

# Slavery

and the natural world

The title 'Slavery and the natural world' is centered on the page. The word 'Slavery' is written in a large, dark red serif font. A stylized, golden-brown branch with several leaves is superimposed over the letters of 'Slavery'. Below 'Slavery', the words 'and the natural world' are written in a smaller, dark red sans-serif font.

# Voyages of Discovery (c1400-1600s)



- Hundreds of years ago people explored, exploited and colonised large parts of the world
- Explorers made long dangerous journeys on wooden ships
- Natural historians discovered new plants to study scientifically or for food and medicine

Christopher Columbus arriving in America (1893, L. Prang & Co., Boston)

# Why enslave Africans?



- Wars or disease killed many original people in the Americas and European servants
- African people were enslaved to work on plantations in the Caribbean and America
- The crops that grew there made huge profits for Europeans

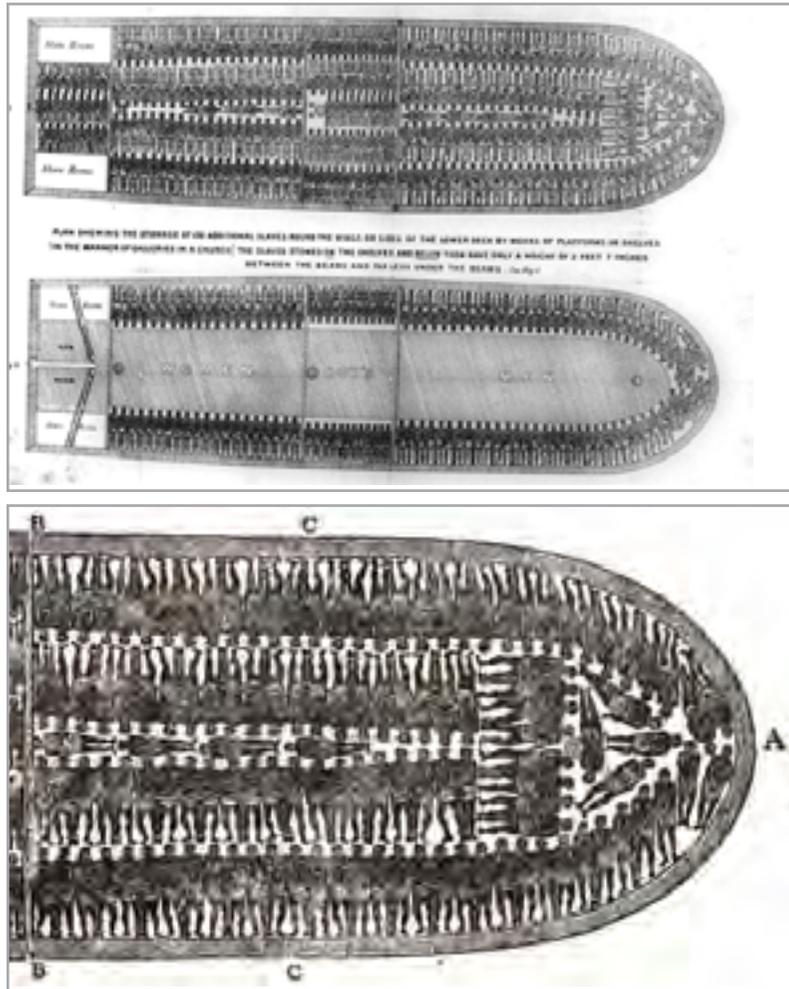
One of the earliest recorded examples of life in the Caribbean, Jean Baptiste Du Tertre, 1610–1687

# Scale of the trade



- The transatlantic slave trade lasted over 300 years
- Historians estimate that 10-15 million people were taken from Africa by force
- Other estimates say many more millions of Africans were taken
- Many African people tried to stop the trade but Europeans had guns and more power
- Africans took few possessions, except their skills, knowledge and ideas and sometimes a few seeds

# Transport across the Atlantic



- African people were taken to the Caribbean and America on ships
- The journey was terrible and lasted six to eight weeks
- People were chained in a space 40 cm wide
- They could not sit up fully or stand
- Equiano was an African captured as a child. He later wrote a book about his experiences

Plan of the slaving ship, The Brookes, first published 1789

## Food on board ship



- Food on slaving ships was often peanuts and maize (from South America)
- Drinking water was often dirty and caused many illnesses
- Enslaved Africans had to eat from the same bowls and could not wash easily
- Many died of dysentery
- At least 1.25 million Africans died crossing the Atlantic
- Africans often resisted enslavement by refusing to eat, starting revolts or suicide

Top: peanuts  
Bottom: sweetcorn/maize

# On the plantations



- Many enslaved Africans worked on plantations growing crops such as sugar, rice and cotton
- A third of all enslaved Africans died in their first three years in the Caribbean
- Punishments were common – people were whipped, tortured and sometimes branded with hot irons
- Africans often tried to escape slavery; some succeeded but others were punished even more
- However, they still kept aspects of their culture and spirit alive

Left: William Blake's illustration of the torture of a female slave, from John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam , 1796

# Abolition and freedom



- Many African and European people campaigned to end slavery
- Europeans typically showed Africans begging to be released, but many, especially Maroons, resisted Slavery
- In reality many Africans, especially Maroons, resisted slavery
- They poisoned the slavers and fought against them
- Slavery only ended in the Americas at the end of the 1800s, but racial inequalities continued
- Forms of slavery still exist in parts of the world today

Left: Armed Maroon by William Blake, from Stedman, 1796

Right: Official medallion of the British Anti-Slavery Society, designed by the Wedgwood factory

# Daily life



- Enslaved Africans were woken at 4.00am
- They often worked from 6 in the morning until 6 at night, six days a week
- The food given to enslaved Africans was very basic
- The ration was about 1.36 kgs of dried meat and about 6 kg of corn for an adult for a week

# Provision grounds



- Enslaved Africans had to grow their own food
- They grew okra and rice – plants that they grew in Africa
- They used their skills and knowledge to survive
- They collected wild foods such as fruits, nuts and fish to survive
- These provided vitamins and minerals as well as extra protein
- Fresh fruit and vegetables provided vitamin C and animals were important sources of protein

Top: Okra

Bottom: Soursop, illustration from the Natural History Museum collections

# Breadfruit and ackee



- Breadfruit is high in carbohydrate
- It was taken from Tahiti in the Pacific to the Caribbean to feed enslaved people cheaply
- The first journey ended in William Bligh's mutiny on the Bounty
- He succeeded on his second voyage
- Breadfruit is now a staple food in many tropical regions
- Bligh took hundreds of plants from Jamaica for the botanist Joseph Banks
- One of these was the fruit ackee – part of Jamaica's national dish 'ackee and saltfish'

Left: Ackee, illustration from a ceiling decoration at the Natural History Museum  
Right: Breadfruit, illustration from the Natural History Museum collections

# Legacies



- Soul food is the traditional cooking of African-Americans in the Southern US where slavery was common
- Soul food can be traced back to Africa
- Rice, sorghum and okra from Africa went to the Americas during the slave trade
- Enslaved people also used cheap foods with little waste
- Soups and stews were boiled over and over again
- Fried foods, foods rich in salt and well cooked vegetables are linked to diet at the time of slavery



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