

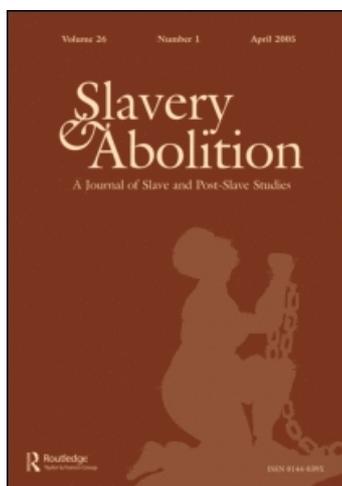
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Slavery & Abolition

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713719071>

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Online Publication Date: 01 April 2002

To cite this Article Handler, J. S. (2002) 'Survivors of the Middle Passage: Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in British America', *Slavery & Abolition*, 23:1, 25 — 56

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/714005224

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/714005224>

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Survivors of the Middle Passage: Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in British America

JEROME S. HANDLER

This paper describes a handful of autobiographical accounts by Africans who survived the physical and psychic hardships of the transatlantic crossing and passed a portion of their lives enslaved in the British Caribbean or British North America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. About 10 million Africans were landed in the Americas over the duration of the transatlantic slave trade, and of the approximately 2.9 to 3 million who landed in British America (86 to 88 per cent in the Caribbean colonies alone), I am aware of only 15 who left autobiographical accounts.¹ These accounts are currently dispersed in a variety of sources and publications. By drawing them together for consideration as a group, I hope to make them more visible to a wider audience than just specialists, and thus potentially more useful to teachers, scholars, and students interested in the early African Diaspora. My focus in this paper is specifically on what the autobiographers relate about their lives in Africa before being taken from their homelands, how they were captured/kidnapped, transported to coastal ports and placed aboard ships, and their personal experiences during the transatlantic crossing. Although a number of the accounts, it can be observed at the outset, provide some – usually very brief – details on their authors' lives and experiences in Africa, most do not mention the transatlantic crossing – the Eurocentrically-phrased 'Middle Passage' – and tend to focus on what happened to their authors after coming to the New World.

Because my emphasis is on the African-born and their experiences in Africa and the transatlantic crossing, I do not include Creoles, i.e., persons, slave or free, who were born in the New World. Biographical sketches, some much more detailed than others, can be drawn probably for scores, if not many more, of the African-born who were enslaved in Britain's Caribbean and North American colonies. Primary sources for such sketches

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Slavery and Abolition, Vol. 23, No. 1, April 2002, pp.25-56
PUBLISHED BY FRANK CASS, LONDON

include fugitive slave advertisements in newspapers, letters or journals/diaries (usually written by Europeans), missionary accounts, newspaper reports, baptismal and court records and short biographical statements published or written by whites, including the Moravian *lebenslauf*.² Such sources usually rely to one degree or another on first-hand evidence and what the enslaved related about themselves.³

However, first-hand autobiographical accounts by the African-born, either written largely or entirely by themselves or narrated to an amanuensis, are very rare.⁴ The 15 accounts I have located are all in English.⁵ Although some of them were not originally written in English, I am unaware of any others dealing with British America that were written/published in other languages.

I make no claim that this group of 15 is statistically representative of the approximately three million Africans who landed in British America. Yet, since European slave traders very rarely recorded the names of individual Africans in their shipping lists, enslaved Africans largely remain nameless and faceless. Thus, these 15 accounts not only reflect, on an individual and personalized level, general patterns of the Atlantic slave-trade, but also bring into relief and humanize the experiences of individuals whose lives are frequently obscured by mass statistical data.

Biographical sketches of the 15 individuals are given in Appendix I, which also lists the primary or secondary sources where their accounts can be found. In the following pages I give an overview of the accounts, utilizing data that are summarized in Table 1 from the accounts themselves. It is to be stressed that often the same type of information is not available in all 15 accounts; the number of cases (n) for each category of information is given in Table 1.

The Accounts and Their Authors

The 15 accounts (12 by males, 3 by females) were either written by the autobiographers, with or without help, or were orally related to and transcribed by an amanuensis/transcriber. Most of the accounts were originally written in Standard English, but two of them, narrated by two 'old' women in Barbados in 1799, are unusual because they are recorded in the English creole of Barbados – the only narratives to have been recorded in any creole language (Appendix I: Ashy, Sibell). Aside from the accounts in English, others were written in Arabic or Old German (three each) and translated into English, either around the time the accounts were originally written or in more recent times. The three accounts recorded in Old German were narrated to white Moravians in Jamaica, Bethlehem (Pennsylvania), and Salem (North Carolina) (Appendix I: Abraham, Monteith, Wooma).

SURVIVORS OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

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TABLE 1
AFRICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTS

	Occurrences/n (number of cases with information)		Occurrences/n (number of cases with information)
Gender of Author		Author's ethnicity/homeland	
male	12/15	Gold Coast (Ghana)	4/13
female	3/15	Asante/Fante (3)	
Account		Northern, ethnicity unknown (1)	
written by self (with or without help)	7/14	Senegambia	5/13
narrated to amanuensis	7/14	Fulbe/Fula/Fulani (2)	
Original language of account		Mande/Mandinkan-speaker (3)	
English (standard or creole)	9/15	Nigeria	4/13
Arabic	3/15	Igbo (3)	
Old German	3/15	Bornu (1)	
Year account first written or published		Details given on capture/enslavement in	
1770s–1790s	9/15	Africa	
1820s–1840s	6/15	none	1/15
Year author captured or transported		minimal	6/15
across Atlantic		moderate	4/15
1720s–1740s	4/11	maximal	4/15
1750s–1770s	3/11	Coastal area of embarkation for Americas	
1780s–1790s	1/11	Gold Coast/probable Gold Coast	6/10
1800–1810	3/11	Gambia	1/10
Age of author when captured or transported across Atlantic		Bight of Biafra/probable Bight of Biafra	3/10
2–6 years	3/13	Details given on Middle Passage	
10–15 years	7/13	none	9/15
20s–30s	3/13	minimal	5/15
Age of author when account was written/published		maximal	1/15
20–30	1/13	First New World destination	
40–60	6/13	British West Indies	12/15
above 60	6/13	Barbados (5)	
Early life in Africa described		Antigua (2)	
minimal	8/15	Jamaica (2)	
minimal to moderate	4/15	other BWI (3) ^a	
moderate to maximal	3/15	North America	3/15 ^b
Parentage claimed from high status family/royalty		Period spent at first destination	
yes	11/15	two weeks or less	6/14
unspecified	4/15	7 months to 4 years	2/14
Original religion		‘several years’	1/14
Muslim	3–4/11–13	15–16 years	1/14
Ethnic/‘Tribal’	8–9/11–13	30 years to all of life	4/14
Converted to Christianity during enslavement		Second New World destination	
yes	8/15	West Indies	1/15
no	2/15	North America	10/15
not mentioned/uncertain	5/15	Virginia (2)	
		New York (2)	
		Other N America (6) ^c	
		None ^d	4/15

Source: Data for this table are drawn from the autobiographies described in Appendix I.

Notes

- One person each to Dominica, Grenada, and an unspecified ‘French island’.
- Two persons to Charleston and one to New Orleans.
- One person each to Arkansas, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, South Carolina, North Carolina and New Orleans.
- These people spent their lives as slaves at their first destination.

Regardless of language, nine accounts were first written or published from the 1770s to the 1790s, while the remaining six were first written or published from the 1820s to the 1840s. Some of the accounts were originally published during the lifetimes of their authors (and later reprinted), while others remained in manuscript until fairly recent times when they were brought into print.

In accounts narrated to amanuenses or translations from Old German or Arabic to English one cannot assume that they are verbatim transcriptions of what was narrated; and one can never be sure about the extent to which the voices of the African narrators were muted or distorted by omissions and other editorial manipulations. These problems also exist, perhaps to a lesser degree, in cases wherein the authors wrote their own accounts, either by themselves or assisted by others, e.g. Bradley, Bakr, Cugoano, Equiano, Rahahman, Said and Smith (Appendix I).

The accounts were narrated/recorded for a variety of reasons, and some apparently were not intended to be read or viewed by a wide public. Belinda's brief account of her life (probably embellished by the amanuensis who recorded it) is included in a petition requesting a special personal privilege from the Massachusetts legislature. James Bradley wrote his 'short account of my life' at the prompting of a teacher at a Christian school in Cincinnati. The *lebensläufe* of Abraham and Ofodobendo Wooma were narrated to Moravian ministers and were intended to be read at funerals in the presence of Moravian congregants; they remained in manuscript until brought into print by scholars in recent years. However, the life story of a third Moravian, Archibald Monteith, is somewhat different and longer than the other two *lebensläufe*. In Jamaica during the mid-1850s, Monteith narrated his account in 'many interesting and edifying conversations' to a Moravian missionary who found him 'a remarkable man'. Whatever were the missionary's reasons for recording Monteith's life (originally in Old German), the account apparently was not initially intended for publication, although an English translation first appeared in 1865, not long after Monteith's death. However, it is not known why, in 1799, the white Barbadian John Ford recorded the life stories of the two 'old' Barbadian slaves Sybil and Ashy: both of these accounts remained in manuscript at the Bodleian library at Oxford University until they were recently brought into print.⁶

All of these essentially private accounts greatly contrast with the highly public narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano. These were quite explicitly designed for a wide readership and were intended to encourage opposition to the slave-trade and slavery. Pecuniary motivations also probably played a significant role. Gronniosaw's life story (Appendix I) was more obviously oriented toward ameliorating his impoverished

finances, but it was written when there was increasing sentiment in Britain against the slave-trade; this sentiment, as in the cases of Equiano and Cugoano, was probably intended to provide the market for his work. John Joseph and Venture Smith (Appendix I) probably had similar pecuniary motivations, but they were also concerned to show the hardships and injustices of slavery, as reflected in their life stories, to a wider reading public.

