**Letter from William Fitzhugh (Virginia Planter and Merchant) to Mr. Jackson (of Portsmouth, New Hampshire), 1683**

Mr. Jackson: As to your proposal about the bringing in Negroes next fall, I have this to offer and you may communicate the same to your owners and Employers, that I will deal with them for so many as shall amount to 50,000 lbs of Tob’o [tobacco] and cask [rum] which will be about 20 hhds. [hogsheads, which are large containers] under the condition and at these ages and prices following, to say—to give 3000 lbs Tob’o for every Negro boy or girl, that shall be between the age of Seven and Eleven years old; to give 4000 lbs Tob’o for every youth or girl that shall be between the age of 11 to 15 and to give 5000 lbs Tob’o for every young man or woman that shall be above 15 years of age and not exceed 24, the said Negroes to be delivered at my landing some time in September next, and I to have notice whether they will so agree some time in August next. And I do assure you and so you may acquaint them that upon your delivery and my receipt of the Negroes, according to the ages above mentioned and that they be sound and healthfull at their Delivery, I will give you such sufficient caution for the payment of the Tob’o accordingly by the 20th Decr. then next following as shall be approved of. The ages of the Negroes to be judg’d and detemin’d by two or three such honest and reasonable men here as your self shall nominate and appoint . . .

*From Colonial Triangular Trade: An Economy Based on Human Misery, edited by Phyllis Raybin Emert (Carlisle, Massachusetts: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1995), p. 16.*

**The Slave Ship**

I

The supercargo Mynheer van Koek

Is sitting and calculating;

There in his cabin he reckons the worth

And profits to come from his freighting.

"The rubber is good, the pepper is good,

At three hundred barrels we'll set her,

I've gold dust here, and ivory -

The black commodity's better.

Six hundred negroes, I closed the deal

Dirt cheap on the Senegal landing.

The flesh is tough, the sinews are taut,

Like the best cast iron, it's outstanding.

I swapped for them brandy, trinkets and beads,

It's such a bargain I'm driving;

I'll come out ahead eight hundred percent,

With only the half surviving.

If only three hundred negroes remain

By the time we reach Rio de Janeiro,

I'll be getting a hundred ducats per head

From the house of Gonzales Perreiro."

Then suddenly Mynheer van Koek is torn

From the thoughts of his acquisition;

The vessel's surgeon steps inside,

The doctor van der Smissen.

He cuts quite a figure, rattling-dry,

With a noseful of warts for the viewing -

"Well, nautical-sawbones," cries van Koek,

"Tell me, how are my dear blacks doing?"

The doctor takes note of the question and speaks:

"I'm here with this information,

Mortality rates underwent, tonight,

Substantial acceleration.

On average two a day will die,

Yet today we were seven shorted,

Four men and three women -- I noted the loss,

'Twas at once in my notebook recorded.

I inspected the carcasses carefully;

For often these rogues will fake it,

In hopes that we'll toss them overboard,

To the waves where they think they will make it.

And of course, as usual, I removed

The irons that the dead were adorning,

I had the corpses thrown in the sea

Right early in the morning.

And then, in a flash, there emerged from the waves

An army of sharks to receive them,

They certainly love that negro-flesh;

My pensioners, so I conceive them.

They follow along in the wake of our ship,

From the moment that we are leaving;

The beasts pick up the aroma of corpse

With a snuffling hunger-craving.

It's just the funniest thing to behold,

How they snap up the dead as they follow!

One grabs the head, one grabs the leg,

The scraps by the others are swallowed.

If all is devoured, they bustle about

Near the vessel, so charmingly reckless,

They gawk at me, in a way that appears

That they want to say, Thanks for the breakfast."

Van Koek breaks in, heaving a sigh:

"This evil, how can I prevent it?

This advancing rate of mortality,

Now, how am I going to end it?"

The doctor replies: "It is through their own fault

That so many blacks died on this voyage;

Their extremely bad breath has tainted the air

They must breathe in the cargo storage.

And also some died from melancholy,

A disease that will fatally bore them;

Perhaps some fresh air, some music and dance

Might give us the means to restore them."

Then cries van Koek: "That's good advice!

Old nautical-sawbones yonder

Is smart like Aristotle was,

The teacher of Alexander.

In Delft, the head of the Institute

For Tulip-Refinement, he never

Had half your brains, despite the fact

That he was exceedingly clever.

Yes, music, music! Upon the deck

The blacks shall all dance in their fashion.

And who won't amuse himself, hopping about,

The bullwhip shall give a good thrashing."

II

High in the azure canopy

Many thousands of stars are swimming,

They gaze from the heavens, shining and wise,

Like eyes of lovely women.

They glance with yearning into the sea,

That a fragrant aura covers

With a purple phosphorescence now;

The ripples murmur like lovers.

