

# Free book review on african leaders' contribution towards slave trade as the main...

[Environment](#), [Water](#)



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## **Book Review**

The book ' The Salt water slavery: a middle passage from Africa to American Diasporas' is authored by Stephanie Smallwood illuminating more on the extent of the African slavery and what extended from the slave markets into the Atlantic ocean during transit of the slaves (usually blacks). Stephanie appears to have been driven into writing this book by the forces of what really occurred in the high seas and the need to expose the shocking reality of what transpired in the high seas (Smallwood, v).

The book can be divided into three sections where each section can be looked at as an independent scene of atrocities to slaves. The sections are the African slave markets along Gold Coast which in the contemporary geography forms Ghana, the middle passage in the Atlantic Ocean and the life of slaves in the Americas. This book reveals some shocking realities that some people are not ready to accept but for the purpose of history and contextualization of the contemporary life of blacks in the US, the book serves a vital purpose (Smallwood, ix).

The book begins with a thrilling introduction of how slave trade was

transacted. The barbers and other people who were powerful were the main players in the market while the poor and powerless were the commodities in the market for sale. There were several factors that could be cited to have fueled the increased demand for slaves in the Americas. This was plantation agriculture which required very high labor input, a factor that was not present in the Americas. Considering that America was colonized by the Britons who were investing and the natives of the land were few to provide the necessary labor, the same Britons turned to Africa for labor supply (Smallwood, 6). The main factor that made Britons to succeed in getting the necessary labor was colonization and lack of enlightenment as well as the increased tribal clashes that saw captured people sold into slavery.

Gold coast formed this big market due to the commodities of trade available in the locality. There were also several tribes that were on war against each other making acquisition of slaves much simpler and constant. Gold also played a very important role since the Britons were frequent visitors to the region. Trade in African war captives and kidnapped or abducted people became famous to a point that the rich and powerful always sort to capture even their fellow blacks and sell them so as to gain the necessary cash. This is well covered in the second chapter of the book which is under the title 'African captives are turned into Atlantic commodities'. Stephanie depicts this not only as dehumanizing but also a cruel behavior due to the way slaves were treated during trade. From a description, it is evident that these people were mishandled, not well fed and some were sick (Smallwood, 58).

After being turned into commodities and auctioned to the slave dealers, these people then came to the hardest of all the three phases of problems,

the transit across Atlantic Ocean. They were packed into their shipping vessels which were also more like their coffins. Escape from the market was almost impossible since the slaves were wrapped together by chains like animals. A lot transpired during transit which is summarized as part of section two.

In section two, slave dealers accompanied the overloaded slave ships in their balanced sailing vehicles. The congestion in the vessels saw some people die in the seas where they were inhumanely disposed by dumping into the saltwater. This section can be taken to have given the author the title of the book since in other books, a lot on slave markets in Gold coast and the Americas is discussed but none other illuminates in this horrific transit passage.

Many slaves died on the way and they were thrown out in the ocean where they would be eaten by sea creatures. In case the high seas became rough, some slaves would be thrown out into the ocean like any other commodities while still wrapped with chains. In this section also, the author illuminates on how the Britons and their bosses in London organized slave trade. The narration is full of emotions when she describes social death and greed that made the people trade in other people (Smallwood, 124).

Still in this section, the author talks of the political economy of slave trade across the Atlantic. This chapter elaborates on how political power accelerated and favored slave trade in Africa. Political leaders gained a lot due to this business and fortified their emperors by engaging in this business. This is a direct depiction of what fueled slave trade.

In this section, the author also talks about 1492, a historic year when slave

trade became well known in West Africa. It is at this time when the African emperors turned against each other and set their kingdoms at war. The captives and abducted people were sold into slavery thus this year is very important.

More on the middle passage which forms the main argument of the book, the author describes the slaves as living dead due to the standards that they were subjected to. For example, the author quotes of diseases that had infected these people and hunger which had made them very feeble.

According to some statistics, those who made it across the Atlantic Ocean to Americas were less than half of the total captives who boarded the ship.

The third section deals with the changing on the Atlantic commodities into American commodities. In the whole section, the author explains of how the slaves were sold like animals or other products to their ruthless white plantation owners. The market was also very embarrassing for the slaves who were then led into different plantations to work (Smallwood, 196).

The working conditions were also not the best for the slaves considering what they had gone through during transit into the Americas. Due to changes in weather and other environmental factors, most of the slaves died shortly after arrival in the Americas and the few who remained were forced to put up with almost intolerable living conditions (Smallwood, 246).

Taking a look at the main arguments presented in the book, the author tries to cover one of the most ignored sections of slave trade, the transportation of the slaves. The main argument which also appears to contribute immensely towards the title of the book is what transpired to the slaves in

the high seas. The author uses a narrative structure to support the main idea with other arguments. Some of the other evident arguments include:

Mistreatment of the slaves from beginning to the end

This subordinate argument is also generally present in all the chapters where the author depicts that the captives were treated as less human beings who are only supposed to work for the strong ones. Lack of medical attention and disposal into the sea alive when the sea became unfriendly also depicts a lot of mistreatment. Lastly, treating the captives as commodities for sale was also an act of human degradation and mistreatment.

### **Some of the major themes in the book include:**

Slavery

This is the main theme upon which the book is based. This theme comes in to explain how inhumanly the captives were treated and taken as less human being. Oppression and war can be taken to contribute greatly towards this theme as sources of slavery and misery (Smallwood, 123).

### **Rivalry**

This theme is also one of the main themes in the book since the author describes the whole situation to have been sparked by rivalry. What caused the war? Considering the war as the source of slavery, then it would be correct also to argue that all the mistreatment was ran by rivalry (Smallwood, 26).

Critically engaging the book for a rating and effectiveness in use in the contemporary society, I can rate the book according to three features

namely: appropriateness of the title, relevance of the contents to the title and contemporary society and the overall useful informational content of the book (Hartman, 4).

Investigating the appropriateness of the title, the title is very appropriate since more than half of the book content elaborates on the title. The title also is very appropriate since the main theme under illumination is slavery. By including a clause on the middle passage, the book title becomes even more specific on an area that most historians rarely cover (Hartman, 4).

A look at the relevance of the book content to the title and main theme, the content is about 90% relevant to the title and 75% relevant to the contemporary society. This is because the content is illustrative and elaborates to the society what is hidden about slave trade. This factor makes the book to be very updated and important in the contemporary society. Lastly on the overall effectiveness of the book as a historical source, the book is 95% effective. This is because it deals with history and gives almost everything that is necessary to conclusively and comprehensively cover the historical topic. The book also refers to other historical books making it operate more as a collection and re-contextualization of history (Hartman, 4).

## **Works cited**

Hartman S. A review on saltwater: A middle passage from Africa to American Diaspora. Columbia University press, 2009 print.

Smallwood S. Saltwater: A middle passage from Africa to American Diaspora. Harvard University Press 2007 print.