There are apparently diverse reasons why the accounts of the Muslims Abu Bakr, Abdul Rahahman and Omar Said were written, but none of these motivations seem to be directly linked to proselytizing sympathizers to wider political issues such as the abolition of the slave-trade or emancipation of the slaves; moreover, none of these accounts seems to have been originally intended for a wide readership. Abu Bakr, enslaved in Jamaica for about 30 years, left two accounts in the mid-1830s, both originally written in Arabic and later translated into English. His precise motivation for writing his life story is unclear, as is whether he initially intended it to be published (both versions originally appeared in publications by whites in the 1830s). The accounts, however, are clearly intended to convey the cultural and religious sophistication of his life and educational background in Africa as well as the conditions under which he was enslaved (see sources in Appendix I). After 40 years of enslavement in the USA, Abdul Rahahman was manumitted in 1828; he then travelled in the US trying to 'raise money to ransom his children and grandchildren' who were still enslaved. A sympathetic newspaper editor requested him to write a 'concise history of himself' in Arabic, and then 'penned a translation of it from his own lips'.⁷ The primary reason for writing his life story, at the age of 66, seems to have been to arouse sympathy for his plight and to aid his cause in raising money to liberate his family (sources in Appendix I). Finally, Omar Said originally wrote his account in Arabic in 1831, when he was 61 years old and had been enslaved for many years. The account apparently was not originally intended for publication, and was written at the request of a sympathetic white man. One English translation appeared in 1848, and a second appeared sometime after his death in 1864 (Appendix I).⁸

In the 11 cases for which there is information on the period of transportation across the Atlantic, seven of the autobiographers were transported from the 1720s through the 1770s, while the remaining four crossed between the 1780s and 1810 (Table 1). In all cases, then, transportation occurred during the most intense period of the transatlantic slave-trade, when Britain was the major slave-trading nation and, with its dependencies, 'carried every second slave that arrived in the Americas'.⁹ While some of the authors were adults when they were captured or

transported, most were rather young and some quite young. Three were small children (between two or three and six years old), while another seven were captured or transported when they were between around 10 and 15. Yet the accounts were mostly written or published when the narrator/writer was at least in his/her 40s, and usually much older, not uncommonly in his/her 60s. Thus what was related about experiences in Africa was usually many years after these experiences took place. For example, when he was about 45, Abu Bakr, a Muslim from present-day Mali, related incidents that had occurred over 30 years earlier; Equiano wrote his celebrated narrative when in his mid-40s but talked about his childhood in present-day southeastern Nigeria before he was kidnapped, as he says, at the age of 11 or 12; James Gronniosaw, also from present-day Nigeria but from a quite different area than Equiano, narrated his early life in Africa over 45 years after his transport; Abdul Rahahman, a Muslim born in Timbuktu, wrote his brief autobiography over 40 years after he left Africa; and Venture Smith narrated his life over 60 years after he had been captured as a child of about six or seven. James Bradley's age, when he wrote his life story in 1835, is unknown but he conjectures he was 'between two and three years old' when kidnapped (Appendix I). Thus, with the exception of Equiano (whose account of his African birth and childhood and the culture of his people has been challenged by some modern scholars¹⁰), recollections of childhood in Africa are relatively sparse and are subject to the fallibility of human memory – especially where it relates to events remembered many years after they occurred. The reliability of personal memories can be also questioned when these memories were evoked specifically to support a personal or political agenda, such as gaining allies in the struggle against the slave-trade or a condemnation of the slave system itself.

Most of the accounts, particularly with respect to the topics that are the focus of this paper (i.e., early life in Africa, capture and enslavement, and transportation to the New World), are very brief, and usually very little is said about the individual's life in Africa prior to being transported to the New World. The amount of space and detail devoted to the early life in Africa is highly variable: eight accounts provide very minimal information (Abraham, Ashy, Bradley, Belinda, Joseph, Rahahman, Said, Sibell); four give slightly more detail (Bakr, Cugoano, Monteith, Wooma), while three (Equiano, Gronniosaw, Smith) provide much more detail than the others. Of these three, Olaudah Equiano's celebrated *Interesting Narrative*, first published in 1789, arguably the most elaborate of the African autobiographies, stands alone in terms of the amount of space and detail devoted to his childhood in Africa (and the transatlantic crossing); as discussed in note 10, portions of his account have been challenged and recently even Equiano's claim of African birth has been questioned.

In one of the more consistent or prominent themes, in the 11 cases where family connections and descent are mentioned, all of the individuals claimed descent from royalty or some other high status relatives or family group. Claiming descent from 'high-born African status had long been a convention in fictional and factual narratives recounted by and about former slaves', writes Carretta.¹¹ In the cases discussed in this paper, for example, Abu Bakr came from an important Muslim family in present-day Mali that 'claimed descent from the Prophet'; Abraham's father 'was a respected man among his countrymen' of the 'Mandingo nation'; Cugoano's father 'was a companion to the chief in that part of the country of Fantee'; and John Joseph's father was a 'distinguished chief of one of the ["Ashantee"] tribes'.¹² Through his mother, Gronniosaw claimed to be the grandson of 'the reigning King of Zaara, of which Bournou is the chief city'; Sibbell's father 'was a great man in my country ... he have great many slaves, and hire many man'; and Venture Smith's father was a 'prince'.¹³

I distinguish between universal religions, e.g. Islam and Christianity, whose adherents can come from any number of national or language groups or ethnicities and which cut across sociocultural boundaries, and 'tribal' or ethnic religions, which usually coincide with a specific 'tribal' or ethnic group, e.g. the religion of the Yoruba or Igbo. Three, possibly four, of the Africans in the sample were originally Muslim, while eight, possibly nine, were originally affiliated with their own ethnic religion. In America, two of the Muslims continued to practise Islam (Bakr, Rahahman), but at least nine people (including one Muslim – Said) became Christians; their conversions (as well as their Christian beliefs) are discussed in the accounts, albeit with varying degrees of detail and intensity (Appendix I: Abraham, Bradley, Cugoano, Equiano, Gronniosaw, Joseph, Monteith, Said, Wooma).

Although the accounts are sometimes ambiguous or vague on the place of origin, homeland, or original ethnicity of the autobiographers, the 13 that contain some information indicate a number of different ethnicities and broad homeland regions. Eight autobiographers clearly identify their ethnolinguistic group (and I use the terms that they themselves employ) and five indicate their homeland region (in three of these five cases some reasonable inferences about ethnolinguistic group can be made; see Appendix I). Four persons, representing several groups (e.g. Asante/Ashanti, Fante), originated on the Gold Coast (Ghana); another five (including Mande-speakers/Mandingo and Fulbe)¹⁴ came from the Senegambia region in the Western Sudan, and four from present-day Nigeria, including three Igbo and one person from Bornu (Table 1). It is well known that people from all of these regions were taken by the British slave-trade during the period covered by this paper.

Capture and Enslavement

Only one individual (Ashy) does not mention how she was enslaved in Africa, while the other 14 describe their experiences, albeit with varying degrees of detail. Six provide what I call 'minimal detail'. Belinda, captured as a child and taken to Massachusetts, for example, only says that she was kidnapped 'before she had twelve years' by 'men, whose faces were like the moon, and whose bows and arrows were like the thunder and lightening of clouds'; John Joseph, kidnapped at around the age of three, briefly mentions that his father was engaged in a 'deadly war', and during 'an unsuccessful encounter with the enemy ... a great many of our tribe [were] taken prisoners'. James Bradley was 'between two and three years old when the soul-destroyers tore me from my mother's arms', and all that Omar Said, a Muslim from present-day Senegal, relates is that he was captured 'by a large army' and brought 'to the great sea, and sold ... into the hands of the Christians, who bound me and sent me on board a great ship' (see also Wooma). Abraham, originally from the 'Mandingo nation', briefly relates how he was captured in warfare, 'and then sent back to his father with mutilated ears'. His father was so angered that he 'stirred the inhabitants of the community' to another war 'to get his revenge'; during this second war, Abraham was captured again and enslaved.¹⁵

Four autobiographers provide more information ('moderate detail' – see Table 1) on how they lost their freedom, some describing the warfare that resulted in their capture and enslavement (Bakr, Rahahman). John Monteith, an Igbo who became a Moravian convert, gives a relatively detailed description of how, as a child of about ten, he was enticed by a 'young man' who was courting his sister to go with him to a market town about a day's walk from his village. Without asking his father's permission, he went because of his excitement at the prospect of seeing things he had never seen, especially 'the great water, the ocean'; however, he was kidnapped and sold as a slave. Duplicity was also involved in Sibell's account of her enslavement. As an old woman in Barbados, she recalled her homeland in Africa and told of her fondness for her sister. One day, when she was alone in her sister's house,

my Budder in Law come in, and take me up and say he going to carry me to see his udder wife, he take and carry, carry, carry, carry, carry me all night and day, all night and day 'way from my Country. ... As my budder in law carry me 'long, me hear great noise, and me wonder but he tell me no frighten. And he carry me to a long house full of new negurs talking and making sing. ... and my budder in law sell me to de Back-erah [white] people [and he] ... took up de gun and de powder which he sell me for and wanted to get 'way from me, but me

hold he and cry and he stop wid me till me hold tongue and den he run away from me.¹⁶

Four other accounts provide more detail than the accounts mentioned in the preceding paragraph. I refer to these accounts as 'maximal detail' in Table 1. Gronniosaw, the grandson of the 'King of Bournu' (Bornu), in present-day north-eastern Nigeria, describes in great detail how, at around the age of 15, his parents voluntarily let him accompany a merchant from the distant area of the Gold Coast, and how he was ultimately sold there as a slave. This merchant arrived at Bornu at a time in his life when Gronniosaw 'was dejected and melancholy' with some personal problems. The merchant

expressed vast concern for me, and said that if my parents would part with me for a little while, and let him take me home with him, it would be of more service to me than anything they could do for me. He told me that if I would go with him, I should see houses with wings to them walk upon the water, and should also see the white folks; and that he had many sons nearly of my age, who should be my companions; and ... that he would bring me safe back again soon. I was highly pleased with the account of this strange place, and ... my father and grandfather, and the rest of my relations ... all agreed that I should accompany the merchant to the Gold Coast. ... There can be little said in favour of the country through which we passed. ... I was heartily rejoiced when we arrived at the end of our journey. ... I was now more than a thousand miles from home, without a friend, or means to procure one.¹⁷

Not long after his arrival at the Gold Coast, Gronniosaw learned that the local 'king' suspected that his father had sent him to spy so that when he returned home his people could 'make war with great advantage to ourselves; and for these reasons he had resolved that I should never return to my native country'. The 'king' had decided to execute him, but changed his mind; nonetheless he would not allow Gronniosaw to return home, and declared that instead he 'be sold for a slave'. Ultimately the merchant who had brought him from his homeland sold Gronniosaw to a Dutch slaver who 'bought me for two yards of check'.

