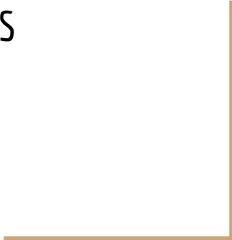
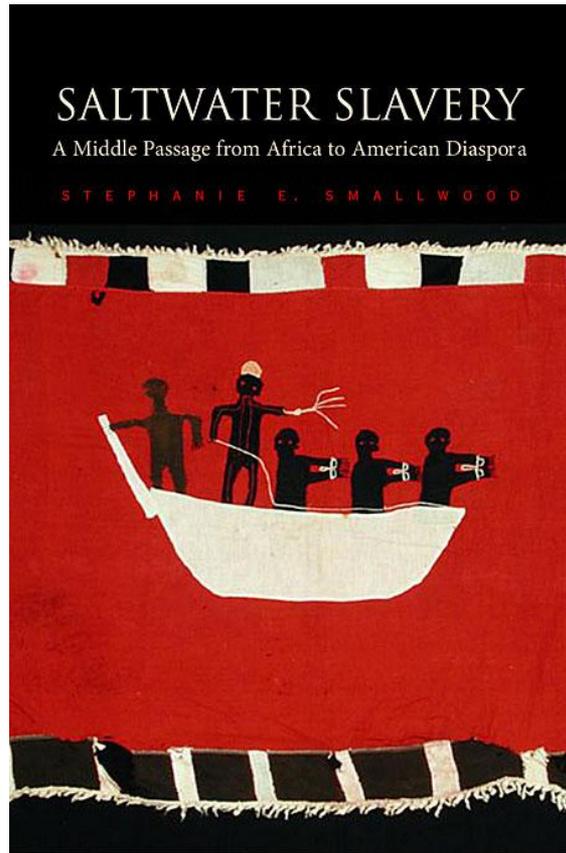


