

# The slave ship critical thinking example

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



Markus Rediker's, ' The Slave Ship is truly a seminal study in thought and interest on the issue of slavery in the African countries who eventually ended up shipped like cattle to the United States and other plantations in the Caribbean. Rediker touches on several interesting aspects but focuses particularly on first hand accounts and the shocking betrayal of some Africans who simply sold their brothers into slavery for a pittance just because it made them money.

The overriding theme of the work is the fact that man can actually turn into a beast when faced with opportunities to make money even if it has to mean squandering his fellow men and brothers for profit. Rediker touches on this subject often and it runs like a leitmotif throughout the whole book.

Personally I greatly enjoyed the first hand narratives of those who found themselves on these hellish hulks and survived their ordeal notwithstanding the barbaric conditions in which they were forced to live for several months. The account by Sarah is particularly harrowing where she describes the wanton brutality of those guards who manned the slave ship however her position as ' favourite' with the ships's crew enabled her to actively plot a slave insurrection which however failed. She ended up being sold in Grenada for a mere three hundred dollars and then vanished off the face of the earth like so many others.

Rediker goes to great lengths to analyze the psychological effects that the slave system and transport had on the crew who were carrying out this barbaric task. Obviously you had to be quite a hard person to go on with such tasks and most of the crew were either press ganged or entered into service for want of having anything better to do. This was obviously

understandable but Rediker is perhaps slightly too hard on some members of the crew when the mindset in those days was pretty much that black people were inherently savages.

Rediker's accounts of the terrifying Middle Passage add some graphic details which are already well known, especially in pieces such as the famous film 'Amistad' and other previously published accounts of former slaves. However Rediker goes into painstaking detail on how the slaves were actually stored in the ship, in some places the space between them was practically nil so we have all those horribly gruesome descriptions of chained men with blood running through the decks and others being sick on each other. It is obviously harrowing but very realistic and truthful.

The whole book is very interesting but as I hinted before, it is the personal accounts which make it rather special and distinctive from the many other books on this period. Several accounts are rather mind numbing but the level of brutality and sheer waste of human life is believable although one finds it slightly hard to understand how villagers in Africa colluded so well with the slave traders. That is another aspect of the book which is interesting and reminds one of 'Roots' by Alex Haley who also went to great lengths to trace his slave ancestry in the Gambia.

Obviously, slavery remains a moot point for discussion even after all these years as we still are experiencing slavery today in more ways than one.

Rediker's account of the hulks which were a living hell for tens of thousands of unfortunate Africans can only enhance our knowledge of the era and it is written in a direct and unfussy style which is quite a joy to read. If slightly

too detailed at times, the book is recommended for those who are new to the subject but even for those who are perhaps more well read on slavery.

## **Works cited**

Rediker M (2007) *The Slave Ship* Penguin