Another relatively detailed account is that of Venture Smith. He tells of the warfare that led to his capture as a child of about six or seven, his subsequent sale to slavers and, uniquely among the accounts, he describes, albeit very briefly, the coffle that brought him from the interior over a great distance to the Gold Coast:

The army of the enemy was large. ... After destroying the old prince, they decamped and immediately marched towards the sea. ... The

enemy had remarkable success in destroying the country wherever they went. For as far as they had penetrated, they laid waste and captured the people. ... All the march I had very hard tasks imposed on me, which I must perform on pain of punishment. I was obliged to carry on my head a large flat stone used for grinding our corn, weighing ... as much as 25 pounds; besides victuals, mat and cooking utensils. Though I was pretty large and stout of my age, yet these burthens were very grievous to me, being only about six years and an half old.¹⁸

Ottobah Cugoano's relatively lengthy description of his kidnapping ('I was early snatched away from my native country, with about eighteen or twenty more boys and girls, as we were playing in a field'), march to the coast (where he saw Europeans for the first time), the fort in which he was imprisoned, and what transpired when the prisoners were taken from their confinement is second only to Equiano in the amount of detail.¹⁹ Arriving at the coast, Cugoano

saw many of my miserable countrymen chained two and two, some hand-cuffed, and some with their hands tied behind. ... I was soon conducted to a prison, for three days, where I heard the groans and cries of many. ... When a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men. Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner. ... When we were put into the ship, we saw several black merchants coming on board, but we were all drove into our holes and not suffered to speak to any of them. In this situation we continued several days in sight of our native land.²⁰

In what may be the only reference to a revolt by an enslaved African in all of the slave-trade literature, Cugoano mentions a thwarted plot; in so doing, he also provides a unique reference among the autobiographers to the sexual abuse and exploitation of women that was widespread on the slave ships.²¹ The plot was conceived aboard the ship before it got under way:

a plan was concerted amongst us, that we might burn and blow up the ship, and to perish all together in the flames; but we were betrayed by one of our own countrywomen, who slept with some of the head men of the ship, for it was common for the dirty filthy sailors to take the African women and lie upon their bodies; but the men were chained and pent up in holes. It was the women and boys which were to burn the ship, with the approbation and groans of the rest; though that was prevented, the discovery was likewise a cruel and bloody scene.²²

Equiano was also kidnapped as a child, and none of the accounts with 'maximal detail' provide as lengthy a description of capture, enslavement, and reaction to seeing Europeans for the first time. In what is perhaps one of the most widely quoted passages of this kind in the literature on transatlantic slaving, Equiano writes:

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave-ship ... waiting for its cargo. ... When I was carried on board I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, which was very different from any I had ever heard, united to confirm me in this belief. ... When I looked round the ship, 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. ... When I recovered, I found some black people about me. ... I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair?²³

Probably none of the autobiographers had seen Europeans before they arrived at the coast, but only a few mention their experience on this first encounter. The shock of seeing white people for the first time and the belief that they were cannibals is expressed in several accounts, the most well-known of which is Equiano's fear that he was to be 'eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair'. Similar fears were also expressed by Cugoano who, upon arriving at the coast 'saw several white people, which made me afraid that they would eat me, according to our notion as children in the inland parts of the country'. When Wooma first encountered Europeans he was 'terribly frightened' because he was sure 'they were devils who wanted to kill us ... we had never before seen a white man and never in our lives heard that such men existed'. Sibell was also terrified and 'thought me would die': she 'nebber see de White people before, me nebber see de great ships pon de water before, me nebber hear de waves before'.²⁴

'The majority of people who eventually were transported to the Americas', John Thornton has written – reflecting a virtually unanimous view among professional scholars of transatlantic slavery and African history – 'were enslaved by Africans in Africa.' 'Most were enslaved', he writes, 'as a result of wars between African armies, or by raiders and bandits that arose from these wars, or from the breakdown of social order that often accompanies war, especially civil war.'²⁵ The 15 accounts generally reflect

the major ways that Africans who ultimately landed in the New World became enslaved in Africa, and in all but one case the autobiographers report or imply they were first captured or enslaved by other Africans.²⁶ Several people were captured in war as adult combatants, and were sold to African slavers who, in turn, sold them to Europeans, or they were sold to Europeans directly. For example, Abu Bakr reported that after he was captured and taken prisoner, 'they tore off my clothes, bound me with ropes, gave me a heavy load to carry, and led me ... in the land of the Fante, to the town of Lago, near the salt sea (all the way on foot, and well loaded). There they sold me to the Christians.' 'There came to our place a large army,' Omar Said briefly wrote, 'who killed many men, and took me, and brought me to the great sea, and sold me into the hands of the Christians, who bound me and sent me on board a great ship and we sailed upon the great sea a month and a half, when we came to a place called Charleston. ... Wicked men took me by violence and sold me to the Christians.' When he was around 26 years old, Rahahman was sent to fight a neighbouring people because they 'prevented our trade'; he was captured, made prisoner and taken far from his homeland 'to the Mandingo country, on the Gambia ... [and] sold directly, with fifty others, to an English ship'.²⁷

Other Africans captured as children were taken during warfare as non-combatants; as with adults taken prisoner, they were also the spoils of war. When he was over 40, John Joseph remembered how as a child of about three, 'the enemy ransacked my father's habitation, and savagely dragged me and my beloved sister from the arms of a dear distracted mother.' Venture Smith, when in his late 60s, recalled in detail events that had transpired when he was about eight years old (his account also indicates that he was forced into a coffle after his capture). Smith and a number of women were hiding in a thicket during a battle, but the enemy won and they were discovered. 'The first salute I had from them,' Smith writes, 'was a violent blow on the head with the fore part of a gun, and at the same time a grasp round the neck. I then had a rope put about my neck, as had all the women in the thicket with me.' The enemy army 'decamped and immediately marched towards the sea ... taking with them myself and the women prisoners'.²⁸ Slave raiders also kidnapped a few of the autobiographers when they were children, but apparently not during periods of warfare (Belinda, Cugoano, Equiano). Some of the autobiographers (Cugoano, Monteith, Sibell) were duplicitously enslaved when they were children, having been innocently enticed to accompany someone they or their parents trusted. Lastly, one of the autobiographers (Wooma) was sold into slavery as a result of a debt incurred by a relative.

Origins, Embarkation, Transportation and the Middle Passage

All the ten autobiographers for whom an embarkation area is given were taken to the New World from coastal areas that were commonly used by British slavers during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; none came from West Central Africa, an area that 'sent more slaves to the Americas than any other region' over the duration of the Atlantic trade.²⁹ Six of the autobiographers were, or probably were, transported from Gold Coast ports (Table 1).³⁰ Some of the six were from southern Gold Coast ethnolinguistic groups/political entities: for example Ashy, an enslaved woman in Barbados, and Ottobah Cugoano were Fante, and John Joseph identified himself as 'a native of Ashantee'. It is not unlikely that European/British slave-traders would have identified such persons as Coromantines, a general term the British applied to southern Gold Coast peoples (today, peoples who speak Akan or Twi languages), or peoples shipped from the Gold Coast who may not have actually originated among southern Gold Coast peoples.³¹

However, the original homelands of others transported from the Gold Coast were not in the Gold Coast. Some captives travelled a considerable distance overland – suggesting an important caveat concerning interpretations or assumptions that might be made of ethnic/linguistic origins from data on coastal embarkation points; that is, these accounts reflect the vast and diverse hinterland from which the enslaved could be taken. For example, Gronniosaw came from Bornu, present-day north-eastern Nigeria, and Abu Bakr's homeland was Jenne/Djenne, in present-day central Mali. Both came from very different ethnolinguistic groups from each other as well as from southern Gold Coast peoples, and the homelands of both were far distant from Gold Coast embarkation points. The distance from Jenne to the Gold Coast port of Lago from which Abu Bakr was shipped is roughly 600 to 700 miles as the crow flies, but the actual total mileage he travelled from his homeland to the coast was much greater. Abu Bakr became a war captive in Bouna, an area far from Jenne (roughly 300 miles as the crow flies), but he was then forced to march from Bouna for somewhat over 300 additional miles to the coast.³² Whether one considers the distance from his homeland of Jenne to Lago, or from Bouna, where he was captured, to Lago, his cultural and linguistic background was quite different from that of the peoples of the southern Gold Coast. Although the actual mileage Gronniosaw reports he travelled may be erroneous or miscalculated, he does make the point that the distance was considerable. In his account (narrated about 45 years after the events he describes), he was unable to 'recollect how long' he had travelled from Bornu to the Gold Coast, but 'it was very tedious in travelling so far by land, being upwards of a thousand miles'; the distance

from the area of Bornu to the Gold Coast is, in fact, very roughly around 1,000 miles as the crow flies.³³ Venture Smith claimed he was taken in a coffle 'about four hundred miles' from his homeland to Annamaboe, the Gold Coast port from which he was shipped. Venture was captured when six or seven years old and recounts these events over 60 years later. Although the accuracy of the number of miles he reported can be questioned (perhaps it was even more), it is quite clear that his homeland – perhaps in a region of what is today western Mali, as Desrochers argues, or Burkina Faso, as Carretta conjectures – was far from the Atlantic shores of the Gold Coast, and his ethnicity or language group quite different from central and southern Gold Coast peoples.³⁴

Of particular relevance to the main objectives of this paper is that the Middle Passage is only mentioned in six of the 15 accounts. Of these six (Belinda, Bradley, Equiano, Gronniosaw, Monteith and Smith), the amount of detail varies considerably. For example, all that Gronniosaw says about the transatlantic crossing is that 'I was exceedingly sea-sick at first, but when I became more accustomed to the sea, it wore off.' For James Bradley, recalling events that occurred when he was between two and three years old, 'The ship was full of men and women loaded with chains, but I was so small, they let me run about on deck.' Venture Smith, whose account of his overland trek in a coffle to the coast is one of the more detailed available, merely says that the Atlantic crossing was 'an ordinary passage, except [there was] great mortality by the small pox' and that of the 260 who left Africa, 'not more than' 200 were alive when the ship landed at Barbados. Through the voice of an amanuensis, Belinda briefly describes her shock: 'Scenes which her imagination had never conceived of, a floating world ... three hundred Africans in chains, suffering the most excruciating torment; and some of them rejoicing that the pangs of death came like a balm to their wounds.' John Monteith gives slightly more detail but still only very briefly describes the voyage to Jamaica on a ship with about '600 to 700 slaves'. As a youngster of about ten, Monteith was captured, taken to the coast, and placed aboard a slave ship. He

and 11 other boys were taken by the captain into the cabin. We were happy; skipped about, eat [*sic*] and drank, and yet I felt very sorry when I saw the other slaves come up from the hold of the ship daily, into the air, and heard their heartrending cries of anguish; fathers & mothers longing for their homes and children, and often would neither eat nor drink, and were so strictly watched and held in such rigid confinement.³⁵

Only Equiano's autobiography provides a consequential amount of descriptive materials: his discussion stands alone and remains the classic

first-hand account of the Middle Passage experience of Africans who were taken to Britain's New World colonies. In another widely quoted passage, Equiano recounts in detail conditions aboard the slave ship:

When the ship had got in all her cargo, they made ready and we were all put under the deck. ... The stench of the hold while we were on the coast 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. ... 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 [chafing] of the chains and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.

Many of Equiano's Igbo countrymen who were on the same ship that took him to Barbados, the first port of call, were sold on the island. Thus, Equiano's narrative (if, indeed, it is based on his own experience – see note 10) provides a unique case where the narrative of one individual can be taken as indirect testimony of the experiences of a particular shipload of Africans in coming to a British colony in the Americas.

As might be predicted for the eighteenth-century British slave-trade, most (12) of the Africans were taken first to the Caribbean sugar islands – since it was labour to produce sugar that dominated the motivations of British slave-trading ventures. Barbados was the main initial destination point (though three of the five who came to Barbados – Equiano, Gronniosaw and Smith – were soon transported elsewhere, reflecting a wider pattern of the inter-American trade), followed by Antigua and Jamaica; only three persons landed directly at North American ports (Table 1).³⁶

Six of the people spent relatively short periods, from two weeks or less, at their first destination, either because they were not sold or because their purchasers took them elsewhere (Table 1). In general, only four of the autobiographers stayed enslaved at their first destination: three (Ashy, Monteith and Sibell) spent their entire lives as slaves in the West Indies and, after 30 years of enslavement, a fourth (Bakr) was freed by Britain's general emancipation in 1834–38 and went to England. The remaining people, including those who first went to a mainland port, were sold elsewhere.

Thus, most of the Africans, whether transported first to the sugar islands or to North America, did not spend their entire lives at their first destination. They were sold and moved elsewhere, sometimes to a number of places during the course of their lives – one of the more tragic and psychically debilitating consequences of the slave system.

