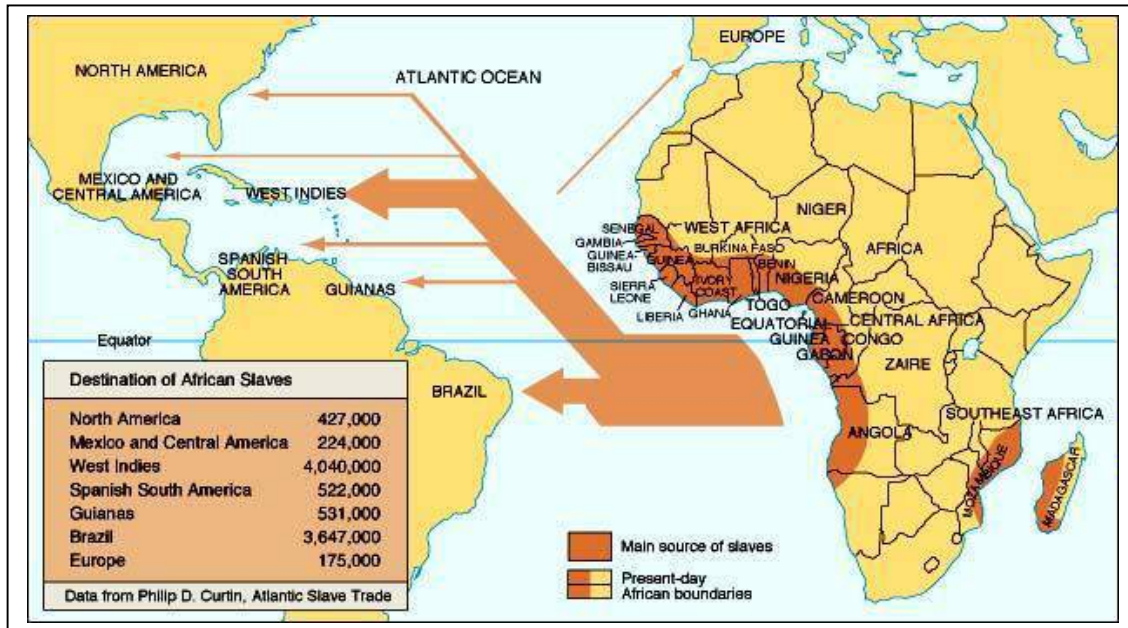


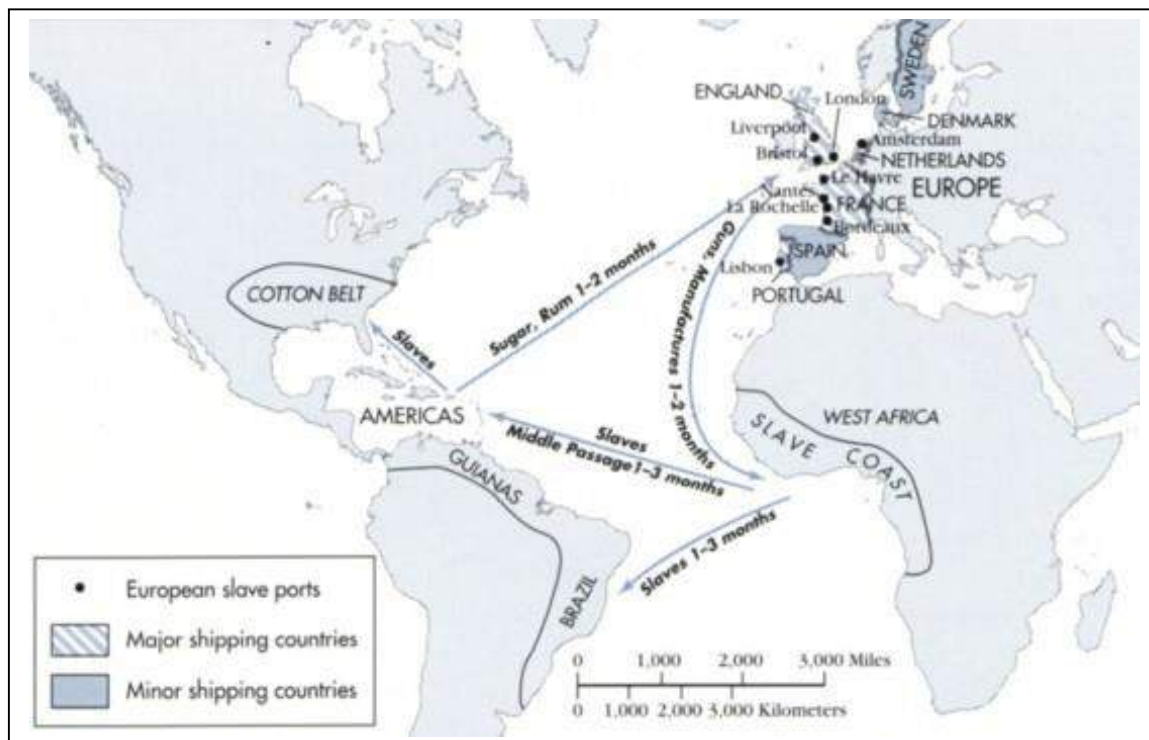
Unit Four: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade



The Transatlantic slave trade was an economic process that was based on the forced transportation of people from the West Coast of Africa to the plantations and mines of the “New World.” It consisted of three main routes:

1. Manufactured goods were brought from Europe to West Africa to be traded for Africans.
2. Africans were taken --via the “Middle Passage”-- to the Americas and Caribbean to work on plantations or mines.
3. Raw materials --sugar, tobacco, rice, cotton-- produced by enslaved Africans were taken to Europe.

The cycle came to be known as the “Golden Triangle” or the “Triangle Trade”







Marchand d'Esclaves de Gorée

Lebrun del.

L. Simon sculp.





A “Door of No Return” on Goree Island, off the coast of Senegal.

It was through doors like these through which Africans were taken to the ships that would carry them on the Middle Passage to the Americas.



The Middle Passage

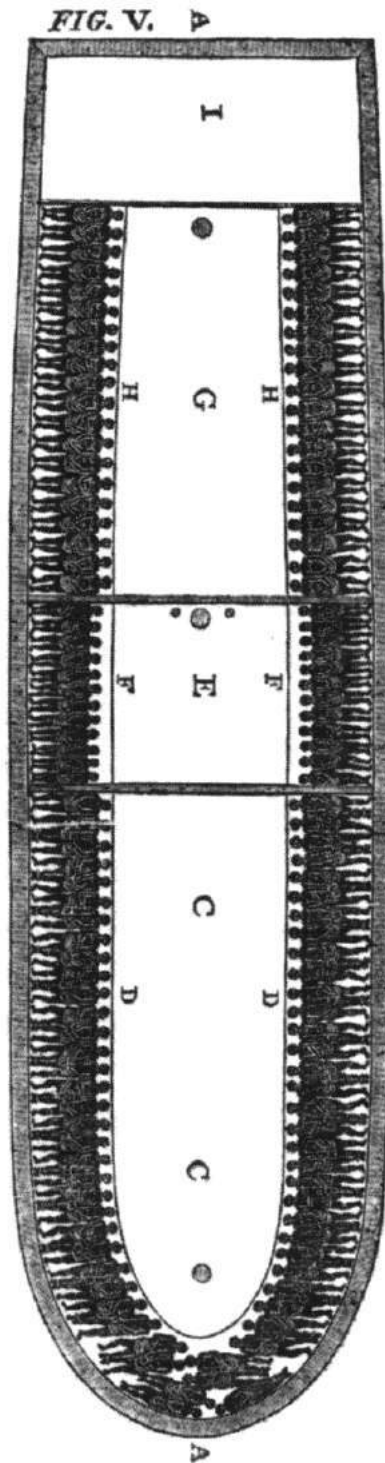
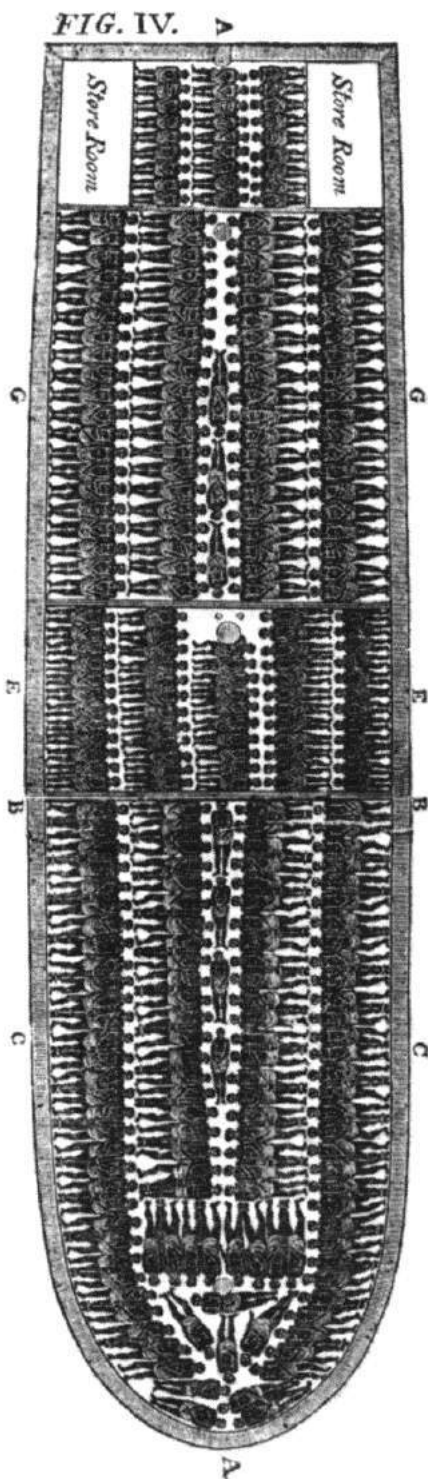
The Middle Passage was the stage of the slave trade in which Africans were transported to the Americas on a voyage that could last one to six months depending on weather conditions.

An estimated ten to twelve million Africans were taken to the various American ports.

However, fifteen percent of that number may have perished at sea; and an even greater number may have been killed resisting capture.



Wieder
S. Luthasius enthet Handel mit der Slaven von d. Holländische en Engellische Schepen.



Conditions on board slave ships were appalling. Men were packed together below deck and secured with chains. They were often forced to crouch or lie down.

Women and children were kept in separate quarters, sometimes on deck, which also allowed them more freedom to move. However, this also made them susceptible to sexual abuse and violence from the crew.

SECTIONS OF A SLAVE SHIP.

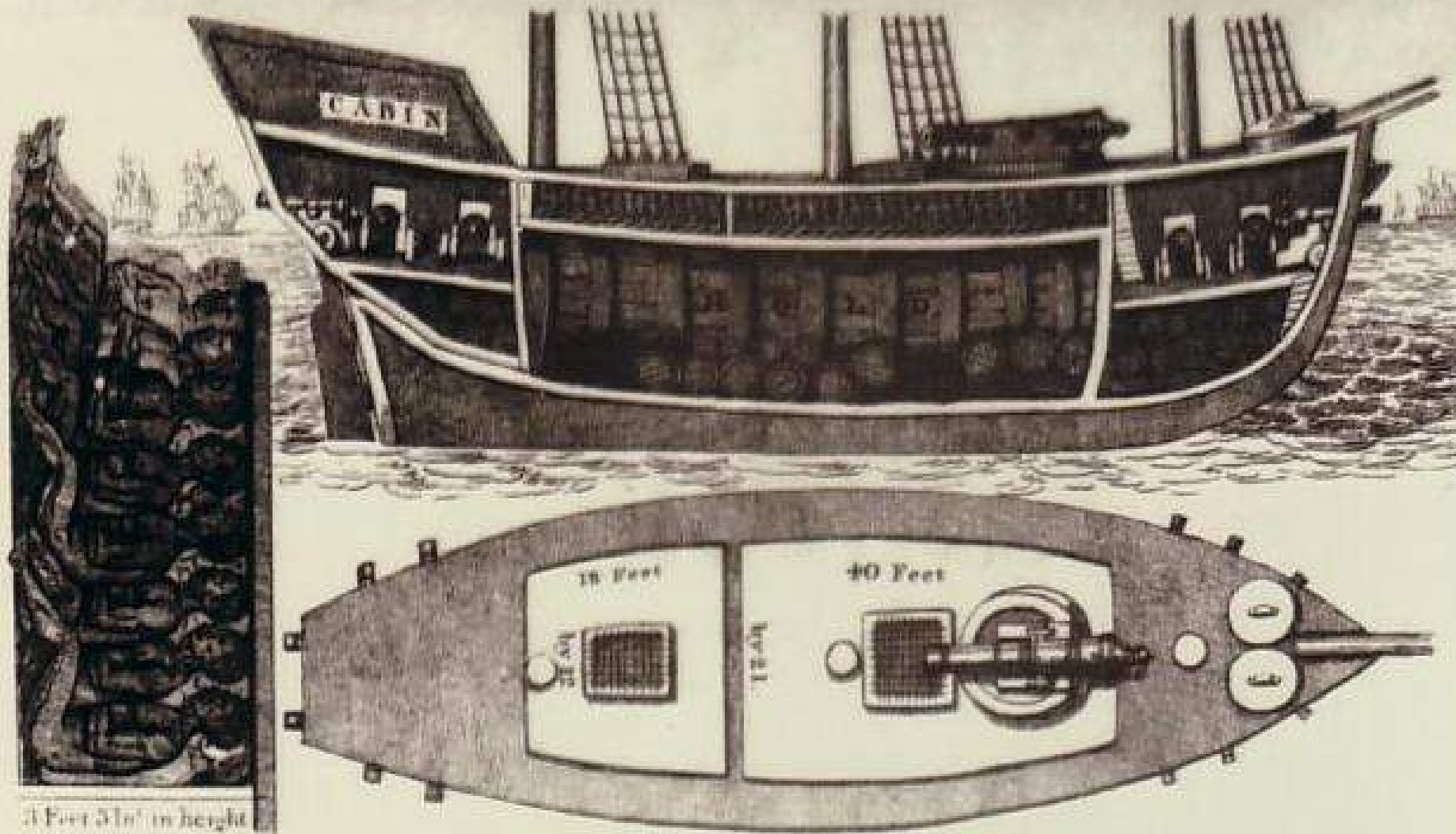


DIAGRAM OF A SLAVE SHIP
British Library.



