

Student Essay on Commentary on Slave Trade

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Essay

An image of the cross-section of the British slave ship, Brookes, seemed pertinent to what we have been discussing in class about shaping the federal union in Chapter 7. An estimated 15 million Africans were transported to the Americas between 1540 and 1850. To maximize their profits slave merchants carried as many slaves as was physically possible on their ships. A House of Commons committee in 1788 discovered that one slave-ship, The Brookes, was originally built to carry a maximum of 451 people, but was carrying over 600 slaves from Africa to the Americas. Chained together by their hands and feet, the slaves had little room to move. It has been estimated that only about half of the slaves taken from Africa became effective workers in the Americas. A large number of slaves died on the journey from diseases such as smallpox and dysentery. Others committed suicide by refusing to eat. Many of the slaves were crippled for life as a consequence of the way they were chained up on the ship. By the 17th century slaves could be purchased in Africa for about \$25 and sold in the Americas for about \$150. After the slave-trade was declared illegal, prices went much higher. Even with a death-rate of 50 per cent, merchants could expect to make tremendous profits from the trade. Conditions aboard the slave ships were miserable. Men, women and children crammed into every available space, denied adequate room, food or breathing space, the stench was unbearable and the dead bodies were just thrown off the side of the ship. All in all the slave trade was a really interesting topic because it is just astonishing how any human could cram many other humans into one little space all together . [293 words]