In only one case was a person first shipped to a sugar island, then transported to another sugar island, and no one was sold from a North American colony to a West Indian one – reflecting the general unidirectional practice in the wider Anglo-American slave-trade. In most cases, illustrating a more typical pattern, the second destination was a North American area, not another Caribbean territory, and persons could spend varying periods of time at their second destination before being sold and transported to still another region (Table 1). For example, Abraham arrived from Africa to an unspecified ‘French island’, where he remained ‘for several years’; he was then taken to Virginia and sold to an owner at the Moravian community in Salem, North Carolina. Abdul Rahahman first landed at Dominica, where he spent a short time before being taken to New Orleans; from there he went to Mississippi. At around the age of 12, Ofodobendo Wooma arrived from Africa at Antigua; he stayed there for only a few days, and was purchased by an owner who took him to New York City where he spent five years. He was sold again and brought to the Moravian community in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where he remained until his death. Venture Smith’s ship went directly to Barbados, but he and three others were not sold; ‘after a comfortable passage’ Smith arrived at Rhode Island where he was sold, and, through other masters, lived in Connecticut and Long Island, and was ultimately manumitted. And Equiano, after spending ‘a few days ... not ... above a fortnight’ in Barbados, where he was not sold (but provides a vivid, albeit brief, description of a slave sale – perhaps the only first-hand account by an African of a slave sale in a British colony), was transported to Virginia in late 1756 or early 1757. ‘On the passage,’ he writes, ‘we were better treated than when we were coming from Africa’; ultimately the British naval officer who purchased him took him to England, his life thereafter encompassing the major portion of his famous *Narrative*.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has summarized some of the more prominent characteristics of a small number of autobiographical accounts by Africans enslaved in British America. I have focused on various social and demographic characteristics of the autobiographers: the time periods and conditions under which their accounts were written; what they relate about their lives in Africa; how they

became enslaved; and their experiences on the transatlantic crossing. I have avoided literary analysis of the accounts, such as their structural and stylistic features, stressing instead the information that these life stories provide on the transatlantic slave-trade and the experiences of individuals who were victimized by it. These individual accounts give a personalized view of the slave-trade and enslavement, and offer a perspective that complements the mass statistical data, such as provided by the Du Bois Database³⁷ that in recent years has contributed so much to a deeper understanding of the organization and demographics of that trade.

Although I take these accounts at face value (even accepting for purposes of this paper the sometimes dubious detailed recollections by older people of their very early childhood experiences), I am aware that all autobiographers are selective in the materials they choose to present. There is no reason to doubt that the accounts discussed in this paper suffer to one degree or another from such selectivity as well as the fallibility of human memory. However, it is impossible to establish the extent to which the accounts were further modified or distorted by the editors, publishers, amanuenses or translators. That is, one can never know what was excluded from the original accounts before they were recorded in print or manuscript, or the extent to which they distort or mute the actual voices of the Africans whose lives and experiences are reported. Austin's comments about various Muslim accounts is more widely applicable and can also be extended to manuscript accounts such as the Moravian *lebanslauf*: 'It is undoubtedly true that those Africans who did talk were not in full control over what whites printed.'³⁸

Most of the accounts are mainly devoted to their authors' experiences after they left Africa, whether in the New World or Europe. Their lives in Africa, the major focus of this paper, are treated in varying degrees of detail. Yet, it is striking that so little is said about the transatlantic crossing. As discussed earlier, of the 15 accounts, the Middle Passage is only mentioned in six. Even in this small group, only Equiano's autobiography offers any detail. However, the recent research of Vincent Carretta (see note 10) suggests that Equiano was not born in Africa. If Carretta is correct, Equiano clearly did not experience the slave ship and transatlantic crossing he so vividly describes, and must have based his account on oral and/or written sources. The accounts themselves provide no data or internal evidence that permit conjecturing why the Middle Passage is so 'slighted' by the autobiographers. Austin suggests one possibility in his discussion of Muslims transported to the Americas. He writes that he knows of only one case wherein a slave gives 'details on the horrors of the Atlantic crossing. He was also the only one to have an African American interviewer. Surely there is a connection. European American interviewers usually chose not to

ask about this experience or to skip rapidly over it with sentimental remarks.' Austin does not say how he knows that white interviewers did not ask questions about the Middle Passage, but he raises a point that might explain the absence in at least some of the accounts of descriptions of the transatlantic crossing.³⁹

As far as I can tell the accounts broadly and sometimes specifically reflect and corroborate what scholars currently know about the transatlantic slave-trade: for example, the social and political complexity of the African societies involved in the trade, both as slavers and enslaved; the role of Africans as the primary captors and sellers to Europeans; the major ways that people were captured and enslaved, including the prominent role of warfare; the religious backgrounds of the enslaved; the not unusual long treks in coffles from the interior to the coastal embarkation points; the demographic characteristics of the enslaved; the importance of the sugar islands in the early British trade; the occurrence of shipboard revolts; and the movements of the enslaved to various parts of British America, that is, the intra-American slave-trade. None of the accounts contradicts or throws into question current knowledge, but they provide details that are not usually available in the European-generated primary literature on the slave-trade, e.g. reactions to seeing whites for the first time, details on how particular individuals were captured and became enslaved, their families and lives in Africa, and their travels from where they were captured to the ports of embarkation. In brief, although few Africans enslaved in British America recorded their life stories, what is generally known about the slave-trade demonstrates that their experiences nonetheless represent the experiences of the millions who did not leave their own accounts. Thus, whatever their shortcomings as sources of data and to whatever extent they may not accurately and fully reflect the actual voices of enslaved Africans, these 15 accounts nonetheless personalize the experiences of individuals who survived the extreme psychic and physical conditions of one of the largest migrations in human history.⁴⁰

APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF AFRICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHERS

More details on a number of the accounts described below, as well as biographical data on the authors, are contained in the notes accompanying various reprint editions. The items I identify as reprints republish the original sources in their entirety; extracts, excerpts or abridgements are noted as such. I have also indicated when portraits of the autobiographers are known.

Abraham

Identifying himself as of the 'Mandingo nation', Abraham was born around 1730. He was taken prisoner during a war (at the time he was 'the father of several children'), and sold to unidentified

European slave-traders who transported him to a 'French island' in the West Indies where he spent 'several years'. He was then taken to Virginia, and from there to the Moravian community at Salem, North Carolina where he was baptized in 1787. He died ten years later, when he was in his late 60s. His life is known through his very short *lebenlauf* (see note 2), which very briefly describes the warfare that led to his enslavement in Africa, but does not include information on the Middle Passage. Originally written in Old German, this brief biography, which is really more of a summary of his life than a first-person account, has been only recently translated and published in English.⁴¹

Ashy

Described as an 'old female slave ... of the Fantee tribe' (southern Gold Coast), this very brief account was transcribed in Barbados in 1799 by John Ford, who was probably a white Creole. The account is one of only two known documents to be originally written in an English creole (see also Sibell, below). Ashy does not describe when or how she was captured or shipped from Africa or her age at the time, and her narration only provides a few details on Fante customs, e.g. rain magic and a comment on the burial of high status people ('if any of our Grandee people die, den all de head of his servants is cut off, and bury in de same place wid him, but if dey run away and stay long time, when dey come back dey no hurtee dem' – i.e. they will not be punished). Nothing is said about the Middle Passage. Her entire life as a slave was probably spent in Barbados.⁴²

Bakr, Abu/Bakr al-Siddiq, Abu (or Edward Doulan/Edward Donellan)

Born in Timbuktu around 1790, Abu Bakr, a Mande-speaker, was educated in the Koran in Djenne/Jenne (present-day Mali). When about 15 years old, he was captured in warfare and taken in a British slave-ship from the Gold Coast to Jamaica, where he remained about 30 years. After general emancipation in the British colonies (1834–38), he went to England and later returned to Africa where he served as a guide for British expeditionary forces. Around 1835, when Abu Bakr was about 45 years old, he wrote his account in Arabic (he had learned to speak English but could not read or write it), and, not long after, it was translated into English. The account is relatively rich in details of his childhood in Africa, especially his family and genealogical connections and his Islamic education. He also mentions place names, describes the mining and processing of gold, trade, traditional slavery and how he was captured in war, enslaved and sold to Europeans. He spent three months on a slave ship before landing in Jamaica, but says nothing about the Middle Passage.⁴³

Belinda (or Belinda Royall)

The few details of Belinda's life are known through a very brief petition, undoubtedly written by an amanuensis (who probably embellished the account with his own words and phrasing). In 1782, at the age of 70, she requested the Massachusetts Legislature to grant her a pension out of the confiscated estate of her master, Isaac Royall, a Tory who fled the state. The petition gives very few details on her African homeland, noting she was born 'on the banks of the Rio de Valta' (the Volta river in the northern Gold Coast; her ethnicity is not identified) and was 'ravished from the bosom of her country, from the arms of her friends' when she was about 12 years old. Transported across the Atlantic around 1724, she summarizes her recollections of the Middle Passage in one sentence that stresses her 'suffering the most excruciating torment'. Although Belinda may have first spent some time in Antigua in the British Caribbean, most of her life was passed in Massachusetts.⁴⁴

Bradley, James

Shortly after purchasing his freedom in 1835, Bradley wrote this 'short account of my life' at the prompting of a teacher at a Christian school in Cincinnati. His life story provides no indication of when he was born or his age at the time it was written. Bradley mentions virtually nothing of his early life and his experiences of enslavement in Africa. He estimates he was

'between two and three years old when the soul-destroyers tore me from my mother's arms, somewhere in Africa'. He lived 'far back from the sea', and was 'carried ... a long distance to a ship. ... The ship was full of men and women loaded with chains, but I was so small, they let me run about on deck.' He was transported to Charleston, lived there about 16 years, then taken to Arkansas and later Texas, where he earned enough money to purchase his freedom in 1833 and go to a 'free State'. A little more than half of this account is devoted to Bradley's life before manumission, the jobs he performed, how he earned money, and the treatment he received; the rest deals with his Christian conversion, his efforts to become literate, and his comments on the state of slavery.⁴⁵

Cugoano, Ottobah/Ottobah Quobna (or John Stuart)

Author of one of the best-known autobiographical accounts, Cugoano, a self-identified Fante from the Gold Coast ('I was born in the city of Agimaque, on the coast of Fantyn'), was kidnapped and enslaved around 1770, when he was about 13 years old. He was transported from Cape Coast Castle to the Caribbean island of Grenada, where he spent eight or nine months; then for about a year he was taken to other places in the West Indies. Brought to England at the end of 1772, Cugoano taught himself to read and write, and ultimately joined the abolitionist movement. At around the age of 30 he published his *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (although 'perhaps written with help from Equiano', he nonetheless 'raised the most overt and extended challenge to slavery ever made by a person of African descent'⁴⁶), using experiences from his own life to expose the injustices and horrors of slavery and the slave-trade.