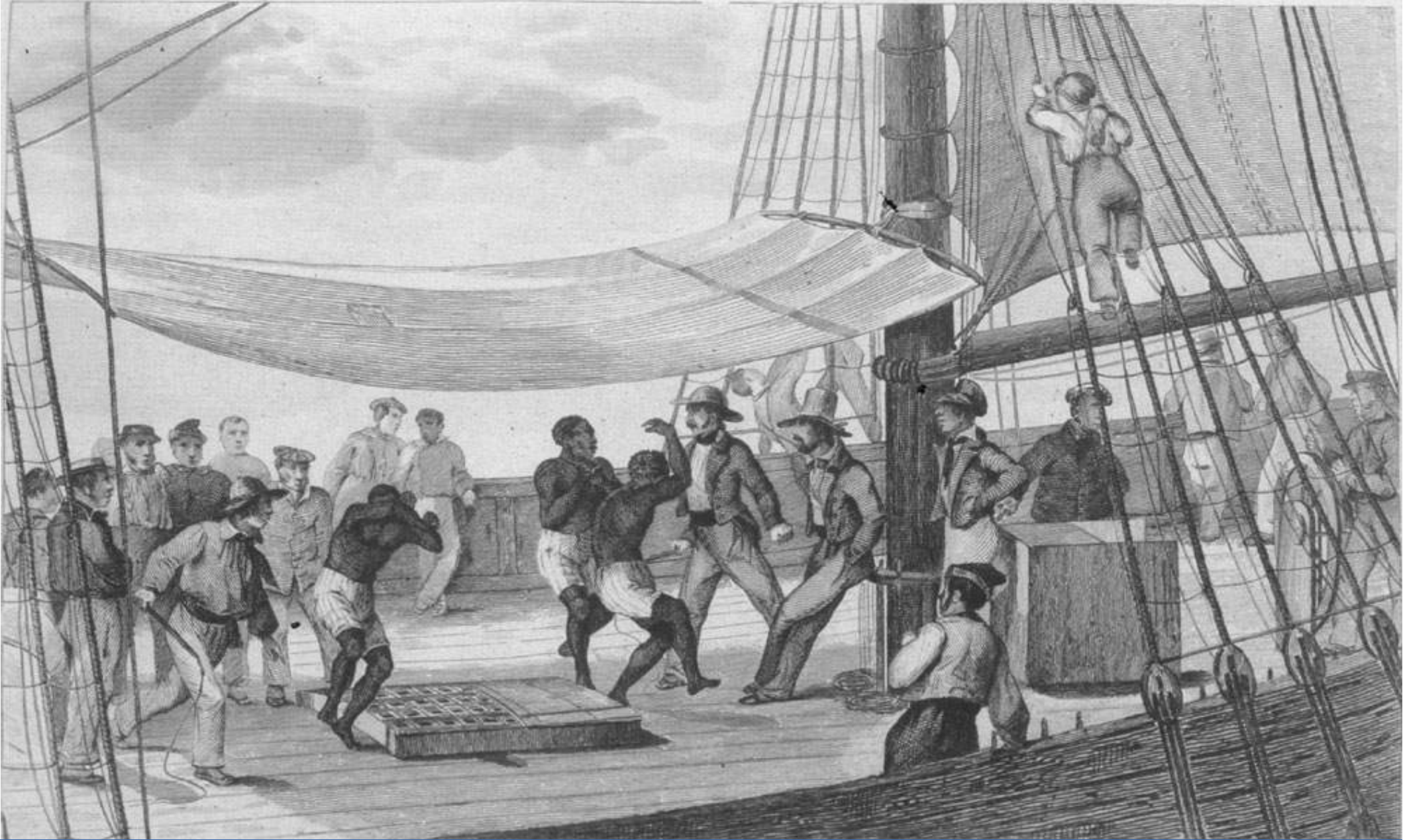


When possible, the Africans were fed twice a day. Those who refused to eat were force-fed.

Their diet consisted of foods already available in the regions of Africa from which they were taken, and with which the Africans were familiar.

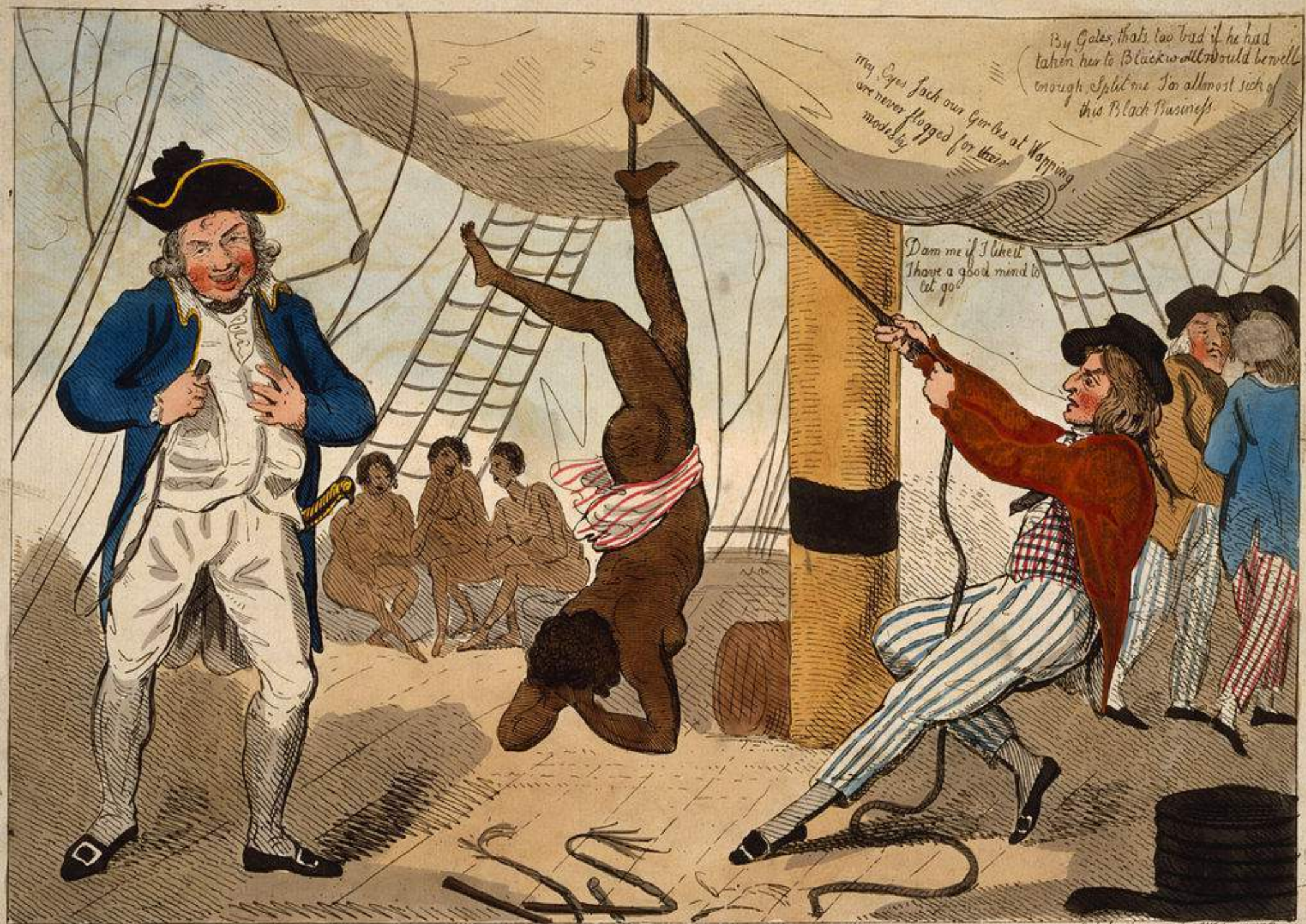
Yams, rice, banana and cassava made up the bulk of their food.

These foods would also become and remain staples of the diets for people in the Americas, and African techniques of cultivating and cooking these foods would become central to American cuisine.



Weather allowing, the captives were brought on deck and forced to exercise or "dance" to keep them healthy. However, the poor conditions allowed diseases such as smallpox and measles to spread rapidly. Though Africans were not as susceptible to these diseases as the Amerindian populations, the conditions still took a heavy toll on both captives and crew. In addition to the physical illnesses, many captives suffered from depression and were unable to function effectively.

Conditions on board ship were horrific. Slaves had to be kept under control. Thus, whippings and other punishments were common for those who disobeyed.



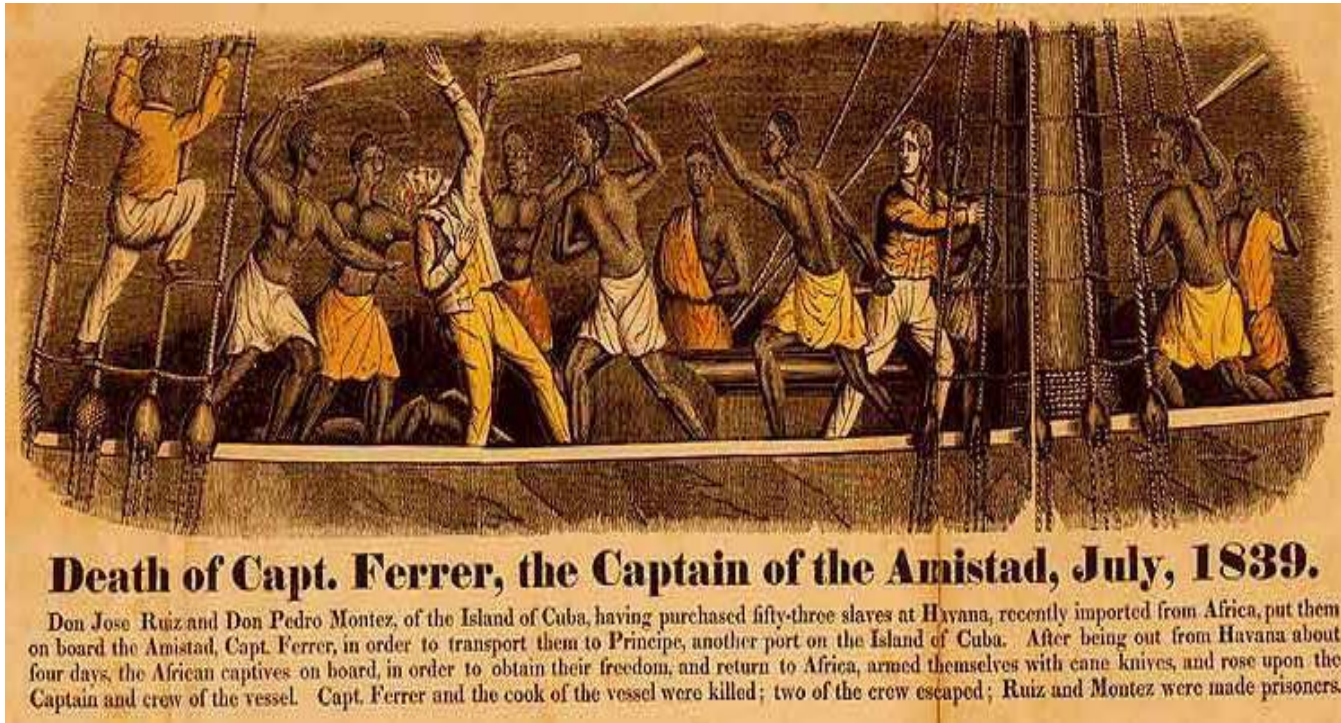
The ABOLITION of the SLAVE TRADE.
 Or the Inhumanity of Dealers in human flesh exemplified in Capt. Kimber's treatment of a Young Negro Girl of 15 for her Virgin Modesty