The Trans-Atlantic Middle Passage

Week Four Lectures

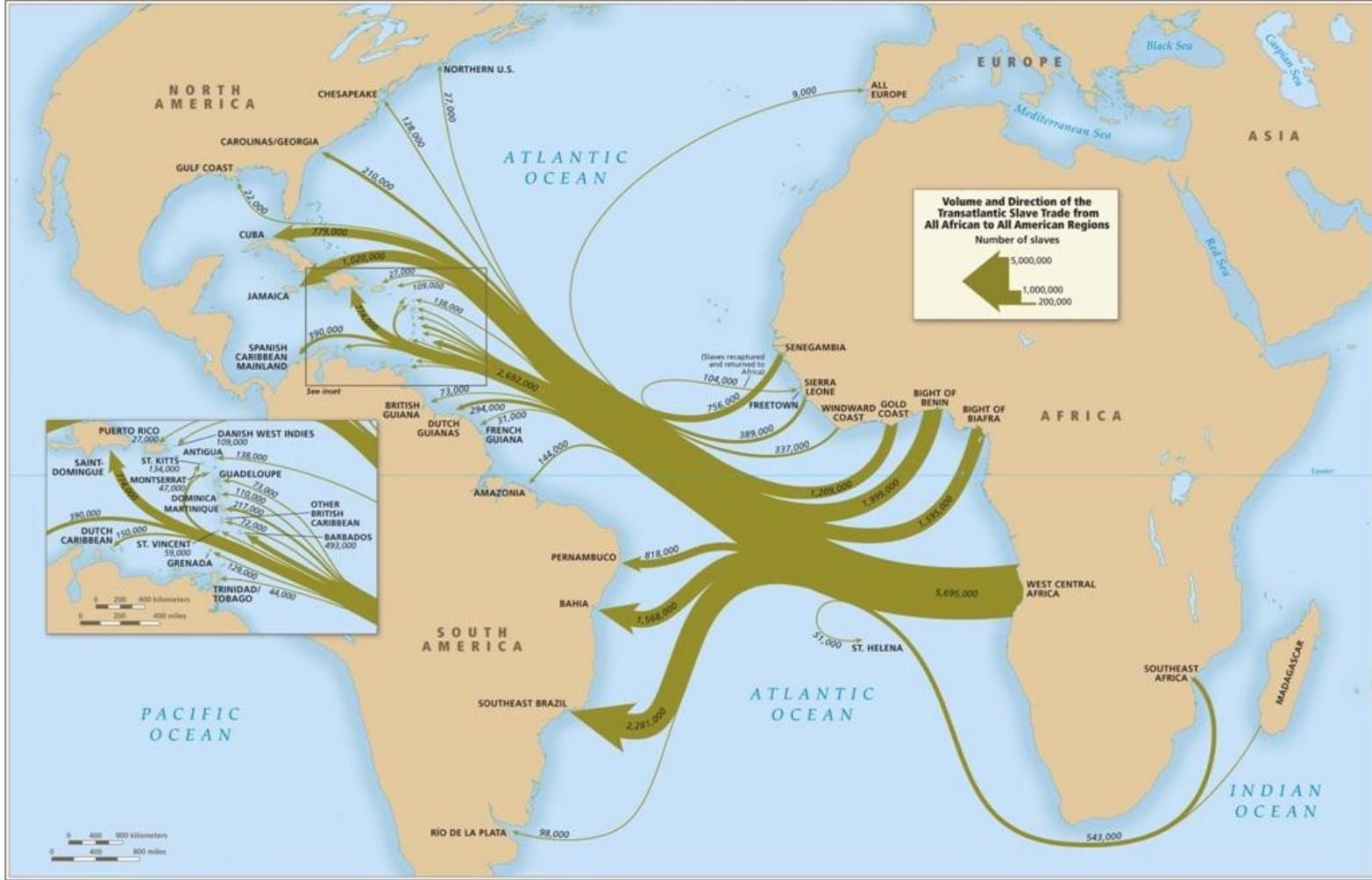


Stephanie Smallwood

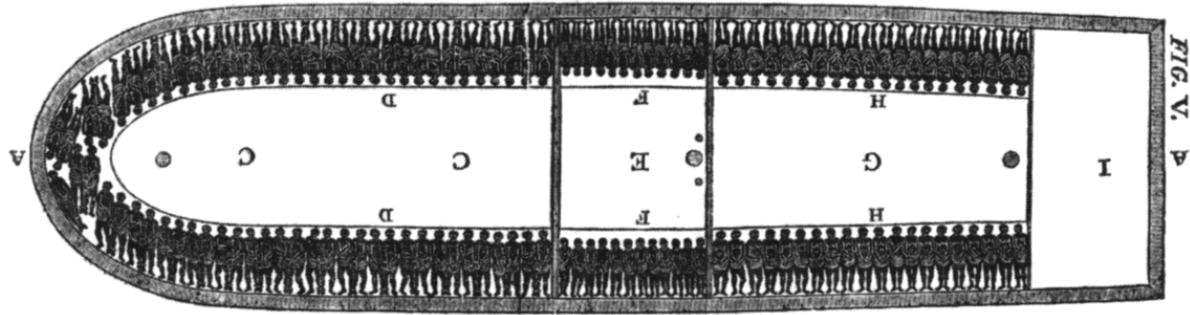
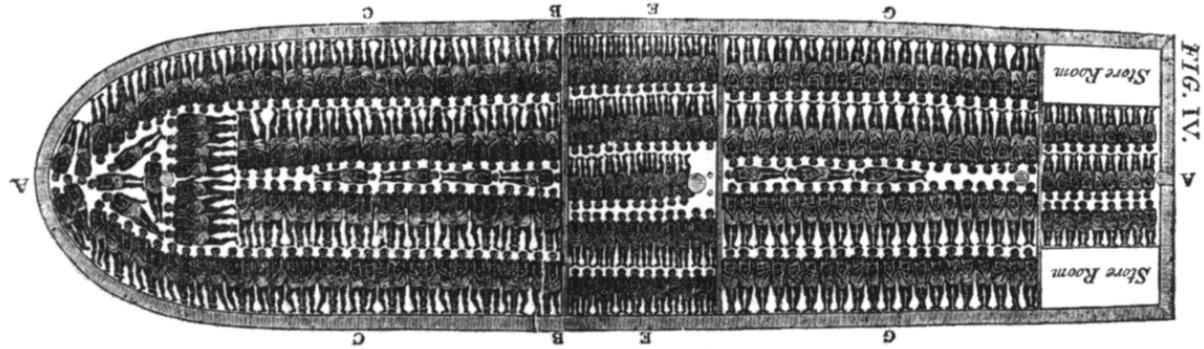


