival strategies were in solidarity with their fellow slaves, but others were purely personal. Many slave survival strategies were directly opposed to the interests of the other slaves on board, though it is

not possible to establish with certainty how many slaves availed themselves of them. The crew relied far more on collective survival strategies than the slaves did. They were outnumbered, and the perception that slaves had of their power was essential to them. Solidarity, or at least the appearance of it, was vital. Slave confinement conditions and punishment rituals were an integral part of the crew's survival strategy. Slavers were in a contradictory position: they were responsible for the well-being of those who threatened them. They generally did what they could to ensure slave survival, but if the risks became, in their view, too large they did not hesitate to sacrifice the slaves.

The experiences of all who made the middle passage and factors that determined their experiences were to a very large degree determined by the closed and cramped stage on which they occurred. A slaving vessel was a microcosm that, more than almost all locations on land, was isolated from the mores and controls of the larger society. The journey was a transient one, but it was long enough to develop on a nature of its own and to contain a myriad of experiences. While the forces that structured the voyage were remarkably consistent, the experiences of those on board were similar in some respects but differed significantly in others. They could differ for those on board the same vessel as easily as they differed between vessels. The middle passage was a complex and important event that historians have not begun to describe adequately.

My work is not a complete social history of the middle passage. There is still much that needs to be considered that is not covered here, and much of what is covered here needs to be worked out in greater depth. More perspectives on the social history of the middle passage are also needed. Detailed case studies on many of the issues raised would be a useful contribution to the work on the middle passage. A discussion between

historians needs to be initiated and a range of methods need to be applied. Given the often fragmentary nature of the sources and the paucity of sources by slaves who made the middle passage, a large body of source material gathered by several scholars interested in the middle passage would be a valuable resource for further work. This is especially necessary for aspects of the middle passage that are only sporadically referred to in the primary documentation. The relations that took place between slaves and slavers (other than mutinies, which tend to be relatively well documented), the interactions between slaves, and the experience of children are examples of areas that would benefit from such a collection.

There are still several import areas that require investigation before anything approaching a comprehensive social history of the middle passage can be written. The recommendations below are by no means exhaustive, but work on these topics would be a significant step towards according the social history of the middle passage the attention that is its due.

A detailed examination of the intimidation, punishments and coercive measures, both positive (such as bribes and rewards), passive (such as chaining), and negative (physical violence, for example) employed on slaving vessels is essential in order to contextualize the actions of crew and slaves alike. A study of the methods by which slavers sought to forces and elicit the behaviour they desired from slaves is essential. Central to this work will be an examination of the types of punishments typically used for various transgressions, the attempts to maximize their effectiveness as weapons of terror, their effectiveness in enforcing slaver-dictated role behavior and the factors influencing that effectiveness. It is equally important to establish what coercive measures were the

norm, and to what degree these were deviated from. If there were distinct forms of control used by different captains or at different times, these need to be identified. The extremes within the trade in this regard need to be recovered too, both in order to establish their relative frequency, their effects, and to establish the range of coercive measures. A study of the threat of violent oppression and the factors effecting the effectiveness of that threat is equally necessary. It was the fear of punishment, not actual punishment that controlled the behaviour of most slaves and crew on board. A study of coercive measures on board slaving vessels also needs to take into account how the power to punish interacted with the threat of violent opposition, and how that interplay contributed to shaping ship-routines. An examination of coercion on slaving vessels should be related to the survival strategies of both slaves and crew. Both slaves and crew were subject to violent and sometimes fatal punishment, and both need to be taken into account when considering coercion on the middle passage.

Both slaves and crew took their cultural backgrounds and previous experiences on board with them. These influenced the actions, reactions and interactions of those on board. As such, a comprehensive examination of how the cultural context that both slaves and slavers acted in is essential, as is a study of how the different cultural backgrounds interacted with each other.

A close collaboration with Africanists will be necessary to recover the cultural background of slaves. The Atlantic slave trade was inflicted on a great diversity of African peoples, and much work is needed to establish how this impacted the middle passage. Future work needs to consider more closely what the likely ethnic composition of slaving vessels was, how diverse it was, and whether discernible differences existed on

slaving vessels due to the ethnic composition of the vessel. Primary documents frequently contain references to the supposed "traits" or "characters" of the slaves' ethnic groups. Historians need to establish how much of this was uninformed stereotyping, and whether anything useful can be distilled from these observations. If there is no supporting evidence, such contemporary observations should be openly discredited. In this work it is important to bear in mind that slaves were generally not a balanced cross-section of their originating societies.

More work needs to be done on who was most likely to be sold into the Atlantic trade, and what their prior histories were likely to have been. The time slaves spent in the barracoons prior to their purchase by slaving ships' crew, is also an area in which there is a great lacuna. Time spent in the barracoons was likely to have profoundly effected, both mentally and physically, most slaves who were so confined. The same applies to slaves who were drawn from the interior and marched to the coast. Both need to be recovered for their own sakes, and for the effect that these experiences may have had on slaves making the middle passage. Crew too, brought their cultures and life experiences on board with them, and these informed their actions and reactions on board.