Pub. April 10 1792 by J.W. Fores N386a





African Resistance

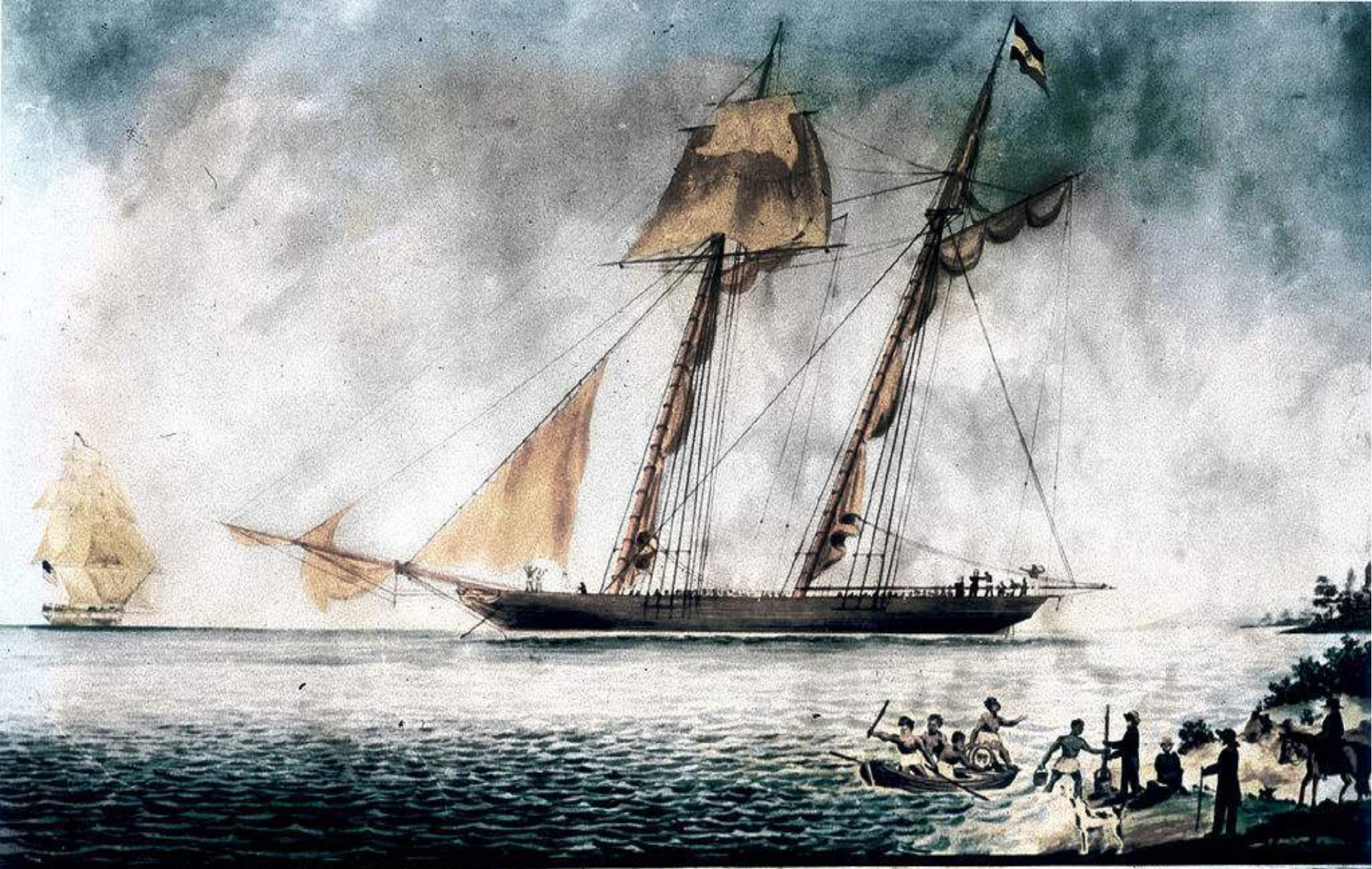


Africans reacted to their treatment and conditions in various ways.

Some tried to escape; others attempted suicide by jumping overboard or by refusing to eat.

Some took the opportunity to rebel.

Relatively few successful shipboard slave rebellions are recorded. One, however, received national attention in the United States and created a folk hero for those who opposed the slave trade.



USS WASHINGTON *La Amistad* NEVIN TRAVIS

Contemporary painting of the La Amistad off Culloden Point, Long Island, New York, on 26 August 1839; on the left the USS Washington of the US Navy (oil painting)

The Amistad Rebellion

In February of 1839, approximately fifty-three Africans from Mendeland were purchased in Havana, Cuba and put aboard the schooner La Amistad for shipment to a plantation on Hispaniola. The ship hit poor weather and the journey was taking longer than expected. Food became scarce, and soon all began to starve. At their trial, the Africans would claim the ship's cook had hinted they would be eaten.

On July 1, 1839, led by Sengbe Pieh (called Joseph Cinque by the Spanish), the Africans seized the ship, killed the captain and cook, and ordered the remaining crewmen to sail them eastward and back to Africa. The Spaniards obeyed and sailed east during the day when the sun could be seen. At night, however, they used the stars to steer north. This zigzag course eventually allowed the Amistad to be intercepted off the coast of Long Island, NY..

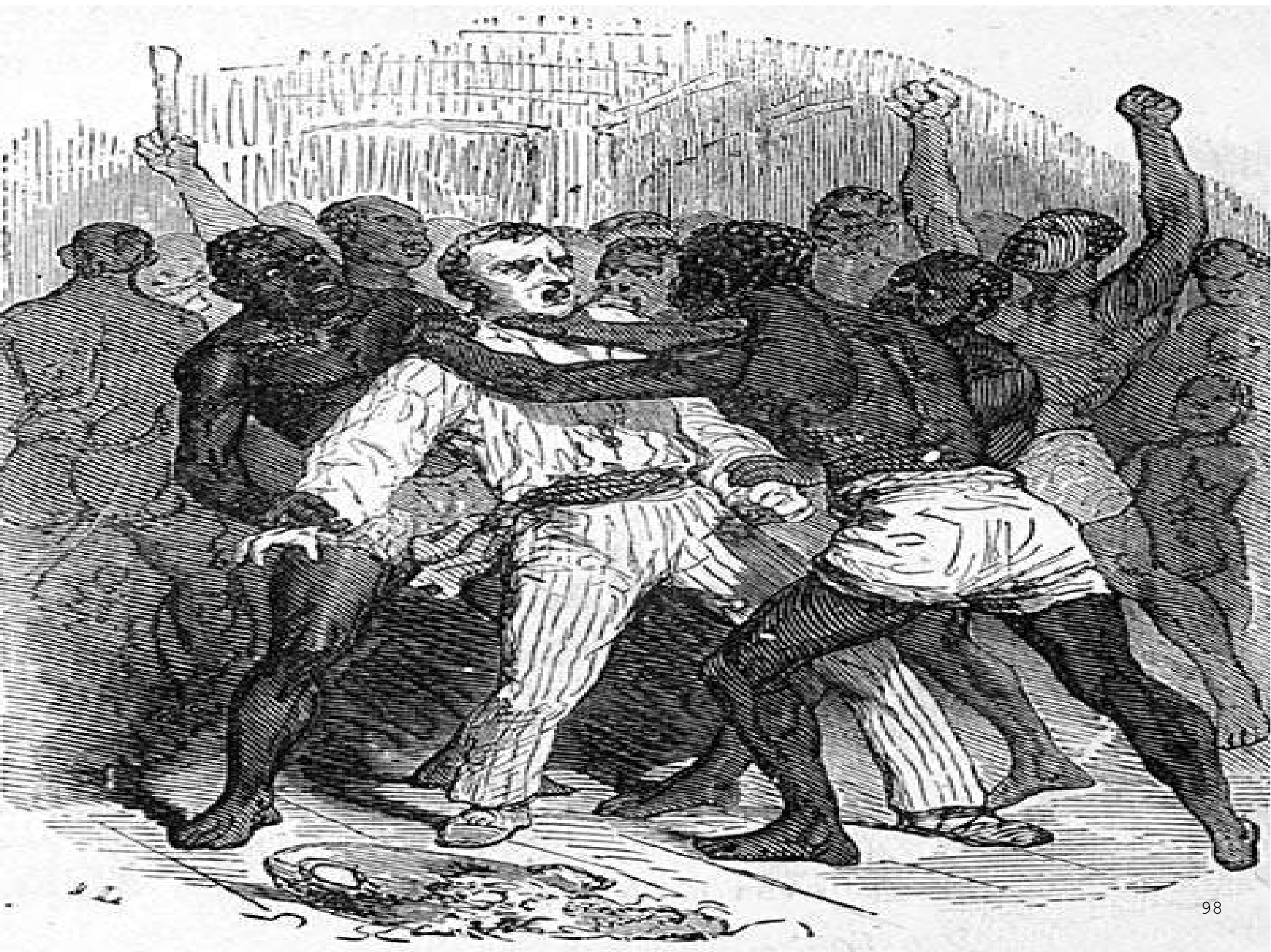
Cinque's Speech on the Amistad



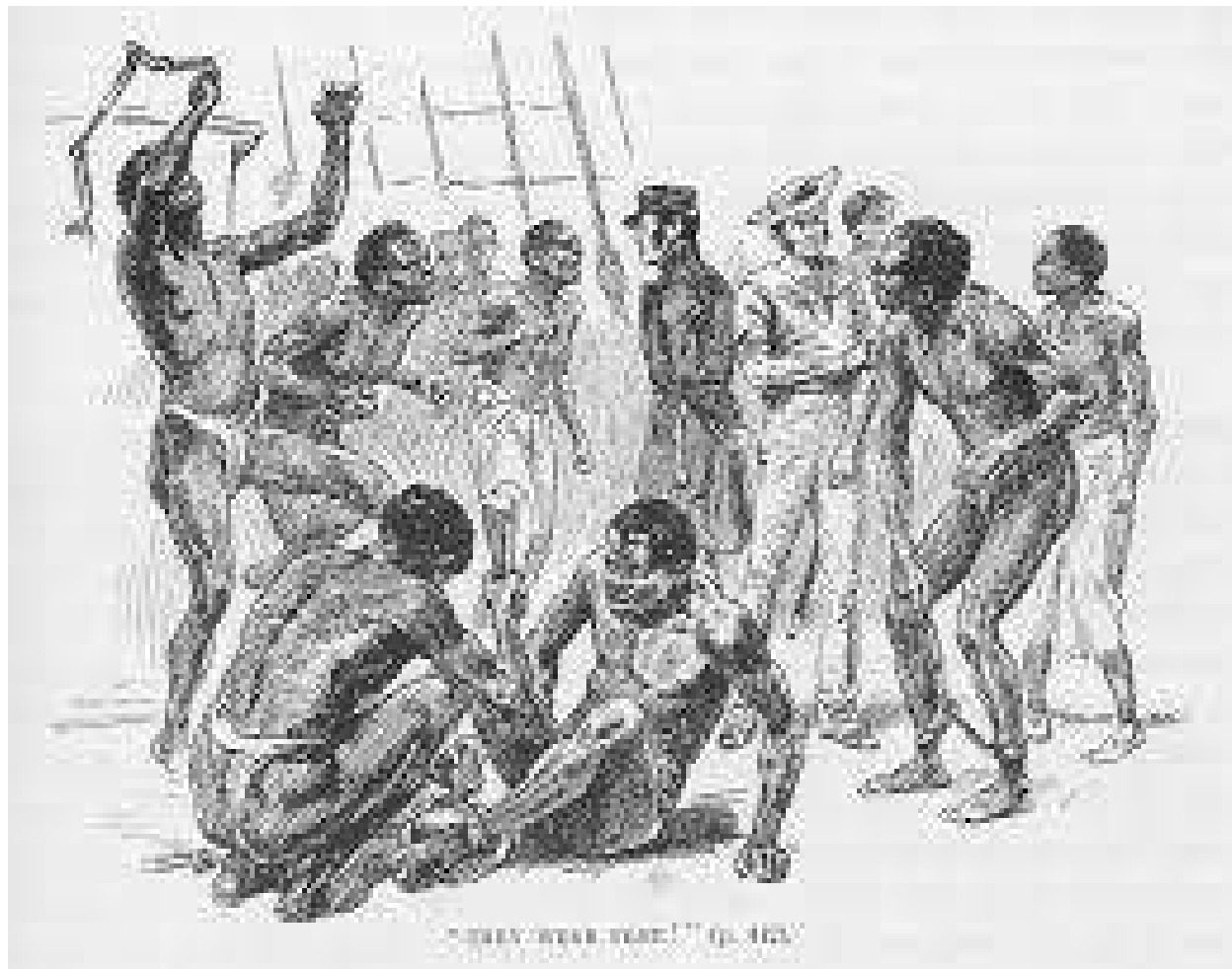
"Brothers we have done what we have purposed, our hands are now clean for we have Striven to regain the precious heritage we received from our fathers. We have only to persevere. Where the Sun rises there is our home, our brethern, our fathers. Do not seek to defeat my orders, if so I shall sacrifice any one who would endanger the rest. When at home we will kill the Old Man, the young one shall be saved. [H]e is kind and gave you bread. [W]e will not kill those who give us water.

