

Document A

Excerpt from *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*

written 1789

Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped at 11 and sold into slavery. Here is part of his story:

The captains needed to keep the slaves in acceptable physical condition if they were to be sold at high prices, so each morning after breakfast the slaves were “danced” on deck, in order to give them exercise. Still shackled together, the men were forced to jump up and down until often the flesh of their ankles was raw and bleeding from the iron chains which bound them together. The women and children, who were free of such bonds were better able to dance to the rhythm that was pounded out on an African drum or iron kettle, sometimes with the accompaniment of a fiddle or African banjo played by a crew member. The slaves, otherwise kept miserably in the “tween decks”, enjoyed this dancing, as it was their only form of physical recreation during the entire day. Each day at sunset the slaves would be placed back below deck to rest in the misery and filth that was the “tween decks”.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African
Author: Olaudah Equiano



Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Photographs and Prints Division, Drawing c. 1800

Document B

Excerpt from *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*

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Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped at 11 and sold into slavery. Here is part of his story:

During the morning exercises members of the crew roved about the deck carrying whips and would beat those slaves who refused to “dance”. Although most whips were made only of simple rope, the wicked cat-o’-nine-tails was also used aboard many slavers. Consisting of nine cords coated with tar, each with a knot at the end, the cat-o’-nine-tails could slash the skin of a slave’s back to ribbons in only a few lashes.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African
Author: Olaudah Equiano

Document C

Excerpts from *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*

Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua left this description of his and his companions' ordeal aboard the ship that took them from Benin to Brazil:

We were thrust into the hold of the vessel in a state of nudity, the males being crammed on one side and the females on the other; the hold was so low that we could not stand up, but were obliged to crouch upon the floor or sit down; day and night were the same to us, sleep being denied us from the confined position of our bodies, and we became desperate through suffering and fatigue."