Collaboration with scholars working on the social history of the 17th, 18th and early to mid 19th centuries of slaving nations is necessary to provide a cultural background for slavers. This should be related to the socio-economic backgrounds of those on board, from "landsmen" to captains. More work is required to establish how this effected their outlook and behaviour while on board. Both their behaviour towards slaves and the interactions among crew themselves need to be examined in the light of their cultural backgrounds. These backgrounds were diverse, and the heterogeneity of slaving

ships' crews need to be taken into account. National, class, race and socioeconomic differences all need to be considered. All crewmembers acted in ways that were framed by their social, ideological, economic and political environments. The recovering of these is vital to a comprehensive social history of the middle passage.

The physical surrounding of the vessel was of primary importance in determining the dynamics between slave and crew, and the structure of the voyage. All the other factors determining the experiences all on board were related to the fact that the physical environment – the location – for this particular form of slavery was an extremely densely populated space that placed clear limits on both slave and crew actions. This effected security arrangements, interactions between crew and slaves, and interactions between the slaves themselves and the crew themselves. The physical constraints dictated the absolute lack of privacy, the severe rationing of food and water, the restrictions on movement, the ratio of slaves to enslavers and the transient nature of the relationship. In some respects life on a slaving vessel placed similar restrictions on crew and slaves, but in other respects they differed enormously. Both need to be considered, and the effect of both need to be related to the experiences of those on board, and to the actions and relationships they contributed to giving rise to. An enormous diversity of vessels made the middle passage and this too needs to be taken into account. In 1852,for example, the American vessel the *Lady Eclipse* left Africa with approximately 1,574 slaves on board, destined for Cuba. On the other hand, standardized to British measured tons, the smallest 10% of vessels (for which information on the number of slaves carried can be recovered) carried an average of only 90.24 slaves. The smallest vessel in the Atlantic Slavery dataset, the *Abigail*, sailed for the Gold Coast in 1758. It displaced only 12 tons, and

carried 40 slaves.[1] Late in the (illegal) trade several steam vessels made the crossing with very large numbers of slaves – often more than 1,000 – on board as technological advances in seafaring made themselves felt in the Atlantic slave trade.

Some work has been done on the male slaves on the middle passage, and this work needs to be integrated into a comprehensive social history of the middle passage. Additional research on male slaves, however, is also still required. Too little is known about their experiences in the holds, the interactions between the male slaves, and the authority structure among them. How male slaves interacted – and how much opportunity they had to do so – with crew and the other slaves on board also needs to be probed.

In terms of social history, the post 1808 illegal trade has yet to be considered in comparative light with the legal trade. The illegality of the trade required slavers to take new factors into account – capture by the British navy being the most obvious – but it is not yet clear what impact this had on the dynamics of the voyage for those involved. It is not yet clear to what degree the illegality of the trade effected the experiences of slaves or crew. Social historians need to establish whether it typically changed any of the basic factors that effected experiences of those on board, and if so, to document them for both slaves and crew.

There are also several related studies that, if undertaken, will broaden the understanding of the social history of the middle passage. A detailed study of the rhetoric of both opponents and proponents of the trade with regard to the actual middle passage would be an important study in its own right. It would also provide future historians of the middle passage with a context within which to locate their own work, and offer a

[1] The *Abigail* sailed under the command of Captain Sam Holiway. The *Lady Eclipse* sailed under Captain Eugenio Venice. D. Eltis et al *The Atlantic Slavery Database*, records no. 36,228 and 4,166.

useful reference point in the often-difficult process of evaluating the plethora of primary documentation extant on the middle passage. Comparative studies contrasting the debates around the actual Atlantic trade to the debates around slavery in North and South America and the slave holding islands would similarly be useful. A work that concentrates on establishing the differences and similarities between the different major slaving nations in this regard would also form a very useful addition to the scholarship on the middle passage.

For many slaves the middle passage was not over once the vessel docked at the port of disembarkation. Some slaves spent time in quarantine, and some slaves, if not sold at the first port of arrival, were shipped to a second or third destination before being sold. This aspect of the middle passage has yet to be examined in any detail. The influence of European wars on the middle passage, especially with regard to privateering, is another area that begs investigation. Slaving vessels that were captured by either British or French antagonists account for nearly 8.5% of all voyages.[2] The danger of being captured by hostile forces was a constant threat in the trade, and a reality for more than 10% of all vessels. The substantial number of vessels taken, and the number of vessels that successfully resisted being taken, suggests that this aspect of the middle passage may have contributed substantially to the nature of the voyage, and as such it is one that needs to be recovered.

Clearly work remains to be done before the social history of the middle passage can stand on an equal footing with the work done on slavery on land. The sources allow

[2] 2,302 out of 27,233 voyages (8.45%) are listed in the Atlantic slavery dataset as having been captured by either French or British forces. This includes the voyages for which the outcome is not known. For more details on the point, including vessels captured by other nations or by Africans, see chapter 3, "Crew". D. Eltis, David Richardson, Stephen D. Behrendt, and Herbert S. Klein *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A*

for a much more comprehensive social history than is currently available. More detailed studies are necessary, and a synthetic work is long overdue. It is my hope that my work demonstrates that the project is feasible, and will serve as a first step in the process of integrating the social history of the middle passage with the social history of slavery in the Americas.

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