Brothers, I am resolved that it is better to die than be a white man's slave and I will not complain if by dying I save you.

Let us be careful what we eat that we may not be sick. The deed is done and I need say no more."







The planters were freed and the Africans were imprisoned, in New Haven, CT, on charges of mutiny and murder. Although the murder charges were dismissed, the Africans continued to be held. The case now focused on whether the Africans were free men who had been illegally stolen or still the human property of the Spaniards.

The case ultimately went to the Supreme Court which, in 1841, decided in favor of the Africans. Thirty-five of them, including Cinque, eventually returned to a Christian missionary colony in what would become Sierra Leone. The others died at sea or in prison while awaiting trial.



Cinque eventually left the colony and little is known of his later life, but the story of the Amistad and the heroic fight of the Africans inspired the anti-slavery movement. Cinque was celebrated as a proof of the Africans' innate desire for freedom and countered the myth that Africans were content enslavement. Cinque also became a folk hero among people who saw him as a symbol of hope in spite of seemingly impossible odds and, to some, the dream of returning home.

In New Haven, Connecticut, the jail where the Africans were held has become a national monument. A statue of Cinque has been erected with a memorial commemorating the Amistad story and Cinque's role.

“The memorial is a reminder of the triumph over oppression and the victory of justice and brotherhood of the Amistad story.”



Responses to enslavement

- Physical and Cultural Resistance
- Need to create methods of Survival
- Rejection (of imposed culture)
- Syncretism (appropriation of other cultures)
- Creation of new (Creole) cultures
 - Sacred
 - Secular
 - Leisure
 - Labor

Oral Influences

- Vocabulary
- Oral traditions
- Stories

New World Words of African Origin

Plants and Animals

Banana: probably Wolof (Senegal) or Malinke for the fruit.

Cola: Temne *kola* and Mandinka *kolo*, name of the tree.

Goober: possibly Kikongo (DRC) and Kimbundu (Angola) *nguba* "peanut."

Gumbo: *Kimbundu *ngombo* meaning "okra."

Okra: Igbo (Nigeria) *ókùrù* and Akan *nkruma* "okra."

Yam: Fulani *nyami* "to eat;" Twi *anyinam* "species of yam."

Chigger: possibly from Wolof and Yoruba (Nigeria) *jiga* "insect."

Chimpanzee: Tshiluba (D.R.C.), *chimpenze*

Impala: Zulu *m'pala* "gazelle."

Macaque: Fiot (Congo-Angola) *makaku*, from *kaku*, "monkey."

Tsetse: Tswana *tsetse*, Luhya *tsiisi*, meaning "flies."

Zebra: Kikongo word for the animal.

Mamba: Zulu or Swahili name for the mamba snake.

Trickster Characters

Trickster characters appear in the folklore of all cultures. Tricksters come in various shapes and forms, but all symbolize the uncertainties of life. All human societies face uncontrollable natural forces. Hurricanes, volcanoes, diseases, droughts or floods can wipe out entire villages or cities. Yet, in every disaster, there are stories of survival. Tricksters represent the element of chance in life that enables hope even in the darkest circumstance. However, tricksters also illustrate the fact that no matter how good things may appear, they can quickly change.

Regular seasons, for example, are critical for the success of societies based on agriculture, but the weather is not under human control. It is no surprise that people will revere the earth and the foods it provides, the sun for its warmth, and the rain that provides drinking water. Tricksters are ways to explain the times when there is too little water or too much sun.

Africans transported to the New World brought trickster characters and stories with them. In the New World, Africans working on plantations combined their experiences in their New World with memories and habits from Africa to produce a body of folk expressions about their experiences. They created tales in which various animals—such as the rabbit, fox, bear, wolf, turtle, or terrapin, snake, and possum—took on the characteristics of the people found in the new environment of the plantation.

Whereas Eshu and Ananse were common in the Caribbean and South America, in the American south a character called Br'er Rabbit took the position as the trickster figure. Little rabbit was seemingly helpless compared to bear, fox or wolf. However, in a folktale, unlike real life, the small rabbit could stand up to and overcome even his larger and more powerful animals. Animal tales gave slaves a way to express their hopes for freedom without the fear of reprisal. Trickster stories were a way to resist. Trickster tales lasted long after slavery ended and ended popular culture in the form of cartoon characters such as Bugs Bunny, whose cunning allows him to outwit all his enemies.

Materials

- Foods (brought from Africa)
- Medicines (and their customary uses)
- Instruments and tools
 - Drums, percussion and stringed instruments

New World Words of African Origin

Music and Musical Instruments

Banjo: Bantu *mbanza*, an instrument resembling a banjo.

Bongo: Lokele (Democratic Republic of the Congo) *boungu*.

Marimba: Kimbundu and Swahili *marimba*, *malimba*.

Samba: probably from Kikongo word *semba*, a Congo-Angolan dance style.

Shekere: Yoruba instrument made of dried gourd with beads woven into a net.

Religion

Mambo: Kikongo, meaning "conversation with the gods."

Mojo: Fula (Senegal) *moco'o* "medicine man" via Louisiana Creole French or Gullah.

Obeah: Efik (Nigeria) *ubio*.

Voodoo: Ewe and Fon (Benin) *vodun* "spirits"

Zombie: Kikongo *zumbi* "fetish;" Kimbundu *nzambi*, a "snake deity"

Slang

Jive: Wolof *jev*, meaning "talk about someone absent, especially disparagingly."

Juke: Wolof and Bambara (Mali) *dzug* or *dzuk*, meaning "unsavory" (via Gullah).

Chevere: "Cool" probably introduced from the Efik language into Cuba the 19th century.

Customs

- Work (agricultural techniques, work customs)
- Play (after work, recreation, entertainment)
- Worship (celebration, ritual, practices)
- Survival (health, defense)
 - Styles of cooking,
 - Use of herbs and medicine
 - Styles of dancing, fighting

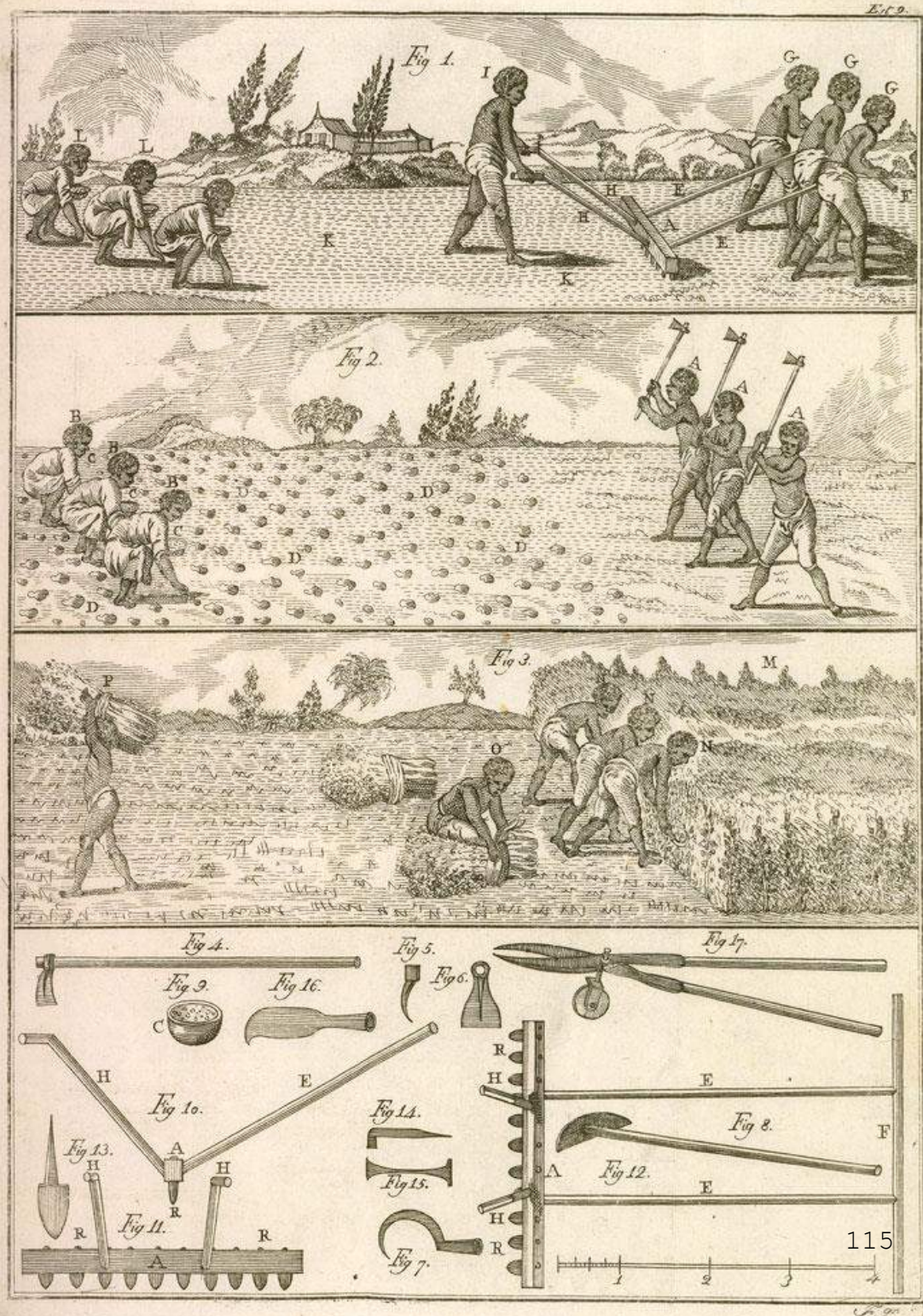
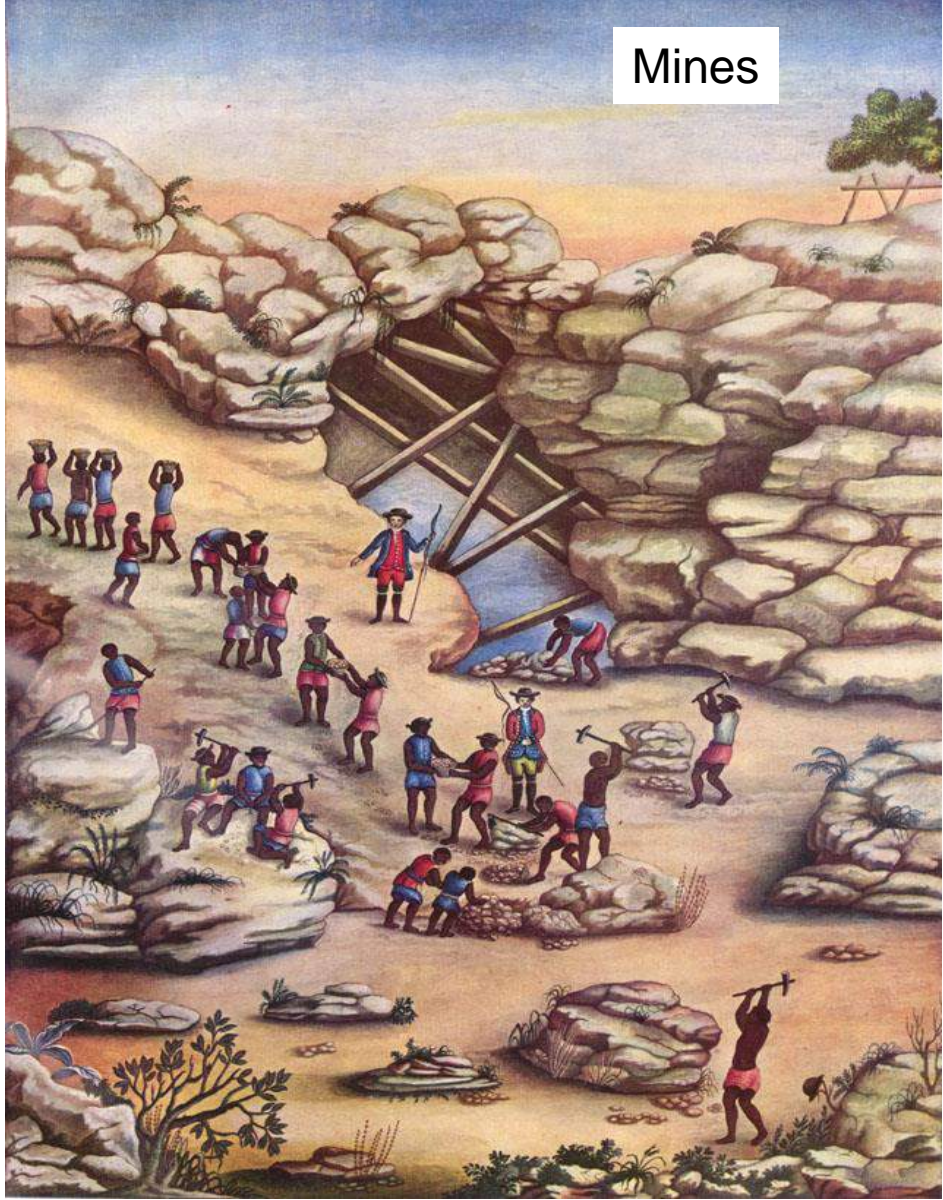
Plantation products

