

Name

Professor

Survey of World History from 1500

Date

European Exploration of Africa and the Slave Trade

For purposes of this essay, I chose to analyze source three from category two which outlines an extensive account of a former slave trader. The source is titled “The restoration and the eighteenth century: From thoughts upon the African slave trade” is an account of the slave trade as narrated by John Newton. The source was written in 1788 and it is a one of the journal entries in his book. Majority of the accounts of the Middle passage are written by traders and ship officers and rarely by those who dealt directly with the cargo. Therefore, “thoughts upon the African slave trade” offers a first-hand account of the slave trade from the perspective of someone who was directly involved in the slave trade. The source was specifically written to showcase the horrors of the slave trade in a bid to support the abolition of slavery.

John Newton was a captain for two Liverpool slave ships during his twenties and kept very detailed logs of all his activities (Newton, para. 2). Although initially treating slavery as simply a profitable trade, he later became an evangelical minister became horrified by his actions and became an abolitionist preacher (Newton, para. 2)). The author pointed out that the ships that the primary aim of the ships when carrying the slaves was to carry as many as possible. Two hundred and twenty to two hundred and fifty slaves would be fitted in a single vessel (Newton, para. 3). They would be laid in rows next to each other to save space, and the conditions were often deplorable. Their lodgings within the ship were even more uncomfortable by the fact that their hands and feet were bound together with chains as they lay side by side (Newton, para. 4).

The heat and smell within these rooms were also unbearable as the weather prevented the rooms from being cleaned and the slaves from being aired (Newton, para. 5). Diseases and epidemical fluxes and fevers often broke out further compounding the suffering of the slaves. Many of them died due to the poor conditions while others continued to suffer throughout the voyage. At least one-fourth of all the slaves brought on board before the voyage succumbed by the time the destination was reached while on the sicklier voyages, more than half the slaves died (Newton, para.7). "I believe, nearly one-half of the slaves on board, have, sometimes, died; and that the loss of a third party, in these circumstances, is not unusual" (Newton, para.6).

The Atlantic slave trade represented the flourishing of a very widespread practice of owning and exchanging human beings (Strayer and Nelson 520). Strayer and Nelson pointed out that some of the major distinction of the transatlantic slave trade was the sheer size of it and the fact that slaves were often treated as some dehumanized property that does not have any rights within the society (521). These can clearly be seen from the account given by Newton. Due to the number of slaves needed, the slaves were often bundled on the ships, and there was no regard given to their welfare or rights throughout the voyages. They were subjected to inhuman conditions and often mistreated leading to the deaths of many slaves. The grave nature of the slave trade and the trans-Atlantic journey was clearly summed up by Strayer and Nelson when it was stated that "Their journey across the Atlantic was horrendous, with the middle passage having an overall mortality rate of more than 14%" (524).

Works Cited

Newton, John. "The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century: The Middle Passage – John

Newton, from Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. n.d.

http://www.wwnorton.com/college/English/nael/18century/topic_2/newton.htm.

Accessed 15 February 2019

Strayer, Robert W. and Eric W. Nelson. *Ways of the World: A Brief Global History*, vol. 2. 3rd edition, Bedford-St. Martins, 2016.