Written and Revised by Samuel Moore

Document D

Excerpt from *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*

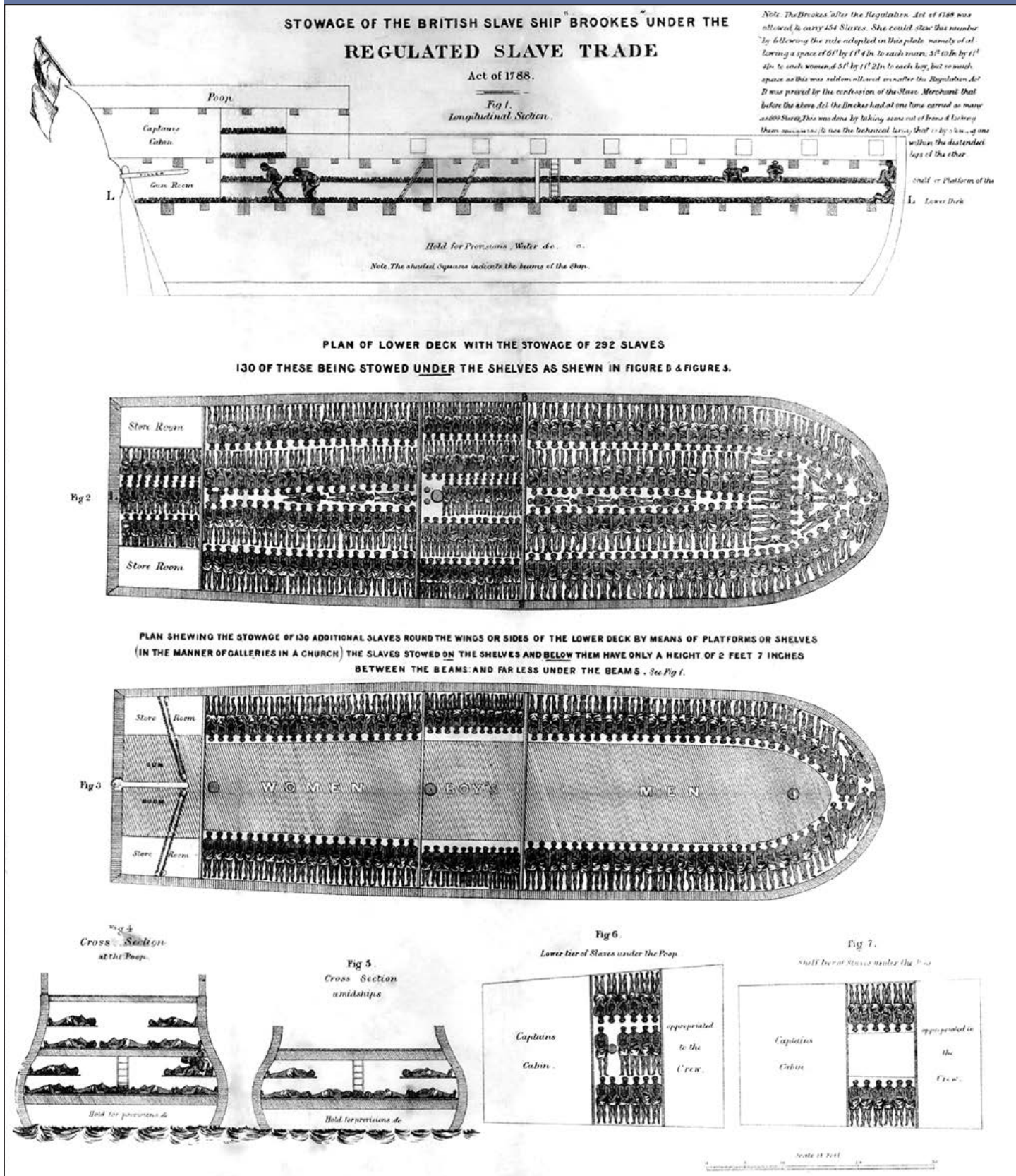
written 1789

Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped at 11 and sold into slavery. Here is part of his story:

Yet the worst time of the Middle Passage came for the slaves when the ship was met with periods of bad weather. During storms the blacks were forced to remain below deck all day and night. The holds were dark, filthy, slimy, and they stank of death. The "tween decks" were often full not only with slaves, both living and dead, but also with blood, vomit, urine, and human waste. Also during periods of inclement weather the slaves were not fed as usual. They were often forced to scrounge for small crumbs and pieces of spoiled food and drink from stagnant puddles of extremely impure water.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African
Author: Olaudah Equiano

Stowage of the British slave ship *Brookes* under the regulated slave trade act of 1788