Cugoano provides some details about his African childhood and family, mentions place names on the Gold Coast and describes how he became enslaved, his march to the coast, the fort/factory in which he was confined, conditions on the vessel that carried him to the slave ship and the slave ship itself. A brief passage describes a thwarted revolt plot (unique among the first-hand African accounts) before the ship got under way, but Cugoano does not describe his experiences on the Middle Passage. An oil painting, located in England, which is often identified as a portrait of Equiano may, in fact, be a portrait of Cugoano – though this is far from certain (see note 46).⁴⁷

Equiano, Oludah (or Gustavas Vassa)

According to his autobiography, Equiano, an Igbo, was kidnapped in his natal village in present-day eastern Nigeria. In 1757, at about the age of 11 or 12, he claims he was transported from the Bight of Biafra to Barbados, where he briefly stayed – unsold – and then was taken to Virginia where he remained about a month. His new owner, a British Naval officer, took him to London and gave him the name Gustavas Vassa ('as he always referred to himself in public and private'⁴⁸). He served in the Royal Navy during the Seven Years War (French and Indian War) as a cabin boy and servant, had several owners, and was manumitted when he was 21. Living in England, he became involved in the abolitionist movement and ultimately became its most prominent black member. When in his mid-40s, he wrote his *Narrative* to arouse in Britain's Parliament 'a sense of compassion for the miseries which the slave-trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen'.

First published in 1789, the *Narrative* 'was offered and received as the first extended account of slavery and the slave trade from a former slave's point of view'; after Cugoano (see above), Equiano is the second 'self-authorized Afro-British writer'.⁴⁹ The *Narrative* sold widely in the British Isles and was reprinted in a number of other editions and in non-English translations. Arguably the best known and the most detailed in the literature, Equiano's autobiography is exceptional in the details provided on his experiences in Africa and the transatlantic crossing. However, Vincent Carretta, a leading authority on Equiano's life, has recently challenged a number of key autobiographical details in his *Narrative*, and argues that there is 'no doubt that Vassa manipulated some of the facts in his autobiography'. Carretta suggests that Equiano 'may have been a native of South Carolina rather than Africa'.⁵⁰ If Carretta is correct, a great deal of the scholarship concerning Equiano's early life in Africa and experiences on the Middle Passage will have to be reconsidered.⁵¹

Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw

Enslaved when he was about 15, Gronniosaw was taken from his homeland in Bornu, present-day north-eastern Nigeria. He travelled overland for many miles to the Gold Coast, from where, in the late 1720s, he was transported on a Dutch slaver to Barbados. Sold on the island, his new owner took him to New York not long thereafter. By the 1760s he was freed, worked in a variety of places and travelled to England and Holland. Most of Gronniosaw's account details his life in New York, his conversion to Christianity, his life with different masters as a domestic servant, how he came to England and his life in England and Holland. Only a small portion of the narrative describes his childhood and homeland (he does not identify his ethnicity/linguistic group, though he possibly was Kanuri), including religious beliefs and practices, agricultural products, trade and marketing practices and the details of his enslavement. Aside from mentioning his sea-sickness, the Middle Passage is not discussed.

Gronniosaw's account was 'taken from his own mouth' in England, when he was about 60 years old and was recorded by 'a young lady of the town of Leominster'. Written because he was impoverished and hoped to get funds through the sale of his book, the first edition was published in 1772; a number of editions appeared subsequently.⁵²

Joseph, John

In this short account (five printed pages) of his 'life and sufferings', John Joseph, a self-identified 'Ashantee' by origin, very briefly relates how his father lost a battle and 'many of our tribe [were] taken prisoners'. Three years old at the time, Joseph and his sister were 'savagely dragged' from their home and taken to the coast where they along with 'three hundred prisoners of war ... were put on a slave ship'. Nothing is said of the Middle Passage. Joseph was transported directly to New Orleans sometime in the early nineteenth century, and worked in Louisiana, South Carolina (where he converted to Christianity) and Virginia. In 1843 he went to England and related his 'life and sufferings' (apparently to an amanuensis) to show the hardships, cruelty and injustices of slavery.⁵³

Monteith, Archibald John (or Aneaso)

Monteith (Monteeth, Monteath) identifies himself as one of the 'the nation or tribe called Eboes' (i.e. Igbo of present-day Nigeria). He was born around 1799. At about the age of ten, he was kidnapped and shipped to Jamaica, where he spent the rest of his life. He became a Moravian and was freed during Britain's general emancipation in 1838. Although he had learned to read and write English to some extent, his life story was recorded – originally in Old German – by a Moravian missionary in Jamaica in 1853 when Monteith was about 54 years old.

A very small portion of Monteith's account deals with his life in Africa. He talks about his family, mentions some Igbo marriage and religious customs and provides a relatively lengthy description of 'tattooing', or scarification. He also describes how he was kidnapped, sold into slavery and placed on board a slave ship which contained '600 or 700 slaves'. He and '11 other boys were taken by the captain into the cabin', but he provides few details on the Middle Passage.

Most of Monteith's account treats his life in Jamaica, particularly his conversion to Christianity and his experiences as a 'native assistant or helper' in the Moravian church. He died in 1864. Not long afterward his narrative was published in English, although a German translation of the original English account had appeared slightly before his death; the version that is relied on here is, in effect, a translation of a translation, and how much it accurately reflects Monteith's own words is problematical.⁵⁴

Rahahman, Abdul (or Abd al-Rahman)

A Muslim Fulbe, Rahahman was born in Timbuktu (present-day Mali) around 1762. As a child, he moved to the Futa Jallon region (present-day Republic of Guinea). Educated in Arabic and the Koran at several West African Islamic learning centres, in 1788/9, when around 26 years old, he was captured during warfare, taken a great distance to the Gambia River and sold to British

slavers. After a six-week passage, he landed at the Caribbean island of Dominica, stayed there briefly, and was then taken to New Orleans, followed by Natchez, Mississippi. Enslaved for about 40 years in the USA, mostly in Natchez, he was manumitted in 1828 and travelled to various parts of the eastern USA while on his way back to Africa. He ultimately reached Liberia, where he died in 1829.

Fluent in several African languages, Rahahman was also literate in Arabic and English. The brief account of his life was originally written in Arabic when he was around 66 years old, at the time of his manumission; later it was translated into English. His description of his life in Africa is mainly devoted to the warfare which ultimately led to his capture; nothing is said about the Middle Passage. An engraving of a crayon portrait of Rahahman was done in 1828, and is shown in the modern publications cited below.⁵⁵

Said, Omar

Born around 1765, Said was a Muslim Fulbe from the Futa Toro area of present-day Senegal. He was captured in warfare and shipped to Charleston, South Carolina in 1806/7, just prior to the abolition of the slave-trade; he spent about 24 years enslaved in South and North Carolina. ('I reside in this country,' he wrote, 'by reason of great necessity. Wicked men took me by violence and sold me to the Christians.') Said originally wrote his account in Arabic in 1831, at around the age of 61; in 1848, the document was translated into English. Sometime after his death in 1864, another English translation, which was 'slightly revised' by a native Arabic-speaker, appeared; this revised English translation is quoted here.⁵⁶

It was difficult to 'write my life,' Said says, because of age and infirmity and because 'I have much forgotten in warfare, as well as the Arabic language'. He briefly describes his life in Africa, focusing on his Islamic education. After his capture 'by a large army, who killed many men', he was brought to the coast and sold to Europeans who put him on board a slave ship. Aside from saying 'we sailed on the great sea a month and a half', nothing more is related of the Middle Passage. Said also reflects on and briefly describes his experiences during his enslavement in the USA.⁵⁷

Sibell

As with Ashy's account (see above), Sibell's narrative was transcribed in the English creole of Barbados in 1799, and is also very brief, albeit somewhat longer than Ashy's. Sibell is only identified as 'an old African female slave'; her ethnicity is not given and my efforts to identify her ethnicity or homeland have been unsuccessful. Sibell briefly describes her home life in Africa, e.g. the wealth and power of her father, some of the customs of her people, her family, and how she was captured and enslaved. She also records her shock on arriving at the coast and seeing Europeans and the ocean for the first time and the coastal barracoon in which she was held; her account, however, does not mention the Middle Passage.⁵⁸

Smith, Venture

Venture (so named by his first European purchaser who bought him 'with his own private venture') was born around 1729. When he was about six or seven, he was kidnapped during warfare and taken a great distance to the Gold Coast. A little less than one-third of Smith's account discusses his early life in Africa, e.g. his family (particularly his high-ranking father), the countryside and geographic features of the land, customs and practices of his and neighbouring peoples, how he was kidnapped and enslaved, and warfare among neighbouring peoples. He also describes the coffle that he was forced to join, the areas through which he passed on his way to the coast, some of the customs of the people he encountered along the way, his arrival at the coast and confinement to a fort at Annamaboe (a major British slaving station) and then his placement aboard a slave ship. This is one of the more detailed first-hand accounts by an African captive of the overland trek and coffle to the coast. Around 1737 Smith was transported to Barbados with 260 other captives; about 60 of them died during the Atlantic crossing. All of the survivors were sold at Barbados, but after a few days Smith and three others were taken to Rhode Island.

The remainder of Smith's account deals with his life in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York (Long Island), as he became a farmer, married, had a family, and was manumitted (around the age of 36). He narrated his life story to an amanuensis when he was 69 years old in order to show the evils of slavery and to point out how he could have been an even more successful black man had he not been enslaved in his early life.⁵⁹

Wooma, Ofodobendo (or Andrew the Moor)

Known in the Moravian community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as 'Andrew the Moor', Wooma identified himself as an Igbo. Enslaved in Africa around 1739/40, when he was 11 or 12 years old, he was taken from the Bight of Biafra to the Caribbean island of Antigua, where he spent a few days. He was bought by a man from New York City, and worked in his house as a servant for about five years. Wooma became a Christian and in 1746 he was taken to Bethlehem, where he married and lived for 33 years. He died in 1779, aged about 50 and still enslaved.

