

# [The transatlantic slave trade and other key](https://assignbuster.com/the-transatlantic-slave-trade-and-other-key/)

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The International Slavery Museum aimed to present TransatlanticSlave Trade and other key issues.

Its purpose was ‘ to promote the understandingof transatlantic slavery and its enduring impact.’ 1Whenconsidering the importance of the museums it is important to understand thatthe museum presents some fundamental key issues. This focuses on thepresentation of both native Africans and Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and thisessay will focus on examining each of these aspects. The museum itself aimed toprovide the audience with an insight into ‘ the understanding of transatlanticslavery’2. Itfocused on providing the audience with an experience for the lives of the’enslaved’ and the tough experiences they had faced. The museum is divided intothemes in which are separated into: Life in West Africa, Enslavement and theMiddle Passage and finally Legacy. The museum allow a greater understandinginto the greater depth of the stories and experiences of the ‘ enslaved’. Arguably, there are some limitations of the museum an example being the idea of’commemoration not celebration’, so the museum focuses on commemorating thepast events in particular the lives of the native Africans as well as thepresentation of the transatlantic slave trade throughout the museum.

Furthermore, the museum allows the audience to gain an experience inunderstanding the message in which the museum was trying to convey for each ofthe key issues. The presentation of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade within themuseum was a key issue when examining the display on ‘ Enslavement and TheMiddle Passage’. This particular exhibition used the technique of the surroundingsto shed a light particularly on the experiences of the enslaved especially ontheir voyage trips. The museum focused both on colour and sound to reflect theexperiences of the enslaved and the dark colours within the displays created atone that which allowed the audience to gain a first-hand experience. Thecolour and sound created a combination as the mood of the colours reflected thescreaming and pain of the enslaved during the voyages to the Americas. Walvin(2013) argues that many of the enslaved were ‘ viewed merely as victims, withlittle role or agency in the entire story of enslavement and freedom’3.

It can be argued that the exhibition to some extent creates the enslaved as’victims’ with the sound reflecting the pain as the screaming suggests a lackof freedom. The harsh conditions as well as the unsanitary surrounding oftenled to the ‘ death of many millions’. 4Furthermore, it was also evidently clear that ‘ Liverpool came to dominate theBritish Slave Trade’ 5andthe exhibition reflected much on the role of Transatlantic Slave Trade withinBritain during the 18th century. The museum presented the journey ofmany of the enslaved from Africa to the America as one which was regarded to bea negative experience and the struggles in which many had faced. Thepresentation of Olaudah Equiano (a former slave) within the museum gave aninsight into the first-hand account and experience on life on the ships. Equiano (1789) states ‘ This wretched situation was again aggravated by thegalling of the chains, now become insupportable…’ 6hisaccount allows an insight into the first-hand experience of a former slave whohad experienced the hardship that had come with the trade ships. When examining the International Slavery Museum and importantfactor to consider is the way in which Trans-Atlantic Slavery was presentedwithin the museum.

It can be regarded as an exhibition which heightens thetreatment of the enslaved with the objects that are included within thegallery. The ‘ Shackles’ are a symbolic object as it presents the enslaved ashaving no ‘ freedom’ (see in Appendix 1). The shackles themselves were ‘ rustic’looking and looked rotten many of the enslaved were chained with one on theirhand and the other on their feet this was because there was a fear of theenslaved escaping and so the shackles signified that the enslaved were’trapped’. The exhibition on ‘ Enslavement and the Middle Passage’ included manyshackles throughout there was one figure in particular of an ‘ Enslaved Africanbreaking free of his chains7′(see in Appendix 2).

The judgment which can be formed from this figure is that thisis often seen to be rather symbolic. The ‘ shackles’ were presented throughoutthe museum this could instigate that the enslaved were not infact treated in afair manner and the Africans were seen to be of an inferior status. Almost, asthough the shackles had removed their identity and more importantly theirfreedom and the museum did well in presenting this within the displays. Anotherinterpretation is argued by Walvin (2013) states ‘ Restraining the growing ranksof Africans by manacles and chains was the only way in which small bands ofsailors could hope to maintain any semblance of control’8it suggests that in order for the ships to be running Africans needed to be’chained’ for many it created the atmosphere of a prison and within the museumthe videos explicitly show the Africans in pain as they try to break free fromthe violence similar to the figure that had been shown.  The display on ‘ Life in West Africa’ within the InternationalSlavery Museum presents the cultural life of the Africans before slavery.