Triangular Trade





The Middle Passage: One Part of Triangular Trade



Goals of Smallwood's Study

"*Saltwater Slavery* brings the people aboard slave ships to life as subjects of American Social History" (3).

Smallwood seeks to address this issue of cultural change and identity shift of those Africans brought to the Americas. Hence, she distinguishes between "American Born Slaves" and "Saltwater Slaves". The latter are those who were born on the continent.

She argues, in part, that many American Born Slaves held Saltwater Slaves in contempt.

At the African Coast (Ghana)

- Upon being captured and sold to Europeans, most slaves were housed in reinforced buildings, often castles, along the coast. Most tried to escape.
 - Shackles were often in short supply, making it difficult for enslavers to control their commodities
- For those who could not escape, food rations at the coast were poor, and many were weakened or died of malnutrition. Many died of disease as well.
- Those who managed to escape their confinements (which they were to remain in until the slave ship arrived) often found that other Africans at the coast would sell them back to European or African slave traders.

A Slave's "Social Death"

Smallwood compares the departure on a slave ship to the Americas along the lines of many West African concepts of death.

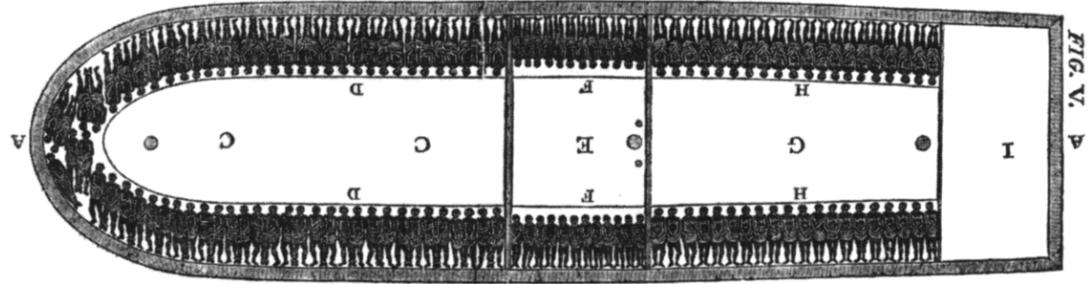
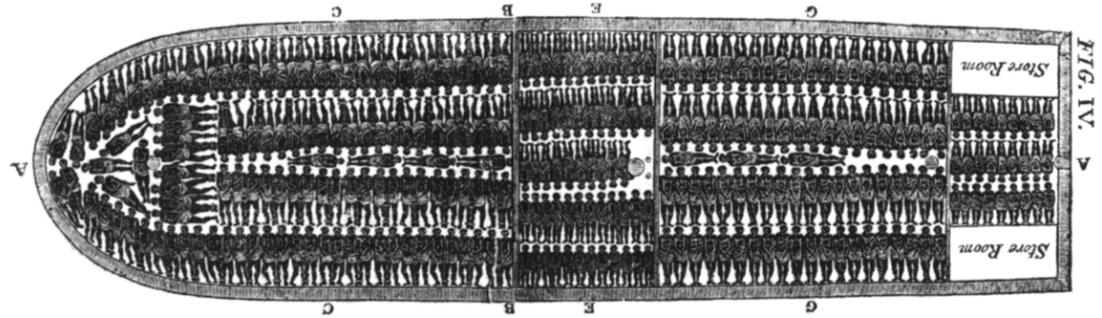
Death was not always conceived of as departure, but rather a new connection to the community, in the form of spiritual connection between living and ancestors.