In his *lebenslauf*, or memoir (see note 2), Wooma provides a few details on his life in Africa, e.g. some Igbo customs and practices, his family, his sale into slavery for debt, and he very briefly relates his experiences on being taken to the coast and how he was placed aboard the slave ship. The Middle Passage is not mentioned. The account was originally transcribed in Old German script, although it may have been narrated by Wooma in English. According to Daniel Thorp, who first translated the account into English, the copy of his memoir in the Bethlehem archives could be 'an amended copy of one that Andrew wrote in German; it could be a translation of one he wrote in English; or it could be a transcription, and perhaps a translation as well, of one he dictated. Whichever of these it is, the voice behind it is that of Andrew.'⁶⁰

NOTES

I am grateful to Ralph Austen, Vincent Carretta, David Eltis and particularly Joseph Miller, who offered comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The collections edited by Allan Austin, John Blassingame, Vincent Carretta and Philip Curtin have enormously facilitated identifying a number of the autobiographies I discuss. For help with various research issues and problems I also thank Vincent Carretta, Joseph Hellweg, Carroll Johnson, Paul Lovejoy, David Richardson, Charles Sullivan, Eric Taylor and Philip Troutman. The research for and writing of this paper took place while I was a fellow at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

1. Some biographical accounts contain autobiographical elements in the sense that they either quote or paraphrase the words of the Africans being written about, but for the purposes of this paper works that are primarily biographical are excluded. I am unaware of any first-hand accounts for England's New World colonies in the seventeenth century, and I exclude autobiographical accounts by Africans who were transported to the slave colonies of other European nations, e.g. Brazil, Spanish America, St Domingue (Haiti) and other French colonies. However, one of these accounts is notable and can be mentioned here. Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua was born around 1824 or 1830, duped into slavery when in his late teens or early 20s and shipped to Brazil in the mid-1840s. His account of his early life in the northern part of present-day Benin (formerly Dahomey) is one of the most detailed autobiographical accounts of life in Africa prior to enslavement. Moreover, Baquaqua gives a lengthy description of how he was enslaved, marched for many days to the coast, and placed aboard a slave ship in the vicinity of Ouidah (Dahomey); his description of conditions aboard the ship and the Middle Passage is vivid and compelling. Enslaved in Brazil (first in Pernambuco, then Rio), Baquaqua ultimately became free by jumping ship in New York City in 1847, travelled to Haiti with Baptists, and returned to the United States in late 1849 where his life story, 'written and revised from his own words, by Samuel Moore', was brought into print in Detroit in 1854. See Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua: A Native of Zoogoo, in the Interior of Africa ... Written and Revised from his Own Words*, by Samuel Moore (Detroit: George E. Pomeroy, 1854). Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy have prepared an annotated edition of the 1854 publication which includes additional

materials written by Baquaqua (*The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America* [Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2001]). Cf. Allan D. Austin (ed.), *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984); *ibid.*, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Robert E. Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). For references to the 'recollections' of Domingos, a West Central African who was shipped to Brazil in the late eighteenth century, and the testimony of Augustino, a Brazilian slave who describes his experiences aboard a slave ship in 1830, see, respectively, Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp.3–4; and Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, pp.37–9.

Figures given above on the transatlantic slave-trade are adapted from David Eltis, 'The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 58 (2001), pp.17–46 (Eltis, p.29, also provides a summary of estimates by Paul Lovejoy, Joseph Inikori and others); Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson and Herber S. Klein, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Richardson, 'The British Empire and the Atlantic Slave Trade 1660–1807', in P.J. Marshall (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Vol.3, pp.440–64.

2. Moravians were required to leave this *lebenslauf*, that is, a kind of autobiography or memoir, which briefly described their secular life and gave an account of their conversion to Christianity. After death, the *lebenslauf* was finished by the congregation's minister and read aloud at the funeral. Written in Old German – a very difficult script to read – among the thousands of known *lebensläufe* in the Moravian Archives are some 'written about black Moravians', including a few who were born in Africa (Jon Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763–1840* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998], pp.xxii–xxiii, 303–7). However, I know of only two that have been completely translated into English and brought into print by modern scholars (see Erika Huber, 'Memoir of Abraham [1797]', in Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan*, pp.309–11; Daniel Thorp [ed.], 'Chattel With A Soul: The Autobiography of a Moravian Slave [ca.1779]', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography*, 112 [1988], pp.433–51). Biographical sketches are also available for several persons of African birth (as well as descent) who lived and died in the Moravian communities of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and Salem, North Carolina (Katherine Faulk Eze, 'Self-Encounters: Two Eighteenth-Century African Memoirs from Moravian Bethlehem', in David McBride, LeRoy Hopkins and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay (eds.), *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World* [Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998], pp.29–52; Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan*, pp.303–7).
3. See, for example, John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp.124–8 and *passim*. Non-autobiographical accounts of Africans enslaved in British America, which sometimes incorporate some of their own words, include several Muslims: Bilali Mohammed, a Fulbe from Futa Jallon (modern Guinea), was taken to the Bahamas in the late eighteenth century, and from there to Sapelo Island, Georgia; Salih Bilali, also a Fulbe from Massina (modern Mali) spent most of his life on St Simon's island, Georgia, where he was a plantation driver for about 30 years; Lamine/Lamen Kebe, from the Futa Jallon, was captured on a trade mission, then transported to America, enslaved for about 40 years in South Carolina, Alabama, and 'other Southern States', and was manumitted in 1834; and Yarrow Mamout, of unknown homeland or ethnicity but well known in the Georgetown area of Washington, DC during his old age. See Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), pp.68–73, 265–307, 409–44. Cf. Austin, *African Muslims* (1997), *passim*; Michael A. Gomez, 'Muslims in Early America', *Journal of Southern History*, 60 (1994), pp.688ff; Sylviane Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), *passim*; Charles C. Sellers, 'Charles Willson Peale and Yarrow Mamout', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 71 (1947), pp.99–102.

William Unsah Sessarahoo, 'the Young Prince of Annamaboe,' was a Fante from the Gold Coast. In 1744, under a ruse, he was carried across the Atlantic and duplicitously sold as a slave in Barbados. He was ultimately liberated, taken to London in 1749, and within a few years was returned to his family in Africa. For a discussion of his life story and the primary sources on which it is based, see Jerome S. Handler, 'Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in Barbados', *Slavery & Abolition*, 19 (1998), p.136n7. The poet Phillis Wheatley was born in present-day Gambia around 1753. When about seven or eight years old, she was kidnapped and transported to Boston where she became a household servant, learned to read and began writing poetry; her first published poem appeared in 1767. See Vincent Carretta (ed.), *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp.59–71; *ibid.*, *Complete Writings / Phillis Wheatley* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001); James A. Rawley, 'The World of Phillis Wheatley', *The New England Quarterly*, 50 (1977), pp.666–77; John C. Shields, 'Wheatley, Phillis', in J. Salzman, D.L. Smith, and C. West (eds), *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), Vol.5, pp.2815–17.

As a final example, one can note the very poignant account of 'Cudjo Lewis,' recorded sometime in the late 1920s by Zora Neale Hurston. When she interviewed Lewis he was in his late 90s. He had been brought over in 1859, 'on the last load of slaves run into the United States'. He described his capture, when 19 years old, by the King of Dahomey and his 'Amazon' troops, how he and other captives 'were yoked by forked sticks and tied to a chain', taken to the coast and placed in barracoons. On the transatlantic crossing the slave ship was chased by the British Navy, but it landed in Mobile with about 100 Africans (Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* [New York: Lippincott, 1942], pp.144–9; reprinted in Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay [eds.], *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1997], pp.1062–5).

4. Philip Curtin's introductory essay and foreword to Part 1 of his now classic edited volume, *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp.3–9, 13–16, provide excellent and still timely introductions to some of the general issues/problems surrounding early narratives by Africans transported to the Americas.
5. I exclude from this paper the life story of Job Ben Solomon (Ayuba Suleyman Diallo) because it is more of a biography, even though it has many autobiographical elements. Ben Solomon was a Muslim Fulbe, from the eastern region of present-day Senegal. At around the age of 29, while on a trade mission (which included two slaves he was going to sell to the English), he was captured by enemies, sold to the English, and shipped from the Gambia area to Maryland; he ultimately went to England and returned to the Gambia, where he died in 1773, at the age of around 72. See Curtin, 'Ayuba Suleiman Diallo of Bondu', in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, pp.17–59; Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), pp.73–117; cf. Austin, *African Muslims* (1997), pp.50–62; Diouf, *Servants of Allah, passim*; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, pp.5–6).

In addition, there are some accounts by Africans who were taken to England without first going to the Americas, e.g. Louis Asa-Asa and the much better known Ignatius Sancho (Moir Ferguson [ed.], 'Narrative of Louis Asa-Asa, a captured African', in *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, London: Pandora, 1987), pp.121–4; Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, pp.77–104; Reyahn King, 'Ignatius Sancho and Portraits of the Black Elite', in Reyahn King, Sukhdev Sandhu, James Walvin and Jane Girdham (eds.), *Ignatius Sancho: An African Man of Letters* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1997), pp.15–37.

Nicholas Said (né Mohammed Ali Ben Said) was born and enslaved in Africa, but was never a slave in the New World and did not experience the 'Middle Passage'; nonetheless, his autobiography is unusual and is of considerable interest as a life story. Born around 1836 in Bornu, when about 14 or 15 years old Said was kidnapped by Tuareg raiders near Lake Tchad, enslaved, and transported across the Sahara, being sold to an officer in the Turkish army who took him to Tripoli. From there he travelled to Istanbul and other parts of the Islamic world and ultimately became the personal servant of a Russian prince who freed him

but for whom he continued to work. He travelled extensively in Europe, left the employ of the Russian in 1867, took a job as a valet to an Englishman, and came to the United States in 1867 from where he travelled to the Caribbean; he returned to the US and finally settled in Alabama in 1873, where he opened a primary school. Said gives a very detailed account of his life and travels outside Africa, but he also provides extensive descriptions of his homeland in Africa, his Islamic education, warfare, the oral traditions and customs of his people and neighbouring peoples. See *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said; A Native of Bornou, Eastern Soudan, Central Africa* (Memphis: Shotwell and Co., 1873); cf. Allan Austin, 'Mohammed Ali Ben Said: Travels on Five Continents', *Contributions in Black Studies*, 12 (1994), pp.129–58.

6. Huber, 'Memoir of Abraham'; Thorp, 'Chattel with a Soul'; Vernon H. Nelson (ed.), 'Archibald John Monteith: Native Helper and Assistant in the Jamaica Mission at New Carmel [1853]', *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*, 20 (1966), pp.29–52; Handler, 'Life Histories'. See Appendix I for biographical details on these individuals.
7. Quoted in Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), p.146.
8. For a succinct discussions of literacy, Koranic education and religion among African Muslims, see Diouf, *Servants of Allah, passim*.
9. Eltis, 'Volume and Structure', p.41.
10. Several scholars have questioned Equiano's detailed description of his African childhood and ethnographic details on the Igbo and his original homeland. Most recently Vincent Carretta, a leading authority on his life, has even suggested that he was not African but of South Carolinian birth; and in the late eighteenth century two London newspapers asserted that he came from what is today the US Virgin Islands. Carretta provides more evidence concerning Equiano's non-African birth, and the 'possibility that he created an African identity for rhetorical and financial reasons', in a forthcoming publication now in preparation (Carretta, personal communication, Oct. 2000; see also Carretta, 'Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity', *Slavery & Abolition*, 20, 3 (1999), pp.96–105; Carretta, 'Defining a Gentleman: The Status of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa', *Language Sciences*, 22 (2000), pp.385–99 In the late 1960s, G.I. Jones, an anthropological authority on the Igbo, found Equiano's descriptions of his 'home and his travels in Nigeria ... disappointingly brief and confused'; he attributes these lapses to Equiano's youth when he was kidnapped, 'and the little he can remember of his travels is naturally muddled and incoherent'. Moreover, Jones, apparently alone among modern scholars, finds that Equiano's writing 'style is far too close to the literary standards of the period to have been entirely his own work' (G.I. Jones, 'Olaudah Equiano of the Niger Ibo', in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, pp.61, 69). Several works by Catherine O. Acholonu challenge Jones's views of Equiano's early African memories, while Elizabeth Isichei, another authority on the Igbo, disagrees with some of Acholonu's findings, particularly with respect to establishing precisely Equiano's homeland; she more generally concludes that 'research has shown his autobiography has many literary echoes ... and that he fused his own recollections with details obtained from other Igbo into a single version.' Isichei, reviews of *The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* (ed. Paul Edwards), and *The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano* (Catherine O. Acholonu), *Journal of African History*, 33 (1992), p.165; Isichei, *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978); Acholonu, 'The Home of Olaudah Equiano – A Linguistic and Anthropological Search', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 22 (1987), pp.5–16; Acholonu, *The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano* (Owerri, Nigeria: Ata Publications, 1989). Moreover, it appears that 'Equiano's Igbo past is mostly a reconstruction of European or Colonial American travel narratives, most obviously, Anthony Benezet's [1771] *Some Historical Account of Guinea...* (London, 1788)' (Eze, 'Self-Encounters', pp.33, 50n22; cf. Carretta, *Olaudah Equiano. The Interesting Narrative and other Writings* [New York: Penguin Books, 1995], pp.241n43, 244n62). Whatever the case with Equiano's writings on his Igbo homeland, I am not aware that the authenticity of his description of his capture, enslavement, and the Middle Passage has been challenged, although the opposite conclusion is obvious if Carretta's suggestion is correct that Equiano may not have been born in Africa.