Themuseum presents the contrast of the two galleries with a difference in colour. The ‘ Life in West Africa’ display includes colourful colours which creates anuplifting atmosphere and it unveils the ‘ African cultural achievements beforethe arrival of Europeans and the start of the transatlantic slave trade.’9The Museum allows the recognition of the lives of Africans before slavery andhow their lives were lived so freely. This gallery further emphasised the powerand wealth of the West Africans and they also were popular with trade as therewas ‘ strong trade bonds between Europeans and Africans’ 10(Emmer2014; 2009). This was ironic as not long after the Europeans began to kidnap theAfricans and their culture as well as identity was proven to have been leftbehing. Many of the Europeans saw the Africans as uncivilised’, however the Igbodomestic architecture  proves that theywere infact ‘ sophisticated’. The museum presents the Igbo architecture (see inappendix 3) as portraying the ‘ wealth’ of the Africans as well as reflectingthe views that during the early modern period the Africans were living in afree society and the museum allows the understanding of a family unit of atitled Igbo man.

The display allows the audience into a greater understandingof the lives of West Africans before slavery and the impact in which many ofthe ‘ enslaved’ face and how their lives changed from the West African societyto the ‘ plantations’ in Americas.   The Africa exhibition was split into two with the livesbefore slavery and after the museum infact distinguished the two. The’plantation’ display had focused on portraying the audience with a darkatmosphere and this helped with gaining an insight into the struggles in whichmany had faced. For many Africans the ‘ Plantation owners wanted labour andjustified the barbarity of their treatment by using biblical arguments thatAfricans were less than human’ 11asthis was reflected through the series of images which presented the conditionof the enslaved. Blassingame (1979) argues that many were ‘ Captured and broughtto America under the most painful and bewildering conditions…’12this suggests that many of the Africans were kidnapped and sent to Americas towork on ‘ the plantations’ and many faced hardship in comparison to their lives inWest Africa. As, they went from living a free life to becoming ‘ enslaved’ andtheir freedom had been removed from them.

The image of the Africans working onplantations (see in appendix 4) allows the audience of the museum to understandthe power of their masters and as Olaudah Equiano quoted ‘ the slaves to bebranded with the initial letters of their masters name; and a load of heavy ironhooks hung about their necks’ this is infact reflected throughout theexhibition. The image presents the master with ultimate control as the gestureof his hand could be understood to be an ‘ order’ and the overall message inwhich the museum conveys is the change the Africans had faced and ironicallythe exhibition reflects the reading in which I have read about the lives of theenslaved. The museum has used the technique of colour to create adifferentiation with the ‘ positive’ life they once lived to now working onplantations with the dark atmosphere that creates negative connations. Duringthis period the ‘ British American colonies demanded African slaves, the role ofthe African companies changed to supply them’13many of the Africans were sent to the Americas to work on either plantation orfactories and they were used as a source of labour. For many there is a loss ofidentity and culture are left behind as in the Americas they are identifiedwith another name and overtime their identity is completely removed. To conclude, the International Slavery Museum presented theNative Americans as well as Trans-Atlantic slave trade as a key issue withinthe museum. The exhibitions of the museum allow a differentiation when understandingthe lives of the African before and after slavery as well as the significantchanges in which they had faced.

The museum uses the technique of colourthroughout to enhance the experiences as well as creating an atmosphere withinthe museum itself. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade display further emphasisesthe lives of the ‘ enslaved’ with the objects that signify the each sector oftheir lives from trade to the shackles. The International Slavery Museum effectivelyuses sound and interactive videos to create an understanding for the first-handaccounts of the ‘ enslaved’ as well as creating an atmosphere that helps theaudience to gain a deeper understanding into the experiences. The displays alsosignify important themes one of which is identity and the museum allows you toexperience the culture and identity of the enslaved to have been removed andhow their lives had transformed since moving to the Americas. For many this wasinfact a period of struggle and many were not infact able to adjust to thislifestyle.

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