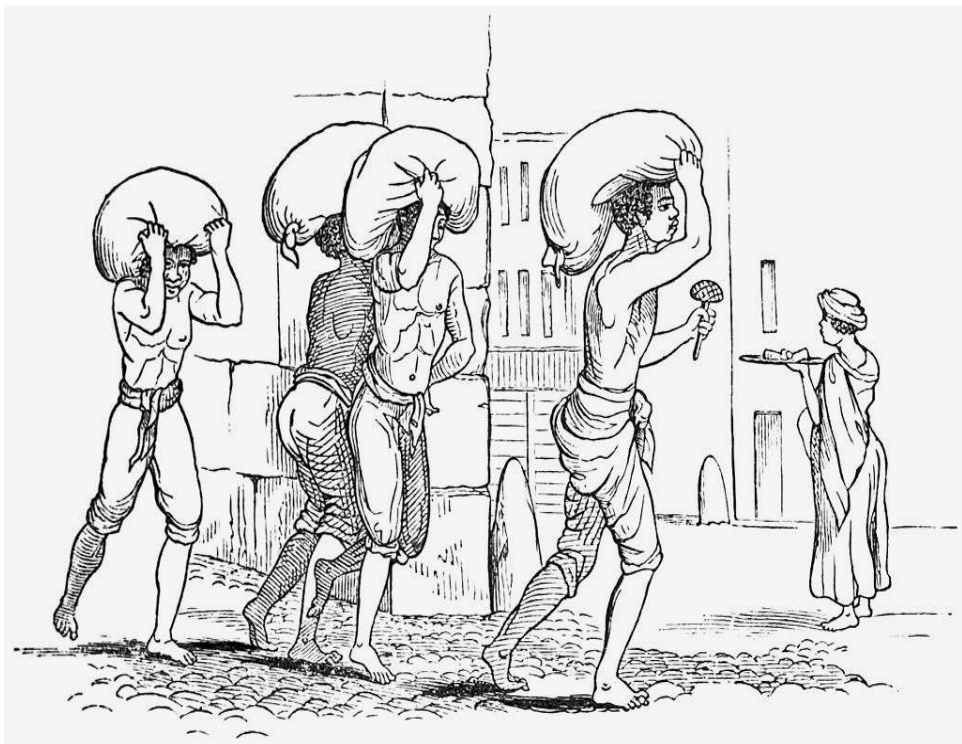


Africans working as slaves on New World plantations and mines supplied products that would be sold in Europe as part of the “Triangular Trade.”

New World Labor

In Brazil, as in other regions of the New World, Africans were used in similar ways for various types of work.

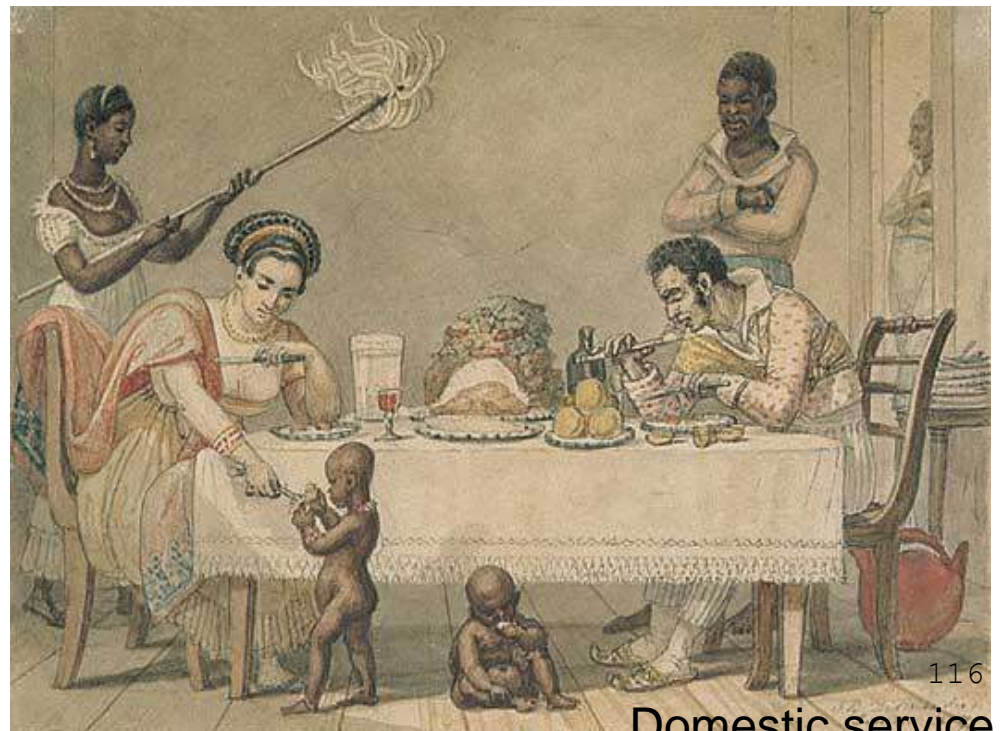




Transporting coffee to market



Brazilian Lady in her Cadeira



Domestic service

Brazil-Angola Connection

The majority of Africans brought to the Portuguese colony of Brazil came from regions near present day Angola and central Africa

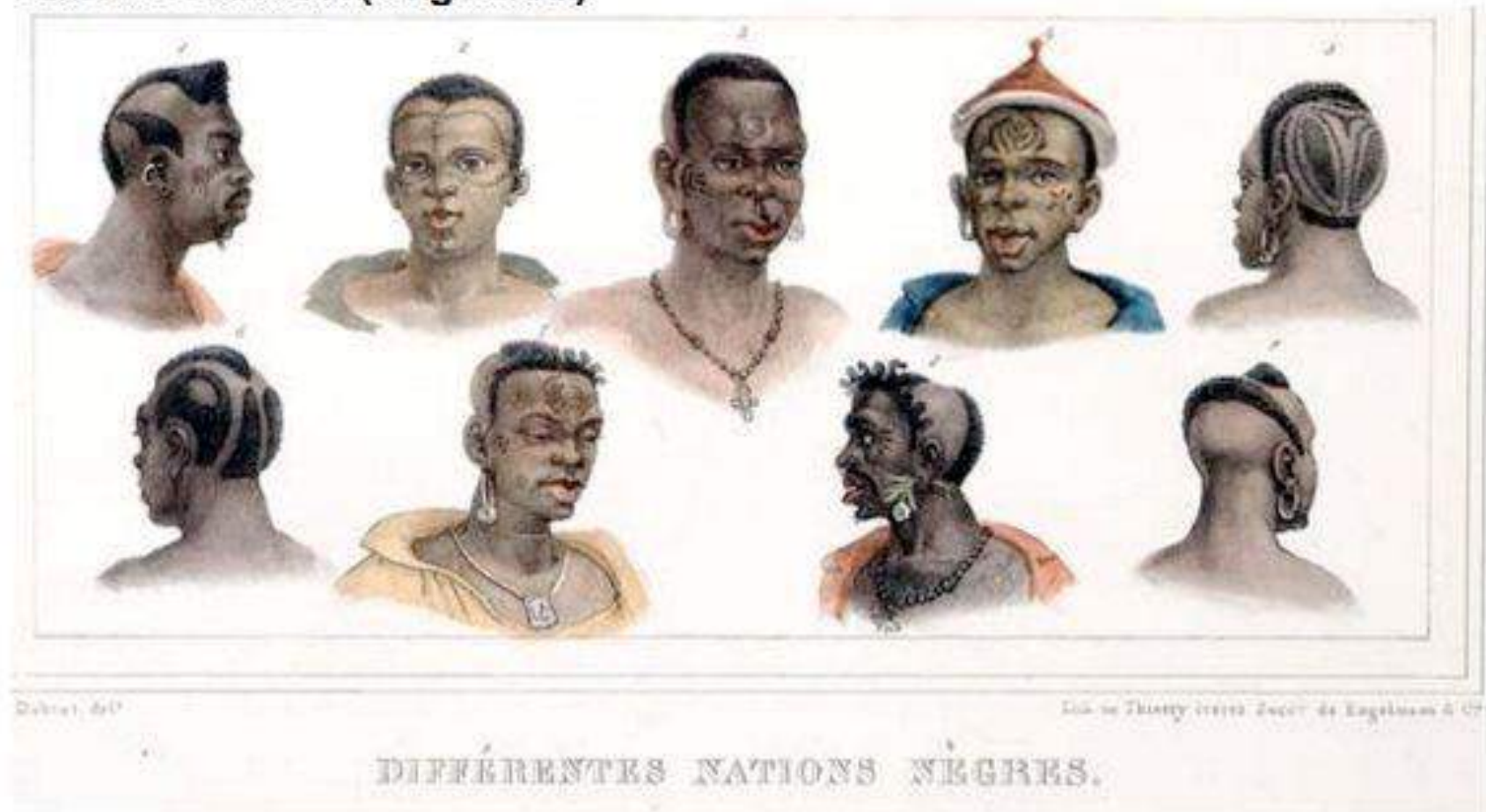


1. Angola 2. Congo 3. Benguela 4. Monjolo 5. Cabinda
6. Quiloa 7. Rebolo 8. Mozambique 9. Mozambique 10. Mina

*All, with the exception of the Mina woman pictured, spoke languages from the Bantu family.

Many Africans had traditions of tribal scarring and tattooing. However, these traditions did not always survive.

Escravo Tatuado (Rugendas)

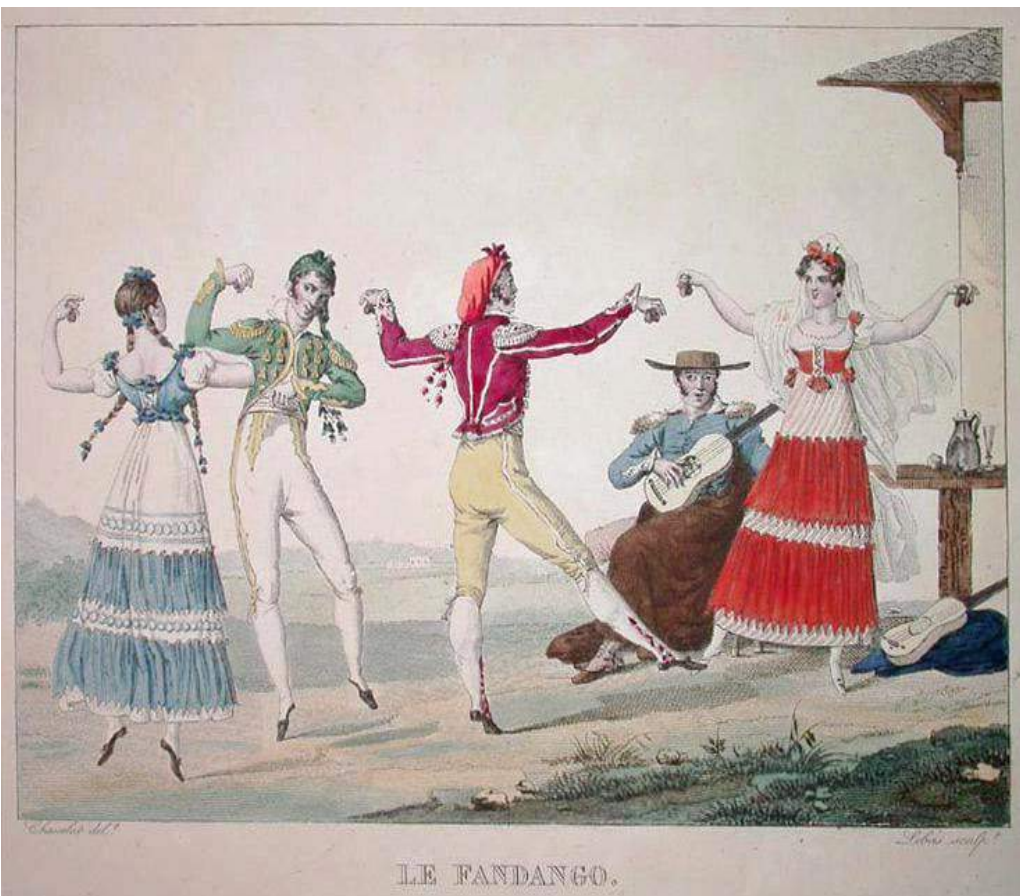


1. Monjolo; 2. Mina; 3, 4, 8, 9. Moçambique; 5, 6. Benguela; 7. Calava

What are some possible reasons that these traditions seemed to disappear among Africans in the diaspora? Are modern customs of scarring, tattooing, hair styles and dress a return to traditions?