11. Carretta, 'Defining a Gentleman', p.390.
12. Ivor Wilks (ed.), 'Abu Bakr al-Siddiq of Timbuktu [1834, 1835]', in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, p.152; Huber, 'Memoir of Abraham', p.309; Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano: Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p.12; John Joseph, *The Life and Sufferings of John Joseph, a Native of Ashantee, in Western Africa: Who Was Stolen from his Parents at the Age of Three Years* (Wellington, New Zealand: J. Greedy, 1848), p.4.
13. James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince. Related by Himself*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Groombridge, 1840), p.3 [1st ed., 1772]; Handler, 'Life Histories', p.132; Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa ... Related by Himself* (New London, CT: C. Holt, 1798), p.5.
14. One of the autobiographers, Abraham, identifies himself as of the 'Mandingo nation, 'while Abu Bakr is identified as Mandingo or Mande (Dyula) by scholars who have edited his account (e.g. Wilks, 'Abu Bakr al-Siddiq'; Austin, *African Muslims* [1984]). These terms can be confusing and are not used consistently by scholars; moreover, they are sometimes used differently by North American and European scholars. Mande, Manden, Manding, Mandinga, Mandingue, Mandingo are sometimes used interchangeably, but North American linguists and ethnographers have tended to use Mande to refer to a large group of related West African languages, principally in the modern countries of Guinea and Mali (e.g. Bambara/Bamana, Malinke/Maninka, Dyula/Jula); Mande is also used to refer to a geographic area which principally includes speakers of Mande languages. For a detailed technical discussion of Mande and related terms and the confusion in modern scholarship, see Valentine Vydrine, 'Who Speaks 'Mandekan'? A Note on Current Use of Mande Ethnonyms and Linguonyms', *Mansa: Mande Studies Association Newsletter*, 25 (1995-96), pp.6-9; also, Patrick McNaughton, *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power, and Art in West Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp.xvii-xix; Ralph Austen, *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature and Performance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp.4-7.
 Fulbe can also be confusing and can be used interchangeably with Fulani, a Hausa word referring to traditional nomadic cattle-raisers (most of whom today are sedentary agriculturalists) spread over a vast area in West Africa; the Fulfulde or Fula (a Mande word), who are sedentary Fulbe and speak Hausa; the term Peul (of Wolof origin) is used for Fulbe in the former French colonies (see, for example, Paul Reisman, *First Find Your Child a Good Mother: The Construction of Self in Two African Communities* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992], pp.10-13).
15. Huber, 'Memoir of Abraham', p.309.
16. Handler, 'Life Histories', pp.132-3.
17. Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, pp.5-8.
18. Smith, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures*. In the early 1740s, an English sailor wrote about the 'great number of petty princes in the inland country of Guinea ... [who] sell ... prisoners to certain Black merchants, who travel into the inland country ... and ... afterwards [they] bring them to the European settlements on the sea coast. These Negro merchants ... sometimes bring these poor wretches a great way. ... These Negro slaves are ty'd together, and commonly every one brings something on their head, according to their age and strength' (James Wyatt, *The Life and Surprising Adventures of James Wyatt ... Written by Himself* [London, 1748], p.157). The coffle was usually organized around making the enslaved carry their own equipment or trade goods, but first-hand accounts by Africans of their experiences are very rare, and very cursory. Venture Smith's is probably the most detailed one available; compare, for example, Abu Bakr, who merely reports that after his capture, 'they tore off my clothes, bound me with ropes, gave me a heavy load to carry' (Wilks, 'Abu Bakr al-Siddiq', p.162; cf. Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, p.41). For nineteenth-century illustrations of coffles, taken from contemporary sources, see the website *Pictorial Images of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite (<http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/SlaveTrade/>).
19. 'I was first kid-napped and betrayed,' Cugoano writes in 1787, 'by some of my own

complexion, who were the first cause of my exile and slavery'; 'but,' he adds, 'if there were no buyers there would be no sellers.' Elsewhere, he writes: 'A good man will neither speak nor do as a bad man will, but if a man is bad it makes no difference whether he be a black or a white devil' (Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, pp.12, 16).

20. Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, pp.14–15.
21. E.g. David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.156n72.
22. Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, p.15. Conrad publishes a vivid account by a British sailor of a revolt aboard a slave ship bound for Brazil in 1845 (*Children of God's Fire*, pp.39–42). A recent study estimates that over the duration of the transatlantic slave-trade about one in ten ships had a revolt of one kind or another. Most revolts took place within a week or so of leaving the African coast, and there were twice as many revolts on the coast, rather than the Middle Passage per se. However, ships usually spent twice as long on the coast gathering slaves, so that if there is an adjustment for time, revolts were equally likely in any phase of the transatlantic crossing (David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt and David Richardson, 'The Costs of Coercion: African Agency in the History of the Atlantic World,' *Economic History Review*, 54 [2001], pp.545–76). Most revolts were unsuccessful in the sense that the insurrectionists were unable to return to Africa or disembark 'in Europe or the Americas free of slave status' – only 23 of the revolts eventuated in such freedom (Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, p.232).
Based on data collected independently, Taylor found that about 76 per cent of the shipboard revolts happened on the African Coast. Almost half took place at night so that the cover of darkness could help the insurrectionists; the next most common time was during mealtimes when large numbers of Africans were on deck. Perhaps the most striking contrast with Eltis is Taylor's finding that of the 361 cases in which the revolt's outcome is known or can be inferred, '25 per cent succeeded in reclaiming freedom for at least some of the insurrectionists' (Eric Robert Taylor, 'If We Must Die: A History of Shipboard Insurrections During the Slave Trade', Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, UCLA, 2000).
23. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (London, 1789), pp.70–71.
24. Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, pp.70–71; Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, p.14; Thorp, 'Chattel With A Soul', p.448; Handler, 'Life Histories', p.133. The belief in European cannibalism was apparently widespread. In the 1780s, a medical doctor on the West African coast reported how 'one day a slave asked me, quite seriously, if the shoes [*souliers*] I was wearing weren't made of the skin of Blacks [*peau de Negres*] since he noticed, he said, that they were the same colour. ... Others ... were persuaded that we ate Blacks, and that we made gunpowder from their bones' (Paul Erdman Isert, *Voyage en Guinee* [Paris, 1793; my translation]). A sailor on a British slaving vessel reported on conversations with 'Eboes' during the Middle Passage; they 'all agreed that they thought we procured them for the purpose of killing and eating them' (William Butterworth, *Three Years Adventures of a Minor in England, Africa, the West Indies, South Carolina, and Georgia* [Leeds, 1822], p.124). There is some evidence that the fear of European cannibalism was also held by some captured Muslims, and similar fears also existed in west central Africa and the western Sudan (Austin, *African Muslims* [1997], p.22; Miller, *Way of Death*, pp.4–5; Kate Ferguson Marsters [ed.], *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa by Mungo Park* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000], pp.276–7).
25. John K.Thornton, 'The African Background to American Colonization', in S.L. Engerman and R.E. Gallman (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Vol.1, p.84; *ibid.*, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800* (London: University College London Press, 1999), p.128.
26. In Massachusetts an elderly Belinda provided a unique example when she recalled that as a child, while with her parents were praying at a shrine in a 'sacred grove ... an armed band of white men, driving many of her countrymen in chains, rushed into the hallowed shades' (Belinda, 'Petition of an African Slave, to the Legislature of Massachusetts [Boston, February, 1782]', in Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p.142).
27. Wilks, 'Abu Bakr al-Siddiq', p.162 (cf. Austin, *African Muslims* [1984], pp.556–7); J.

- Franklin Jameson, 'Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina, 1831', *The American Historical Review*, 30 (1925), p.793; Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), pp.146–7; see also Abraham, Appendix I).
28. Joseph, *Life and Sufferings*, p.4; Smith, *Narrative*, pp.10–11.
 29. Eltis, 'Volume and Structure', p.33.
 30. Cf. Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, *passim*, and *ibid.*, 'Volume and Structure', Table 2 for the role of the Gold Coast and other regions at various periods.
 31. The term Coromantine or its variant spellings (e.g. Cormantin, Coromantee, Kormantin, Kromantine) derived from the name of a Fante-speaking coastal settlement on the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana). Around the middle of the seventeenth century its importance as an English trading post caused its name to be given to all slaves shipped from the Gold Coast. For example, in the 1690s, the slaving captain Thomas Philips wrote that 'the Negroes most in demand at Barbadoes are the Gold Coast, or as they call them, Cormantines' ('A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London, ann. 1693,1694, from England, to ... Barbadoes', in A. Churchill [ed.], *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* [London, 1746], Vol.6, p.230). After Coromantine was captured by the Dutch in the mid-1660s its role in the English/British slave trade virtually disappeared. Aside from referring to a place, the term Coromantine could also refer to several larger ethnolinguistic groups, principally Akan-speakers such as Fante and Asante (e.g. John Thornton, 'The Coromantees: An African Cultural Group in Colonial North America and the Caribbean', *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 32 [1998], pp.161–78).
 32. Wilks calculates that the captives covered the approximately 200 miles from Bouna to Kumasi by travelling roughly 20 miles a day; for the remaining approximately 120 miles to the coast, 'because of the dense forest, it was generally considered impossible to average even 10 miles a day' ('Abu Bakr al-Siddiq', pp.166–9 and Map 7).
 33. Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p.6; cf. Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p.36; see Austin, *African Muslims* (1997), p.2, Map 1.
 34. Robert Desrochers, 'Not Fade Away: The Narrative of Venture Smith, an African American in the Early Republic', *The Journal of American History*, 84 (1997), pp.56–9; Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p.385n2. Others in the autobiographer group were also shipped from areas with ethnically/linguistically different populations. For example, Rahahman, a Fulbe Muslim from the Futa Jallon region (present-day Republic of Guinea) was captured in warfare and taken to 'Mandingo country' on the distant Gambia River, far from the land in which he grew up, and Omar Said, from the Futa Toro area (present-day Senegal) 'believed that there were only two who could speak his language on the ship which brought him to America' (Austin, *African Muslims* [1997], p.81; *ibid.*, *African Muslims* [1984], p.450).
 35. Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p.8; Smith, *Narrative*, p.13; Belinda, 'Petition' in Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, pp.142–4; Nelson, 'Archibald John Monteith', p.32.
 36. See Eltis, 'Volume and Structure', Table 3, for recent estimates on arrivals to regions in British America.
 37. Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson and Klein, *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*.
 38. Austin, *African Muslims* (1997), pp.9–10. For a detailed and informative discussion and evaluation of the white editors of African and African-American narratives, and some of the methodological issues in determining the accuracy and veracity of the narratives, see Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, pp.xvii–lxv.
 39. Austin, *African Muslims* (1997), p.34. Diouf offers three reasons for the absence of this 'personal documentation,' including (1) a 'cultural reason' which involves 'deep aversion Africans feel at relating personal matters, especially those of an intimate nature'; (2) 'the psychological process of shutting off terrible memories and refusal to open up old wounds that are frequently experienced by survivors of atrocities'; and (3) 'the censorship that men who were being helped by whites imposed on themselves. Too-vivid descriptions of the Middle Passage, for example, could only underline the barbarity of the society to which those whose assistance was requested belonged' (*Servants of Allah*, pp.41–2). The reasons offered by Austin and Diouf are insufficient to explain all of the autobiographies discussed in the preceding pages. The data are simply too inadequate to arrive at a completely satisfactory answer.