Slavery, however, was a place stuck in between living and dead, between living and ancestors, perhaps. Saltwater slaves faced an even worse predicament.

"Those who left on the [slave boats] were neither venerated, like the deceased, nor suspended in the balance between marginalization and integration, like local slaves, but rather consigned to an interminable purgatory . . . Saltwater slaves were thus threatened in their capacity to die honorably and therefore to exist meaningfully, as dead kin connected with the community of the living." (61)

The Slave Boat

Could this possibly be a hygienic way of transporting people?



"The slave hold was thus a space specially designed for the transport of captive people" (69).

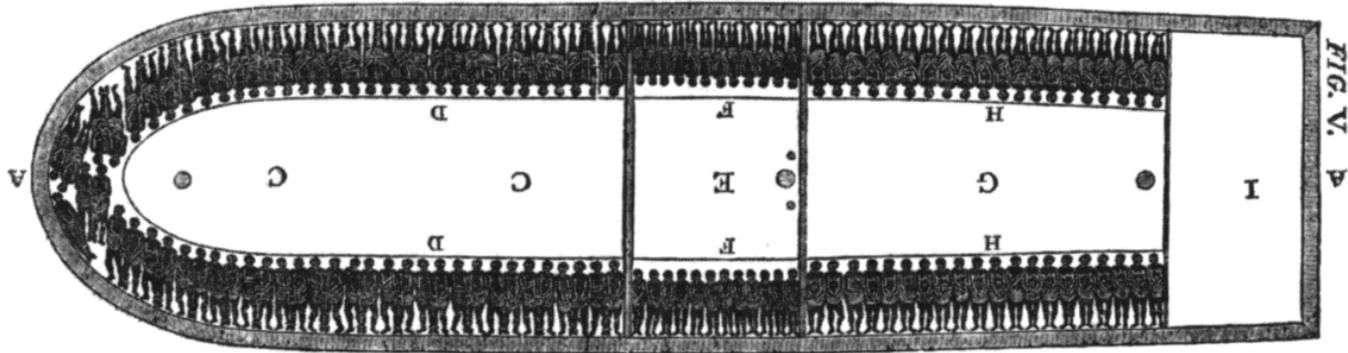
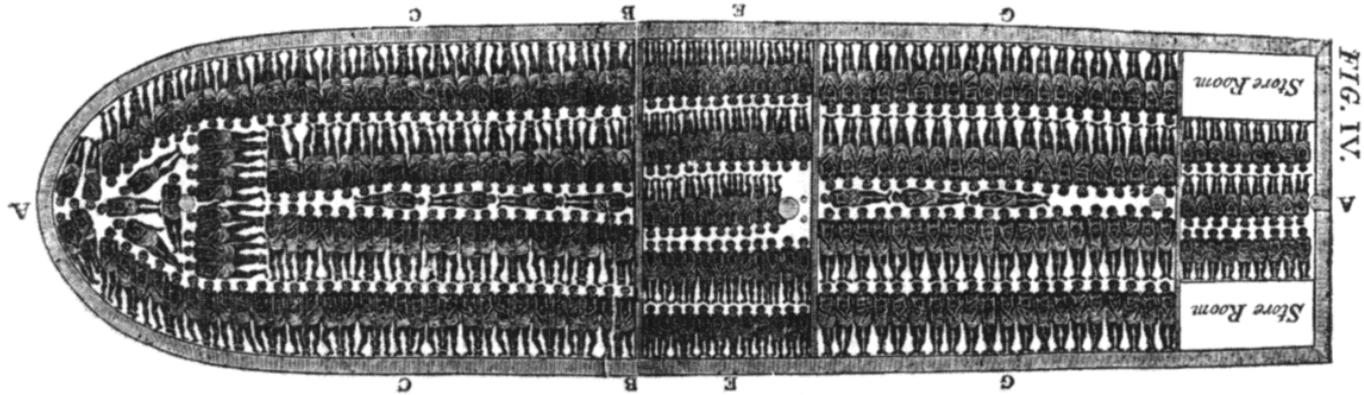
Captives were separated by gender, and they were rarely allowed above deck.