“Negro Fandango Scene at Campo de St. Anna, Rio de Janeiro” (1822).





Fandangos (European folk dances)



Africans from the Kongo-Angola regions had their own tradition of fandango called the jongo, a word that comes from the Quimbundo term *jihungu*.

The jongo (also called the caxambu or corima) is an Afro-Brazilian dance that is originally rural, but which has had a strong influence on Brazilian popular culture, in particular on "samba carioca" (carioca = from Rio de Janeiro). Its practitioners consider it to be the "grandfather" of samba, the dance that is an international symbol of Brazilian culture.

Similar to to Angolan *semba* (or *masemba*), jongo was brought to Brazil by Bantu peoples from present day Angola. Like the Portuguese fandango, and Angolan *semba*, men would compete by dancing against each other to see who had the cleverest steps. In jongo, there were also poets who compete with each other verbally by improvising clever songs and sayings on the spot.

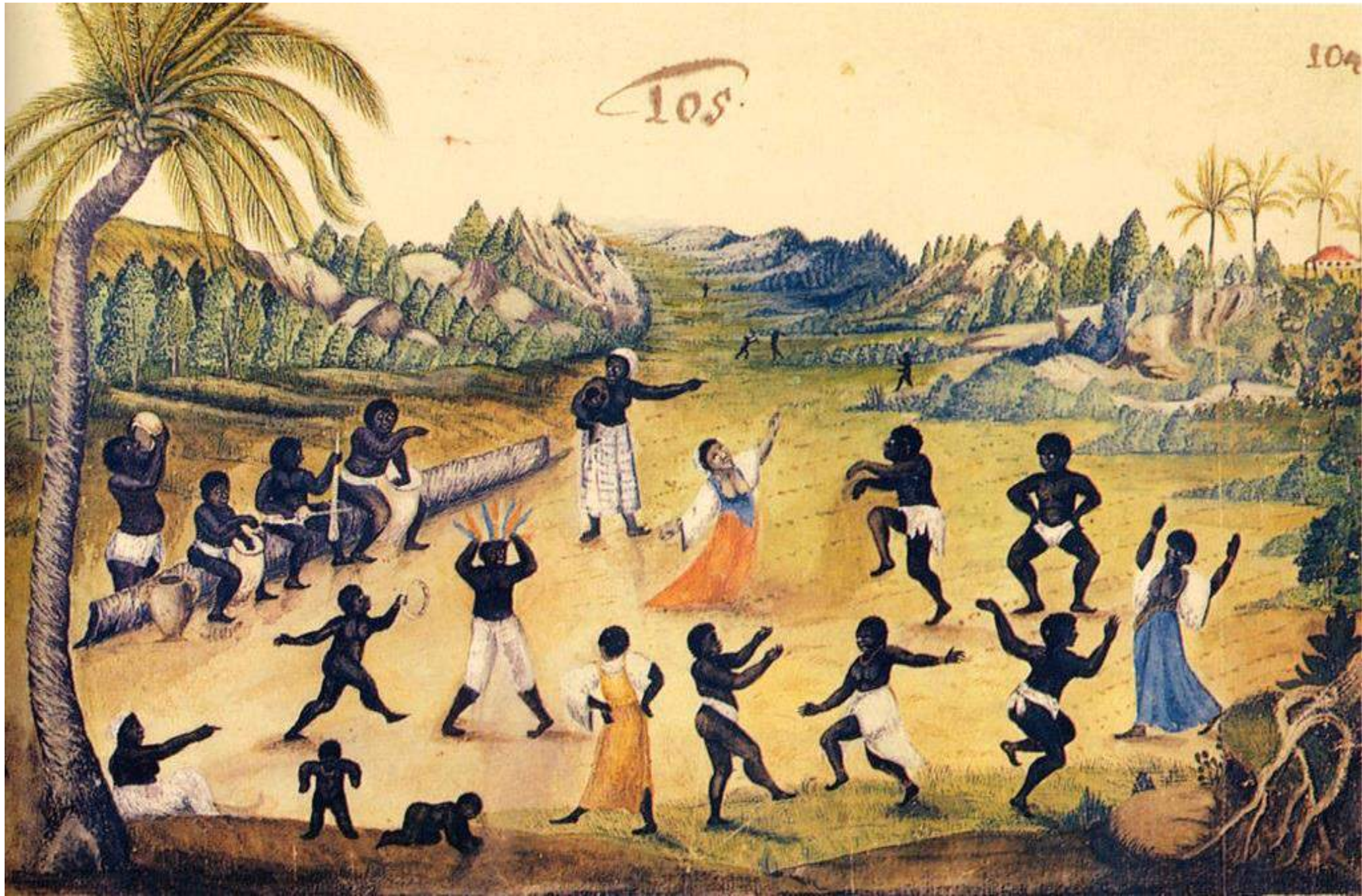
Jongo also had an element of religious expression. The drums used were considered both sacred, magical and the ancestors of the community. Fire is used to tune the instruments and also to enlighten the souls of ancestors.

The jongo was danced and sung to the sounds of the urucungo (a Bantu bow instrument that was ancestor to the berimbau), guitar, pandeiro, and consecrated drums. It is still practiced in various cities of the Paraíba Valley in southeastern Brazil and Rio de Janeiro, to the north of São Paulo and in the region of mines and coffee plantations in Minas Gerais.



Contemporary jongo (caxambu)

Los







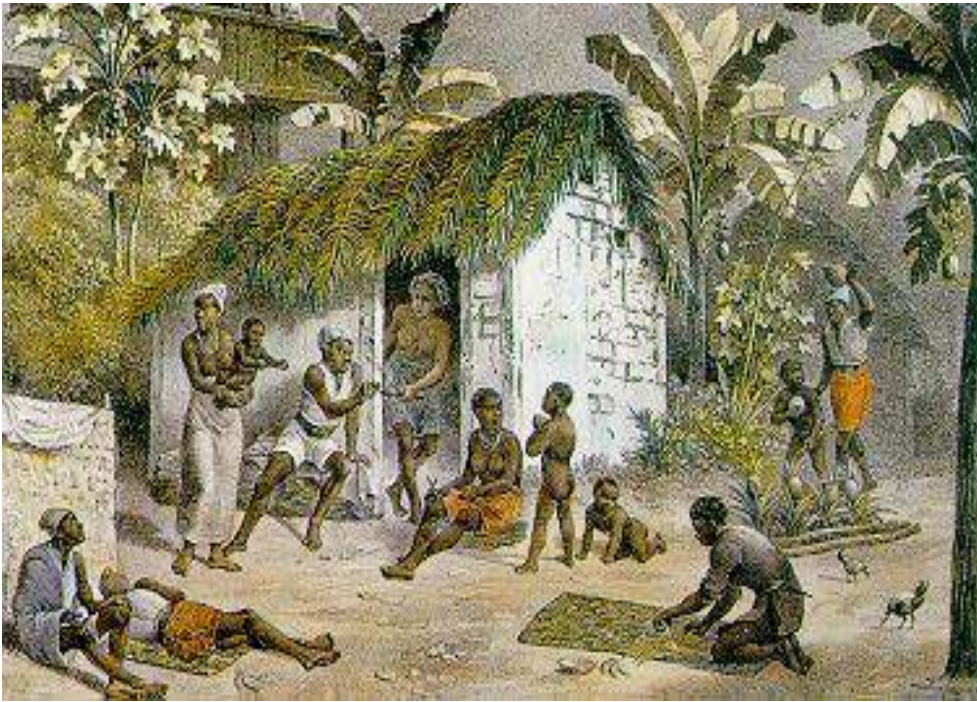
Which aspects of African folklore are illustrated above?

Plantation Slavery

"Rather than identifying with and submitting totally to his master, the slave held onto many remnants of his African culture, gained a sense of worth in the quarters, spent most of his time free from surveillance by whites, controlled important aspects of his life, and did some personally meaningful things on his own volition."

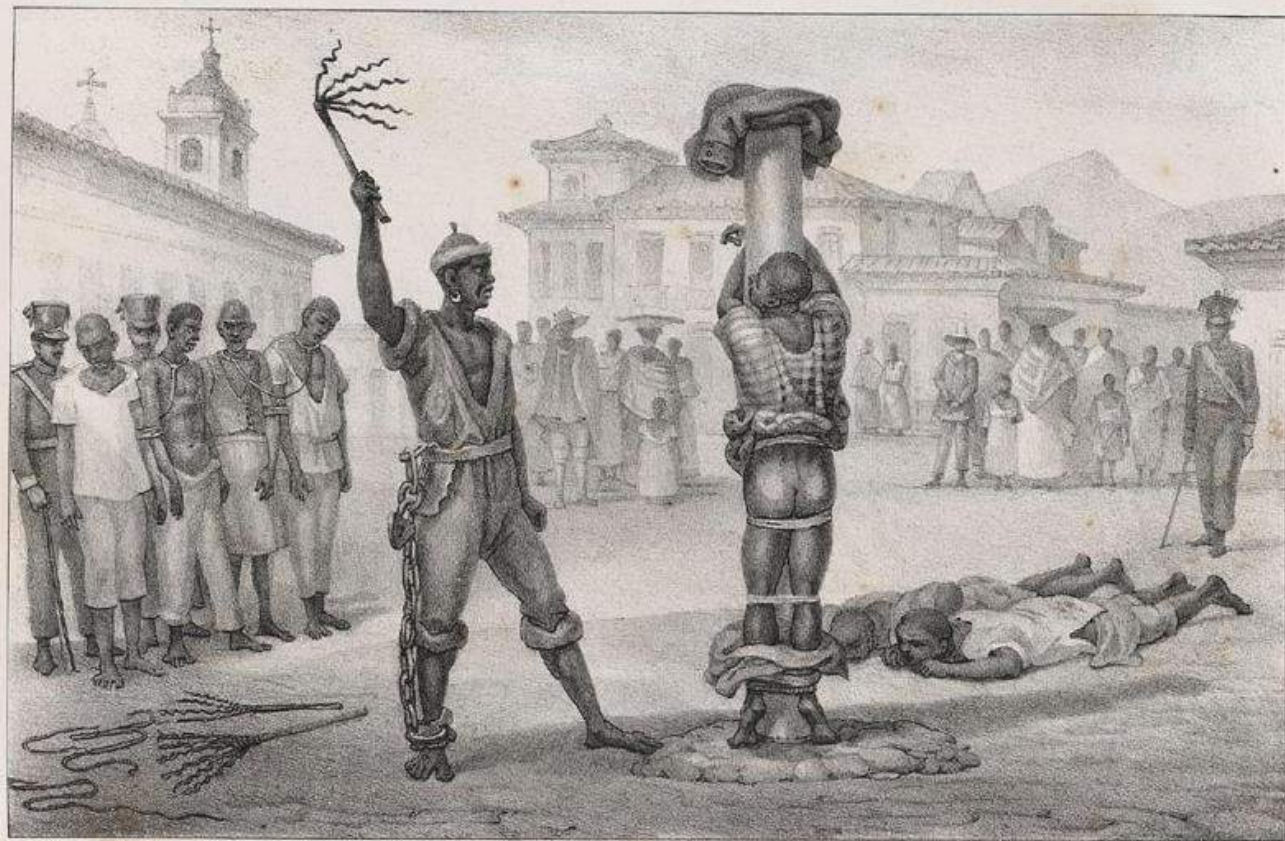
John W. Blassingame
The Slave Community

In addition to mining, tobacco and coffee production, sugar cane was a crop that required the use of large numbers of slaves. Columbus had introduced sugar cane to the Americas in the 1490s. The methods of planting and harvesting sugar, and the way workers worked and lived remained the same for hundreds of years throughout the New World.