40. As page proofs were being corrected for this article, Kari J. Winter (University of Vermont) brought my attention to another account which is germane to this paper. *The Blind African Slave: Or, Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, Nicknamed Jeffrey Brace* (St Albans, Vermont, 1810 [accessible on the University of North Carolina website of slave narratives]) has both autobiographical and biographical elements. Jeffrey Brace claims he was captured in Africa around 1758, transported to Barbados (where he allegedly spent about three months), and was later enslaved on a British ship and then in Connecticut. Manumitted for his military service in the Revolutionary War, Brace settled in Vermont and narrated his account to Benjamin Prentiss, a lawyer, who served as amanuensis and editor. I only had time to read the first several chapters of the Brace account, which treat the African background, Atlantic crossing, and sojourn in Barbados. I am greatly suspicious of the veracity of these pages, and suspect a fabrication. However, what is related of his later life may, in fact, be essentially true. Winter, who is editing the account for publication with the University of Wisconsin Press, has turned up archival materials that substantiate major facts of his memoir (pers. comm.).
41. Huber, 'Memoir of Abraham', pp.309–11.
42. John Ford, 'Two Narratives by Female Slaves at Barbados, written down there by John Ford, 1799', University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. misc. b.4, fols. 50–51; published in Handler 'Life Histories', pp.133–4.
43. Wilks, 'Abu Bakr al-Siddiq', pp.152–69; Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), pp.525–9, 550–61.
44. Belinda, 'Petition,' in Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, pp.142–4; see also Anon., 'Colonel Henry Vassall', *Publication X. Proceedings, Jan. 26, 1915–Oct. 26, 1915* (Cambridge, MA: The Cambridge Historical Society, 1917), pp.70n1, 71n3.
45. Bradley's account was first published in the *Herald of Freedom* (7 March 1835), and is reprinted in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, pp.686–90. The *Herald of Freedom* article is the major source on Bradley's life, although Blassingame (p.686n6) cites a couple of other primary sources; at least one of these (*Fourth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Cincinnati Lane Seminary* [January 1834]) is virtually uninformative.
46. Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, pp.xix, xx.
47. Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species. Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (London, 1787); reprinted in Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano* and *ibid.*, *Unchained Voices*, pp.145–84. Excerpts in: Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen (eds.), *Black Writers in Britain 1760–1890* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp.39–53; Paul Edwards and James Walvin (eds.), *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp.108–18; Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr (eds.), *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp.128–56. See also S.E. Ogude, *Genius in Bondage: A Study of the Origins of African Literature in English* (Ile-ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1983), pp.121–30.
48. Carretta, *Olaudah Equiano*, p.ix.
49. Carretta, "'Olaudah Equiano or Gustavas Vassa?'" New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity', *Slavery & Abolition*, 20, 3 (1999), p.97; *ibid.*, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, p.xxvi.
50. Carretta, 'Olaudah Equiano or Gustavas Vassa?', pp.96, 102–3.
51. Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*. One edition or another has been reprinted many times. The most authoritative modern edition is the Penguin edition, edited by Vincent Carretta (*Olaudah Equiano*). Other editions have been edited by Robert J. Allison (*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Written by Himself* [New York: Bedford Books of St Martin's Press, 1995], and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (*The Classic Slave Narratives* [New York, Mentor, Penguin Books, 1987], pp.1–182). Also Werner Sollors (ed.), *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (New York: Norton, 2001). Excerpts/abridgements have appeared in a number of edited volumes, including: William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American*

Autobiography, 1760–1865 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp.56–60; Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, pp.185–318; Jones, 'Olaudah Equiano of the Niger Ibo', pp.60–98; Paul Edwards, *Equiano's Travels: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996); Edwards and Dabydeen, *Black Writers in Britain*, pp.54–80; Edwards and Walvin, *Black Personalities*, pp.119–41; Potkay and Burr, *Black Atlantic Writers*, pp.159–268. See also Ogude, *Genius in Bondage, passim*.

For a popular biography of Equiano, apparently heavily based on the Penguin edition of the *Narrative* and its notes (Carretta, *Olaudah Equiano*), see James Walvin, *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745–1797* (London and New York: Cassell, 1998).

There is a relatively large body of scholarship relating to Equiano, including the editorial notes in the various reprints and abridgements cited above. For a review of the publishing history of Equiano's *Narrative*, see James Green, 'The Publishing History of Olaudah Equiano's Interesting Narrative', *Slavery and Abolition*, 16 (1995), pp.362–75, and Carretta, *Olaudah Equiano*, pp.xxxv–xxxvii; also *ibid.*, 'Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa?', p.104n2 for some of the scholarly literature (see also note 10).

An oil portrait, painted by an unidentified artist, hangs in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (Exeter City Museums and Art Gallery, England) where it is identified as 'Olaudah Equiano, British School, late 18th century'. When I visited the museum in 1998, a label on the wall next to the painting stated that Equiano visited Exeter in 1792 to 'raise public support for the abolition of slavery'. This portrait is published on the front cover of the Penguin edition. In an early printing of the Penguin edition, the editor, Vincent Carretta, does not mention the painting, but in a later printing of the same edition, he adds a short paragraph to his Appendix B which stresses that the painting 'is almost certainly not that of Equiano'. Carretta notes that the resemblance between the subject of the portrait and the portrait of Equiano on the frontispiece of his *Narrative* 'is merely superficial, and the sitter's dress indicates that the portrait was very probably painted before 1765, a period when Equiano was usually outside of England' (Carretta, *Olaudah Equiano*, p.316). In a more recent publication, Carretta writes: 'Gerald Barnett, biographer of Richard and Maria Cosway [British painters], and Christopher Fyfe, historian of Sierra Leone, believe that Cugoano, not Equiano, is the subject of the portrait reproduced on the cover of the Penguin edition of Equiano's writings, a portrait that Barnett believes was done by Richard Cosway' (Carretta, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, p.xxxiv; cf. King, 'Ignatius Sancho', pp.35–6; Christopher Fyfe, 'Paul Edwards – A Tribute', *Slavery & Abolition*, 19, 3 [1998], p.139). Yet Reyahn King, an authority on eighteenth-century portraits of Afro-British personalities, while observing that 'this portrait may not be of Equiano' also questions if it is of Cugoano ('Ignatius Sancho', pp.35–6). Who, in fact, is the subject of this well-known portrait still appears to be an open question. (Vincent Carretta brought my attention to the various references cited in the above paragraph.)

52. The 1772 edition is reprinted by Carretta (*Unchained Voices*, pp.32–58), who also establishes this as the earliest edition; Gronniosaw 1840 is also easily accessible, but there appear to be some minor variations between the 1772 and 1840 editions. See also Edwards and Dabydeen, *Black Writers in Britain*, pp.7–23; Edwards and Walvin, *Black Personalities*, pp.99–107; Potkay and Burr, *Black Atlantic Writers*, pp.23–63. Also Andrews, *To Tell a FreeStory*, pp.35–46, *passim*; Gates, 'James Gronniosaw and the Trope of the Talking Book', in James Olney (ed.), *Studies in Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.51–72; Ogude, *Genius in Bondage, passim*.
53. Joseph, *Life and Sufferings*.
54. Nelson, 'Archibald John Monteith'. Paul Lovejoy brought this publication to my attention. Linda M. LaPointe (Reeves Library, Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania) assisted in obtaining a photocopy of it.
55. Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), pp.121–49; Austin, *African Muslims* (1997) pp.64–83; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, pp.682–6.
56. The earlier and somewhat different translation is published in Theodore Dwight, 'Condition

- and Character of Negroes in Africa', *Methodist Review*, 46 (1864), pp.88–9; cf. Jameson, 'Autobiography of Omar Ibn Said', p.789. See Austin, *African Muslims* (1997), pp.152–3 for the recent scholarship on Said's manuscript account and the preparation of a new translation.
57. Jameson, 'Autobiography of Omar Ibn Said'. Jameson's editorship of this anonymously printed article is established by Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), p.517n34. See also Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), pp.445–51, 464–8; Austin, *African Muslims* (1997), pp.128–56; Dwight, 'Condition and Character of Negroes in Africa', pp.88–9; Gomez, 'Muslims in Early America', pp.688–9. A daguerreotype-photo of Said in his later life is held by the Davidson College Library (Davidson, North Carolina) and is published in Austin, *African Muslims* (1984), p.446, and *ibid.*, *African Muslims* (1997), p.128.
58. Ford, 'Two Narratives,' in Handler, 'Life Histories', pp.132–3.
59. 'I am now sixty nine years old,' he writes at the end of his account, 'though once straight and tall ... I am now bowed down with age and hardship. My strength ... is now enfeebled so that life is a burden, and it is with fatigue that I can walk a couple of miles. ... My eye-sight has gradually failed, till I am almost blind. ... But amidst all my griefs and pains, I have many consolations. ... My freedom is a privilege nothing else can equal' (Smith, *Narrative*, pp.30–31). Reprinted in Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, pp.369–87; Dorothy Porter (ed.), *Early Negro Writing, 1760–1837* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), pp.538–58. Cf. Desrochers, 'Not Fade Away'; Ogude, *Genius in Bondage*, pp.31–2. Smith's homeland and ethnicity are uncertain. Desrochers carefully reasons that he may have been a Mande-speaker, coming from an area that today would be in western Mali, while Carretta speculates he came from 'one of the Mossi states in what is now Upper Volta' (today, Burkina Faso); Desrochers, 'Not Fade Away', pp.56–9; Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p.385n2.
60. Thorp, 'Chattel With A Soul'. Another translation, which presently exists only in typescript, was kindly made available to me by Katherine Faull Eze, professor of German at Bucknell University; there appear to be only minor differences between Thorp's and her translation. Eze speculates that Wooma's memoir was possibly narrated in 1750s, when he was in his mid-20s and prior to his marriage – contrary to the usual reading of the *lebenslauf* at a congregant's funeral. Wooma married Magdalene Beulah Brockden in 1762. Born in Little Popo on the Slave Coast (to the west of Whydah), Magdalene arrived at the Bethlehem community in 1743 when she was 12; she was manumitted in 1758 and lived until around the age of 90 (Eze, 'Self-Encounters', pp.44, 48).