Brookes slave ship c. 1790

Image©: Everett Historical

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Document E

Excerpt from *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*

written 1789

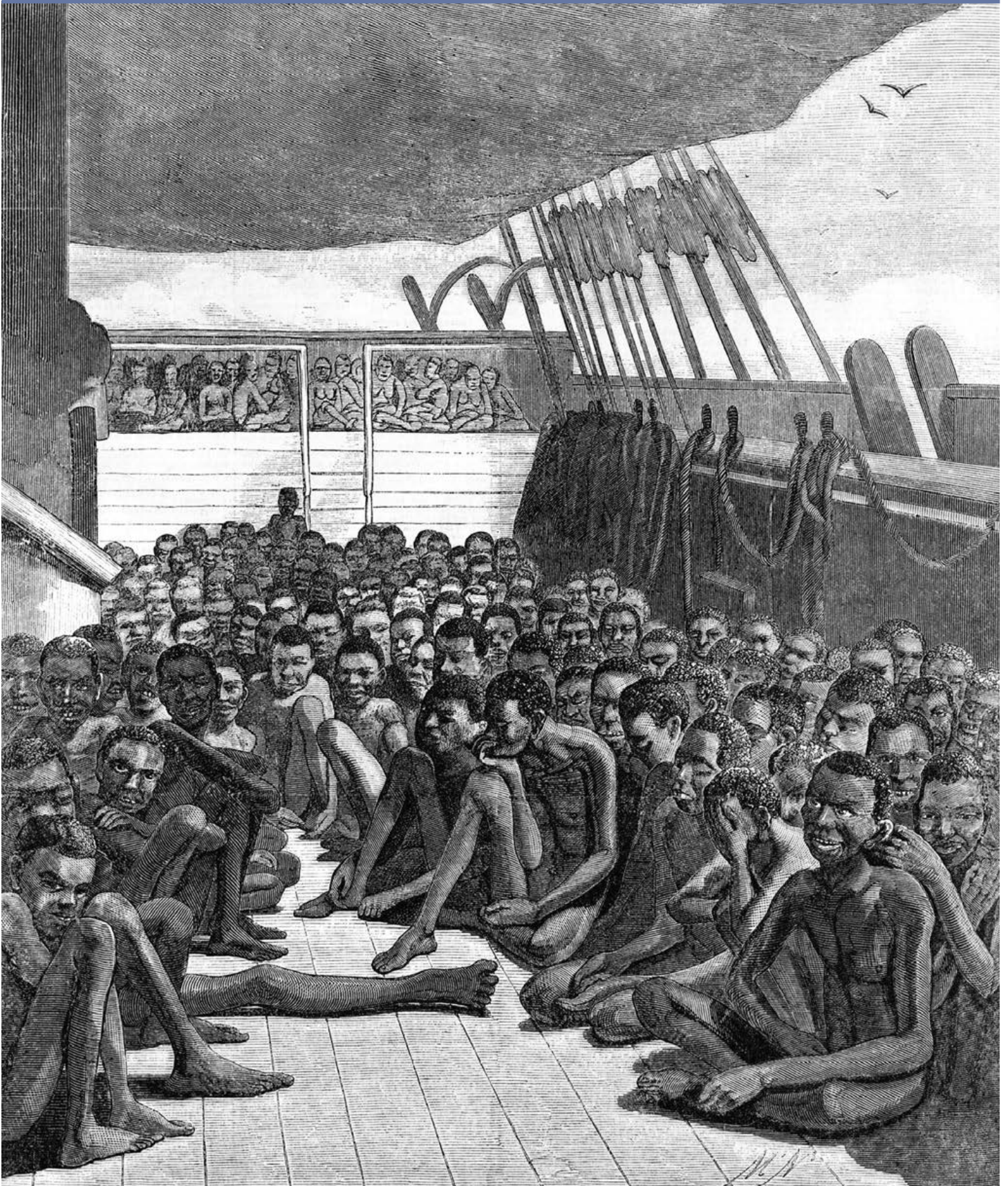
Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped at 11 and sold into slavery. Here is part of his story:

During periods of good weather, the slaves would be brought up on deck in the morning. At this time the men would be shackled together with iron chains, while the women and children would be allowed to roam about on deck. At about nine o' clock in the morning they were given their first meal of the day. Interestingly, slaves from different sections along the West African coast would often be fed different meals. Those from the Northern part of the Guinea Coast would be fed boiled rice, millet, or cornmeal. Slaves from the Bight of Biafra had stewed yams, and those from still farther south in the Congo River region would be fed starchy manioc, cassava flour, or banana-like fruits. Sometimes a few lumps of raw meat would be thrown in with their food to keep them healthy. It was also at this time in the morning that the slaves were given their daily ration of a half-pint of water in a small pan, called a pannikin.

In the late afternoon came the slaves' second and only other meal of the day. Sometimes it was the same as their first, but most captains were not that humane. The afternoon meal usually consisted only of horse beans, very large beans which are used to feed horses. They were the cheapest form of food available. The beans were boiled until they were pulpy and then covered with a mixture of palm oil, flour, and water. To cover up the horrible taste, large amounts of red pepper, called "slabber sauce", were added.

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Author: Olaudah Equiano

The Slave Deck of the Bark “Wildfire”



The slave deck of the ship Wildfire

The Slave Deck of the Ship Wildfire, Library of Congress