

Talking Points for Interactive PowerPoint

Wooden Coffle – when Africans were brought from the interior to the coast they were arranged in a type of bondage called a coffle. As you can see from the picture, the device went around the enslaved individuals head and then attached to another's and so on. The three general means for acquiring enslaved Africans was through "war," kidnapping, or sentencing. These "wars" could be an outright conflict between two tribes or societies, or they could be a result of manipulation by European meddlers in the interest of keeping a ready supply of "cargo." Being kidnapped speaks is self-explanatory, and to be "sentenced" into slavery could be for an actual infraction or possibly manipulated by outside forces as well. Many of these coffles were marched to an interior waterway where they were loaded onto canoes and then shipped to the coast.

Slave Castle – these castles would be used as European "footholds" on the African coast. A castle represents strength and might. Slaves were brought and sold here. They were used as a place to hold hundreds of enslaved Africans at once. When ships arrived, they were then shuttled out to the "slavers" using yawls, longboats, or canoes. In this method it was Europeans dealing usually with the keepers of the castle, which were usually other Europeans. The trade was not always completed in this "castle-style" method. In places that did not have a "slave castle," the trade varied. Ships sat at anchor most likely for longer periods of time dealing with various dealers bringing their "cargo" to the ships one or a few at a time. This process could take months. Example: John Newton, who wrote the famous hymn "Amazing Grace," recorded being on the coast for 8 months dealing with local merchants and dealers.

Cowry Shells – these were simply one form of currency or "money" used on the West African Coast. There many other commodities used to purchase enslaved Africans. Guns and weapons were prized commodities in Africa because it gave a group military dominance over another, which would then help them procure more people to enslave- the cycle repeating over and over. Among other items, tobacco, gold, rum, silver, and copper were also used.

Iron Shackles – throughout the course of a person's passage from village to the coast or ship, the point where they feel the cold iron for the first time must have been horrific. This was usually the moment that they transferred over into European "ownership." Many accounts speak of the strange looking people with mean red faces. It is widely recorded that many Africans thought they were being sold to be eaten by the "white men." As they boarded, they were given a number and eventually a new name. They then had to watch fellow Africans row back to the coast. This is why nets were put up on the sides of the ship. People tried to jump off the boat in attempt to escape or die. It was just a downright heart-wrenching scene.

Cat o' nine tails – this was simply a very potent whip which was used as a deterrent and a punishment. It had a handle with nine knotted "tails" at the end of it. The captain and first mate would definitely be scene wielding this weapon. Interestingly enough, many ordinary sailors would feel the bite of this as well. It is good to note that the life of sailors during slave voyages was anything but a walk in the park. It is incomparable to the enslaved, but the treatment of them by the captain could at times be horrific as well.

The Schooner – this was not the only boat in the trade, but it was widely used. Like I noted before, these boats anchored on the coast for varying periods of time. The boat became literally a floating factory of sorts. Ventures were made inland, on occasion, but this was dangerous, especially in areas without a castle. The boat was not only a factory but also a defendable fortress. Getting caught defenseless on shore could prove costly or even deadly. The everyday sailors were often used for these ventures, as their lives were of lesser value than that of the captains and mates. The captain had to play games of confidence as well as incentives. He had to be wary of who he was dealing with, but also wanted to get his ship out of there as fast as possible. He wined and dined dealers while trying not to get swindled. As the enslaved were added to his "cargo," the men were shackled in twos and then chained together by tens. The men were almost always kept below deck. This area became a suffocating stench-filled environment, which is hard to imagine. Blood, feces, urine, vomit...

The Blunderbuss- this was a shotgun of sorts. It could spray a lethal shot of shrapnel upon the deck if there were an uprising or insurrection. Rebellions were ever-present. The intention of the participants was not always to take hold of the ship and escape. Sometimes the intention was to die and take as many of their captures with them. On board the ship was a wall called a "barricado." This acted as a fort on board the ship. Sailors ran behind the wall and used their blunderusses until the uprising was contained.