L'EXÉCUTION DE LA PUNITION DU FOUET.

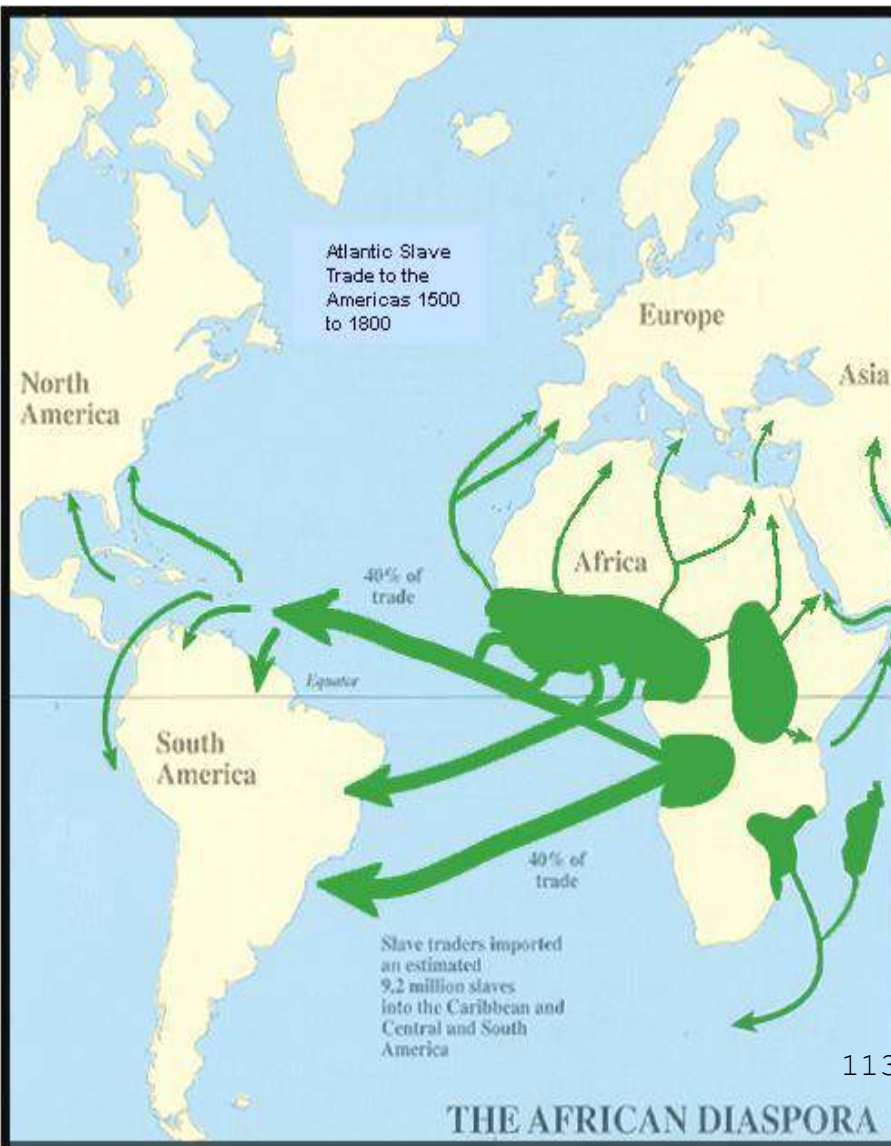








The African Diaspora in South America







SOLDATS CIVILISES SOLDATS INDIENS DE LA PROVINCE DE LA CORITIBA, RAMENANT DES SAUVAGES PRISONNIERS







Cultural Resistance

Quilombos

Another response to enslavement was to fleeing into the countryside and create their own communities. In Brazil, these settlements were called quilombos or mocambos, and the inhabitants are called quilombolas.

Quilombos often accepted Amerindians, Jews, Arabs and others who wanted to escape colonial oppression. Because of this, quilombos have come to symbolize the Brazilian sense of a multi-ethnic (European, African, Indian) identity and the ideal of a free society.

Quilombos still exist, but the most well known of them is the 17th century quilombo at Palmares and its final leader, Zumbi.

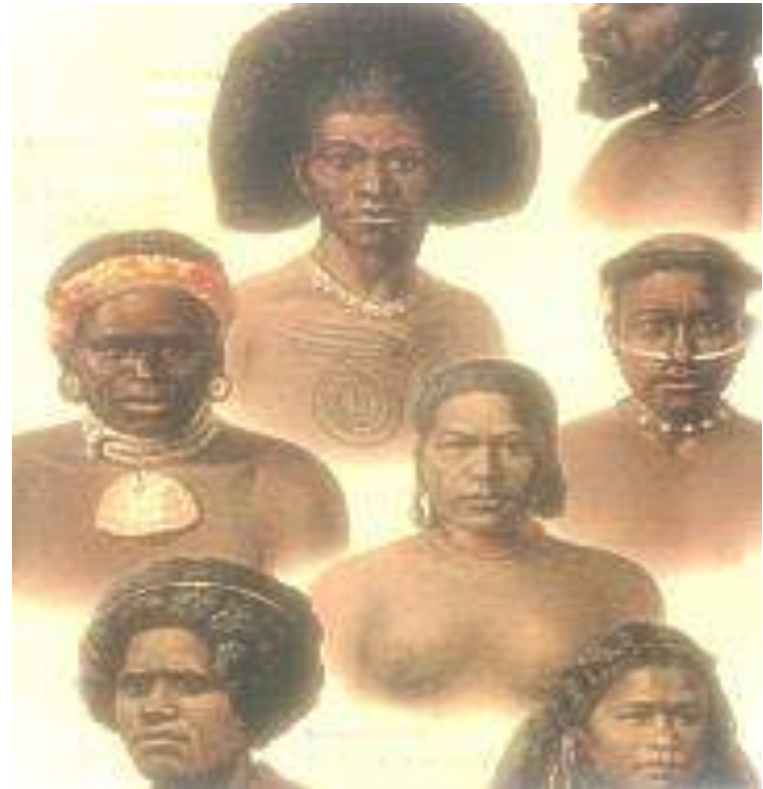


Locations of Quilombos in Brazil

Quilombolas were able to maintain and create their own culture. This involved finding ways to survive the environment and the ongoing attempts to recapture and re-enslave them.

They freely mixed and incorporated elements of African, Indian and European traditions. Some of the quilombolas were newly arrived from Africa; others were “crioulos” (creoles) who had been born in Brazil and did not know Africa.

This combination created a uniquely Brazilian culture and sense of the Brazilian identity.



Capoeira

Africans who escaped to form communities had to develop means to protect themselves. No one knows for certain, but it is generally accepted that the Afro-Brazilian martial art/dance/game was originally practiced by slaves, on the plantations, in the cities, and in the quilombos. Slave masters would allow it because, outwardly, it resembled other slave dance.



Today, capoeira is practiced all over the world by peoples of all nationalities, ages, sexes and ethnicities. It has been officially registered as part of Brazil's cultural legacy at the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage.



Wherever capoeira is practiced, elements of African oral, customary and material lore are presented and preserved.



The Roda (circle)



The Instruments



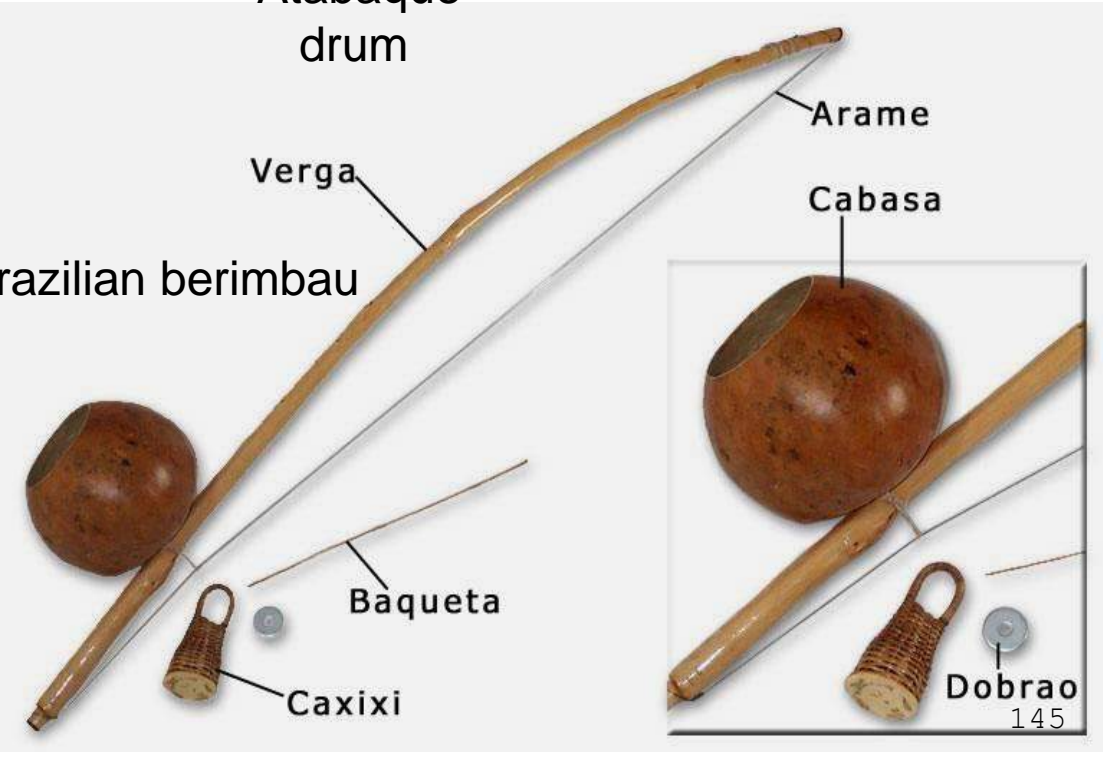
Atabaque drum



Pandeiro



Brazilian berimbau



The Ginga (basic movement)



Toque-de-Angola



Dance or Martial Art



Music and Songs

Capoeira has an oral tradition made up of songs and stories about past capoeira masters (*mestres*), heroes and of other notable historical figures.

They are sung in a **call and response** pattern. Each new generation of learns the songs, how to play the instruments and passes the knowledge on to the next generation.

Many contemporary practitioners of capoeira Angola consider themselves to be preserving a cultural heritage and history.

Capoeira é fundamento- Mestre Barrão

Capoeira is fundamental, capoeira is having feet on the ground,
Capoeira is culture capoeira is from the heart

My teacher always told me, Barrão
Never leave this behind
All that glitters is not gold, Not all that balances falls

Capoeira is fundamental, capoeira is having feet on the ground,
Capoeira is culture capoeira is from the heart

I want to sing a litany I want to play play my berimbau
I want to play Angola and regional Capoeira

Capoeira is fundamental, capoeira is having feet on the ground,
Capoeira is culture capoeira is from the heart

Jucaturucu old black
Black Old Grandfather
He taught my father, but my father has taught me

Capoeira is fundamental, capoeira is having feet on the ground,
Capoeira is culture capoeira is from the heart

I'll tell my buddy I'll tell him how it is
Look, I'm a capoeira looking for the group axé (spirit)

Capoeira is fundamental, capoeira is having feet on the ground,
Capoeira is culture capoeira is from the heart

The most famous of all the Brazilian quilombos lasted from 1605-1694 when it was finally destroyed by the Portuguese colonists.

The last king of the Palmares Quilombo was Zumbi. Despite his resistance to slavery, Zumbi was ultimately captured and beheaded on November 20, 1695.

Although the settlement at Palmares was destroyed, many quilombolas continued to resist, forming smaller, dispersed communities that could not be eradicated.

Eventually, the region formerly known as Palmares was called Angola Janga.

Serra da Barriga
One time capital of Palmares Quilombo



"The time has arrived to take our nation from the darkness of racial injustice"

"Born free in 1655 in Sierra da Barriga, from the union of Palmares and Alagoas, grandson of Aqualtune, he would not allow the submission of his people to the yoke of Portuguese rope because he wanted freedom for all, inside or outside the Quilombo. He continued fighting and became leader of the quilombo, being wounded in 1694, when the capital was destroyed in November 20, 1695. He was killed and beheaded.