Slaves as Cargo: Transforming Identities

- While most slave ships obtained the bulk of their Cargo from a single port, some had slaves from various different locations. Furthermore, as we have learned, many slaves were taken from the hinterland and brought to the ports.
- With that being said, many people were multilingual, and they could speak with one another and discuss their shared situation.
- Being on board a slave ship without clear knowledge of where you are going is inherently disorienting, making the measure of time difficult.
- For reasons like this, there were many instances of slaves taking their own lives on board the ship, perhaps by jumping into the sea.
- There was a recognition, however, that despite the varied backgrounds of these individuals, they were in a shared situation.

The Middle Passage

"The Transatlantic transport of all of these various Africans to the Americas qualifies as the quintessential moment of transfiguration, the height of human alienation and disorientation" (Gomez 2005: 71-2).



Reminder: Loss of Life en-route

- According to Gomez: "Loss of life during the trek is conservatively estimated to have averaged 10-15%, and in Angola it reached an obscene 40%" (73).
- Part of the reason for this loss of life was not just that Africans were forced to march to the coast or placed in unhygienic boats, it was also because they were waiting at the coastal castles (Barracoons) for sometimes up to one full year.
- When one factors in the Middle Passage deaths, somewhere in the range of 30-70% of captured people never even arrived in the Americas.
- Remember also that of those captives who arrived alive to the coast, many were kept for local purposes. Slavery was indigenous to many West African cultures, and not all slaves were exported.
 - Some were used to manage and/or capture more slaves

Gender Relations in the Belly of the Beast

- Once some of the surviving slave captives were brought from the coastal prisons (barracoons) to the slave ship, they were segregated by gender.
- All of the men had their ankles chained and their hands shackled. Furthermore, to make mobility harder, the men were chained in pairs with another male slave.
- It was very rare for male slaves to be allowed contact with females; they were often kept in different parts of the ship. The women had the children kept with them, and they were sometimes (though not always) bound with chains.
- According to Gomez: "The separation of male and female captives also facilitated the sordid history of rape of African women and girls by European men, a humiliation that began before they were ever sold to New World planters (who promptly went out and did the same). In point of fact, crews were given sexual access to captive females as a matter of policy. Even a small number of females violated infrequently was sufficient to establish the assailability of the captive population" (Gomez 2005: 76).

The Nutrition game

- We have established that malnutrition was often the case on these boats.
- While this was the case, we must remember that starvation was not the goal of slave-ship captains; he wanted his cargo to arrive to the buyers intact.
- Slaves were normally fed twice per day, with minimal water rations. Meat was rare, unless the boat caught fish.
- Obtaining rations was very, very hard; as was storing them. It was estimated by a Dutch slave trader that a boat with 500 slaves needs 100,000 yams for the voyage
- Many of these rations were obtained from the "Atlantic Islands", which were no longer needed for sugar production: Cape Verde, the Canary Islands, and (to an extent) Cape Town (though it's not an island).

Arrival in the Caribbean

- Even if it was not to be the final destination, most boats arrived at Barbados first, as it is the furthest East of all of the Caribbean Islands. And the winds from West Africa tend to blow towards it.
 - For slave boats delivering Cargoes to North America or other Caribbean Islands, this was a place to pick up new provisions.
- Barbados was a location where stocktaking took place. The boat *James* notes its mortality rate as follows: 372 captives were sold to Barbados planters, 51 dead on the voyage.
- Furthermore, as Smallwood notes: "The commodities they sold to American buyers were not the same commodities purchased on the African coast." They were now weakened, malnourished, and traumatized.
 - Sellers therefore washed, shaved and oiled slave bodies to give the illusion of health.
- Finally, as was noted before, many slaves were sold to planters on credit.