No sail is fluttering on the ship,

And idle stands the masting;

But lanterns shimmer upon the deck,

Where dancing-music is blasting.

The helmsman strokes the fiddle now,

The boy has a drum to thump it,

The cook, he plays upon the flute,

The doctor blows the trumpet.

A hundred negroes, women and men,

They gyrate and hollar with 'em,

And as they leap about like mad

The irons klank in rhythm.

They stamp on the deck with riotous zest,

And many black lovelies, shining

In naked pleasure, moan and groan,

Salaciously entwining.

The beadle is Maître des plaisirs,

And uses the whip to good measure,

To stimulate careless dancers, so

As to goad them to cheerful pleasure.

And fiddle-dee-dee and rum-pa-pa-pum!

The din attracts the monsters

Who daftly doze in the undersea world,

They start to arise from down yonder.

Then dazed, amazed, and swimming up,

The sharks come, in great numbers;

They gawk in astonishment up at the ship,

All stupid from their slumbers.

They notice that the breakfast hour

Is not yet here, and they yawn then,

Unlocking their jaws; and the jawbones display

The rows of sawteeth upon them.

And fiddle-dee-dee and rum-pa-pa-pum -

The dancing and wild gyration

Goes on without end, and the sharks begin

To bite their own tails in frustration.

They don't love music, or so I believe,

Their sort prefers to forego it.

"So trust no beast, that loves music not!"

Says Albion's honored poet.

And fiddle-dee-dee and rum-pa-pa-pum -

There's no end to the wild gyration.

Van Koek, at the foremast, folds his hands

In prayerful supplication:

"In Jesus' name, have mercy, Lord,

On the lives of these sinful black chattel!

If they enrage Thee, don't forget

That they're as dumb as cattle.

Please spare their lives in Jesus' name,

Who died for our salvation,

For if I can't deliver three hundred head,

'Twill be my ruination."

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By Heinrich Heine

**The North American Colonies**

The Chesapeake became the primary tobacco producer for the world, exporting some 38 million pounds by 1700 and effectively liquidating English West Indian production. It was also the most important slave zone in continental North America, holding some 145,000 slaves (or 60 percent of the total in the thirteen colonies) by 1750. The Georgia-South Carolina region became a major rice producer on coastal plantations, with some slave-produced indigo in the backland areas. These slave-based rice plantations absorbed 40,000 slaves by mid-century. By 1790 there were an impressive 698,000 slaves in what was now the United States, 94 percent of whom were in the socalled southern states from Maryland south. . . .

But rice and tobacco would soon pale in significance to the production of cotton. Although long- and short-staple cotton had been grown in the southern region for some time, . . . only the introduction of mechanical cleaning of the short-staple and heavily seeded cotton in the 1790s with the cotton gin permitted cotton planting to penetrate into the interior of the country and also to become a competitive crop on the world market. Starting in the rice regions, cotton spread inland quickly, and as early as the 1830s half of the cotton was being produced in the newly settled regions of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana . . . By the middle of the nineteenth century this was the largest single export from the United States, more valuable than all other exports combined, and it was an overwhelmingly slave-produced crop…

*From The Atlantic Slave Trade by Herbert S. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 43-44.*

**Captured! (From “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano . . .”)**

. . . I was born, in the year 1745, in a charming fruitful vale, named Essaka. . . . \* My father was one of [the] elders or chiefs . . . As I was the youngest of the sons, I became, of course, the greatest favourite with my mother, and was always with her; and she used to take particular pains to form my mind. . . . In this way I grew up till I was turned the age of eleven, when an end was put to my happiness in the following manner . . .

One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent the night. We were then unbound, but were unable to take any food . . . The next morning we left the house, and continued traveling all the day. For a long time we had kept the woods, but at last we came into a road which I believed I knew. I had now some hopes of being delivered; for we had advanced but a little way before I discovered some people at a distance, on which I began to cry out for their assistance: but my cries had no other effect than to make them tie me faster and stop my mouth, and then they put me into a large sack.

\* Essaka was a village in the ancient Benin Kingdom, a powerful African kingdom located in present-day Nigeria.

*From “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself,” in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company,1997), p. 141, 142, 151-152.*

**The Voyage (From “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano . . .”)**

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was . . . waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up . . . When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. . . .

I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands . . . and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. . . .

The stench of the hold . . . was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship’s cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died . . . This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains . . . and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated.

*From “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself,” in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company,1997), p. 157, 159.*

**Sold! (From “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano . . .”)**

We were conducted immediately to the merchant’s yard, where we were all pent up together like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age. . . . We were not many days in the merchant’s custody before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this:---On a signal given, (as the beat of a drum) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamour with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans . . . In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again.

*From “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself,” in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company,1997), p. 160-161.*