After 300 years, the date of death of this leader of Black resistance was instituted by the Black movement as a national day of black consciousness."



Statue of Zumbi in Salvador, Bahia



**In Honor of
International Women's
Day
March 2009
Finding Nzinga**

What African symbols can you identify in the poster?

What do you think they represent?

Benkos (Domingo) Biohó (c1580 – 1621) is the most famous of all Colombian Cimarrones. Oral historians say he was born in the Bioho region of Guinea Bissau, Africa. Seized by Portuguese slavers and resold as a slave to Spaniards, he was brought to Cartagena de las Indias, Colombia. Unable to tolerate the harsh treatment, Bioho escaped with his family and other slaves into the interior and established a maroon community. From there, he led a guerrilla campaign against the Spaniards.

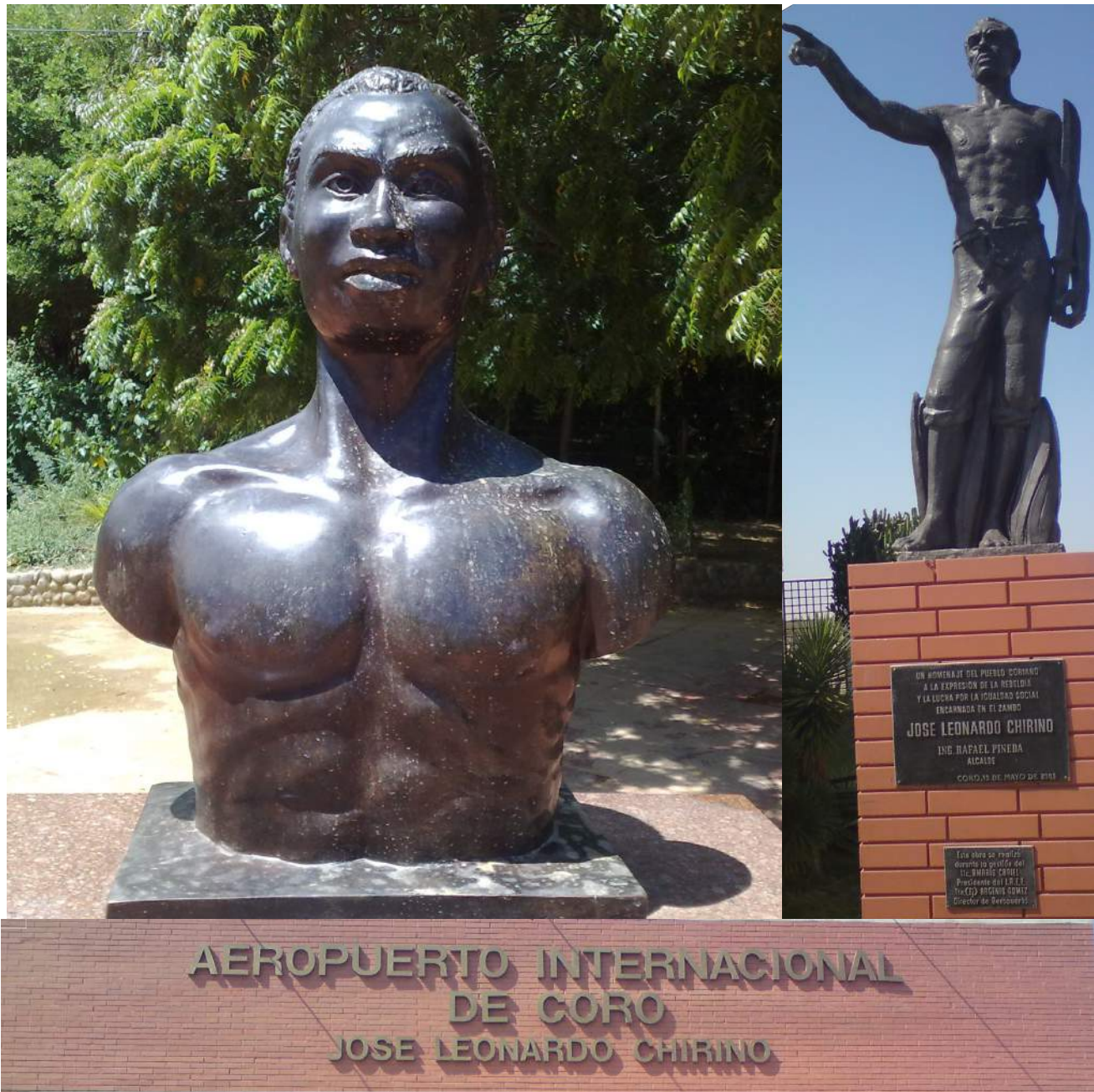
In 1605, the Spanish Governor finally signed a peace treaty with the group and allotted them a small parcel of land for them to cultivate. Hostilities continued, however. Eventually, Bioho was captured and hanged on 6 March 1621. His death sparked another war that would last until 1691 when Domingo Criollo, a palenquero, called for the King of Spain to intervene. The King decided to allow all Palenqueros born in the Palenque the right to live in freedom on the lands where the Palenques were located.

The statue of Benkos Bioho stands in the center of San Basilio de Palenque, where he founded his settlement.



José Leonardo Chirino (1754-1796) was a Venezuelan Zambo of African and Amerindian descent. Although himself a free farmer, Chirino led an uprising of Congolese sugar plantation slaves in 1795. The object of Chirino's rebellion was the abolition of slavery, White privilege, and the establishment of a Republic. Inspired by the uprisings on Hispaniola, Chirino's rebellion, though unsuccessful, caused serious disruptions to Venezuelan colonial order.

After the failure of the insurrection, Chirino was pursued and eventually tried and hanged in 1796. His body was dismembered; his head was displayed in an iron cage on the road to Coro, and his family was sold into slavery.



Bust, statues and buildings commemorating José Leonardo Chirino in Venezuela.

Gaspar Yanga—often known simply as Yanga or Nyanga— led a slave rebellion in Mexico during the early period of Spanish colonial rule. Legend has it that he had been a member of the royal family of Gabon, but official records from the period about his origins are not extant. We know that he labored as a slave on a plantation near present-day Veracruz, and that he led a band of cimarrones (maroons) in a struggle of resistance against the Spanish beginning in 1570.

Yanga's cimarrones withstood Spanish attacks for nearly forty years (1570-1609). The conflict was settled with an agreement that Spain would recognize Yanga's settlement as an autonomous region. The region was given the official name of San Lorenzo de los Negros (or de Cerralvo); but since 1932, the town in Mexico has proudly used the name of Yanga. Its residents proudly claim that it is the birthplace of freedom in the Americas.

A “Carnival of Negritude” celebrating Gaspar Yanga, his successful resistance of the Spanish, and the founding of the first free city in the Americas takes place every mid-August.

In 2009, the town celebrated its 400th anniversary.



Kola History

The kola nut is the fruit of the kola tree, and is native to the tropical rainforests of West Africa. Kola contains caffeine and is the flavoring ingredient in “cola” drinks.

Since ancient times, Kola has been used in West African cultures as a stimulant and to ease hunger pains. Kola is also an important part of traditional West African social, medicinal and spiritual practices, particularly Niger and Nigeria. The nuts are presented as offerings during prayers, ancestor veneration, and significant customary events, such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. Kola nuts are also used in traditional Obi divination rituals.

Kola nut played an important part during the slave trade. Onboard slave ships, mixing the nuts with stored water made it more drinkable and was even claimed to cure bad water. The trade in slaves certainly contributed to the kola nut’s presence in New World societies. Planters could use the stimulant and a hunger-suppressing effects of kola to increase the work output of their slaves. At the same time, Africans could use the kola nut to reestablish and continue their own medicinal and spiritual traditions. In the Afro-Brazilian religion of candomblé, the kola nut still play an important role.



1 KOLA NUT -POD (WITH SEEDS) AND SEEDS



2 Ifa DIVINATION TRAY WITH KOLA NUTS

In the 1880s, pharmacist and ex-Confederate soldier, **John Pemberton**, combined extracts from the African kola and the Peruvian coca plant with sugar, other ingredients and carbonated water to create the first cola soft-drink. As the story goes, his accountant tasted the concoction and called it “coca cola.” The present recipe for Coca Cola is a well-guarded secret; so, few know whether kola nut is still used, though it is said that a type of coca extract is still used.

No wonder that America’s iconic soft-drink, “Coca Cola” was invented in the South. It has become global shorthand for U.S. American culture. Coca-Cola is such an important cultural element that it has defined such things as our image of Santa Claus. See <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/holidays/the-true-history-of-the-modern-day-santa-claus>



In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World. Judith A. Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff. University of California Press, 2009 (pp 70-17).

Maracatu



1Maracatu dancers

Maracatu is an Afro-Brazilian performance celebration done at carnival time that originated in the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco. There are two types: *maracatu de nação* (nation-style maracatu) and *maracatu rural* (rural-style maracatu).

The term “nation” refers to the fact that, in the 17th century, Maracatu was performed for the coronation of the Congo King (*Reis do Congo*) –an enslaved or free Black man selected by the slaves to act as an intermediary

between the Africans and the Portuguese or, later, Brazilian government. The Congo Kings were expected to keep the peace among their various nations. The culture and folk tradition of Maracatu evolved from this institution.

The institution of Congo Kings ended when Brazil abolished slavery in 1888. However, the various nations continued to choose their own symbolic leaders and perform the elaborate Maracatu coronation ceremonies.

Maracatu celebrations are secular, but the traditional nations are based on the Afro-Brazilian religious tradition of **Candomblé**, and the signs of its influence can be seen throughout the celebration.

The *nações* parade with dancers, drummers and characters dressed like members of the 17th century Portuguese royal court. They parade carrying a *calunga*, a miniature figure that represents the central divinity of its African nation. Generally made of cloth, wax or wood, *calunga figures* are considered sacred and carrying them bestows a great honor.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTO3-5itQPI>

Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante Parade in Carnival



2Calunga figure

There are still active *nações* in cities in northeastern Brazil, famously in [Recife](#) and [Olinda](#). Some can boast of continuous activity as far back as the 19th century. Most, however, are relatively new. Records show that the first crowning ceremony took place in 1674.

Candomblé

Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion that combines elements of traditional Yoruba, Fon (Benin) and Kongo beliefs along with aspects of Catholicism. Religions that combine elements of several belief systems are called *syncretic*.

The word Candomblé can be translated as “dance in honor of the gods.” Practitioners believe in a supreme being who is served by lesser divinities called *orixas*, *voduns* and *inkices*. The names of these divinities reflect their origins in the various communities of African peoples who were enslaved. Candomblé’s orixas are the Yoruban orisha; the vodun are from the Fon (Benin) belief system; and the nkices are the Kongo nkisis. Together they represent the forces of nature and the deified ancestors who are the links between the human and the spirit worlds. Candomblé practitioners believe that everyone has a personal orixa that controls his destiny and serves as a guardian.

In Brazil, as in other parts of the New World, Africans from different regions (or nations) found ways to unite themselves and form communities. Candomblé was something around which people could unify despite the fact that they were enslaved. It was a way to preserve their various African cultures, but in the process they also created something entirely new that was no longer solely African. Elements from European and Amerindian cultures and folklore were incorporated.

As an oral tradition, Candomblé is passed down in the form of stories and customs, especially the music and dance that are essential to Candomblé ceremonies. These dances and musical rhythms expanded past religious uses and found their way into Brazilian popular culture. They could be expressed at any time, during work or play, at home or at church; but, they were especially prevalent during the celebration of carnival.

Spanish Catholics brought the celebration of carnival to the New World with them in the 1500s, almost simultaneous with the beginning of the trade in African slaves. Though there are few historical records, the first known carnival celebrations were held on the island of Hispaniola, today’s Dominican Republic.

Since the tendency in Catholic countries was to baptize Africans and Amerindians under their control, churches and religious fraternities were convenient opportunities for Black people to meet practice Candomblé, even though it was actually condemned by the Catholic Church.

As a religion, Candomblé is a good example of syncretism. However, it is also significant as an example of how Africans banded together to retain elements of their traditional cultures and create new traditions and a new common identity. Their creations came to define the musical styles of their regions.

The musical instruments associated with Maracatu include a large wooden rope-tuned **drum** (alfaia), a cowbell, (*gonguê*), a *caixa* (literally “box,” but a type of snare), a gourd shaker strung with beads (agbé), and a metal cylindrical shaker filled with metal shot or seeds (*mineiro*). Songs are sung in “call and response” style with a soloist and a chorus



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmuOoaeuubs>

Maracatu Estrela Brilhante do Recife

See also:

<http://www.scarsdaleschools.k12.ny.us/cms/lib5/NY01001205/Centricity/Domain/382/Maracatu%20History%20.pdf>

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