

# Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

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## BRIEF OVERVIEW

This module focuses on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the system which forced the enslavement of Africans who were transported to the western world. Enslaved Africans faced some of the most brutal treatment in human history, enduring a journey across the Atlantic Ocean that lasted anywhere between 4-10 weeks on ships with two hundred to eight hundred people packed into the bottoms of the vessels' holds. Some revolted, some took their own lives, some fell sick and died on the journey. But for those that survived, arriving in ports and trading cities in the Caribbean, South America, and the United States was only the first step of the rest of their lives.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Analyze** three different documents from the period of trans-Atlantic trade.
- **Interpret** accounts of people involved in the trade of African people.
- **Identify** economics/prices related to the trans-Atlantic trade in each document.

## SESSION OUTLINE

### Activity:

These three documents in the boxes below are a small sample of the Rubenstein Library's archives of the trade but provide an important window into understanding the legacy of the trade and the people involved. Follow the instructions accompanied with each document and have students use the analysis questions to reflect on what they observed.

### KEY HISTORICAL DATES:

- **1807**—England abolishes the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in its colonies in the western world
- **1808**—The United States abolishes the Trans-Atlantic slave trade

### GUIDING QUESTIONS:

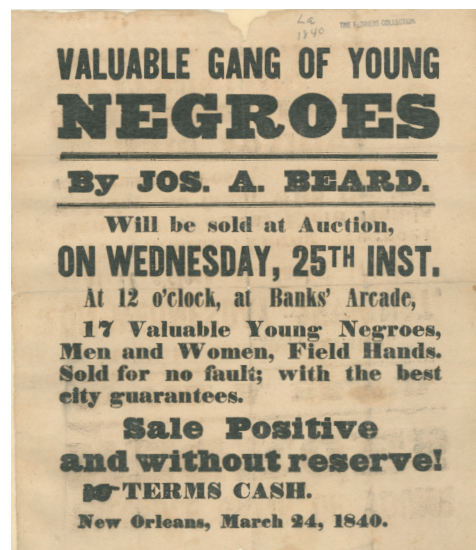
- What geographic locations are mentioned in each document?
- How are the experiences of enslaved people articulated in each document?
- How are the experiences of the participants in the trade articulated in the documents?

### DOCUMENT #1:

[Ascention Insurance Account](#), 1793 (pay close attention to page 3)

**Context/Summary:** Account detailing the value of the ship *Ascention* and its cargo including 52 slaves. Apparently, the ship was lost in the slaves' insurrection in 1793. Information was gathered for the purpose of collecting insurance.

**Citation:** *Ascention Insurance Account, 1793*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.



## DOCUMENT #2:

[Archibald Boyd Papers](#) (go to page 5)

**Context/Summary:** Personal and business correspondence of Boyd and his son, James E. Boyd, attorney and political leader. Includes letters of Samuel R. Browning, a slave trader, commenting on the health of various slaves and on the condition of the slave market.

**Citation:** *[description of item]*, Archibald Boyd Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

## DOCUMENT #3:

[George and Christopher Champlin Letter](#), 1773 (go to page 1)

**Context/Summary:** Collection consists of a letter by Champlins' agents, Threlfall and Anderson, to the Champlins, reporting on the slave market.

**Citation:** *Letter from Threlfall and Anderson to George and Christopher Champlin*, *George and Christopher Champlin Letter*, 1773, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

## Individual Analysis Questions:

(select one document)

1. What are some of the unique or distinguishing characteristics of this document?
2. List three things the document tells you about life at the time and in the place where it was created.
3. List two things in the document that you think are important.
4. What question(s) does this document bring up for you? What would you say is missing?

## Group Discussion Questions:

After you've spent some time reviewing the collection, you'll discuss these questions with your groupmates. You may not get to discuss every question and are welcome to choose to discuss the question(s) you like best.

- How did you decide on the document you picked?
- Did the guide provide accurate description of the document(s) you observed?
- How does studying these documents help you understand the slave trade?
- Can you discern the experience of African people within these documents?

## Additional Resources:

- Browse through additional [digitized collections](#) related to the trade of people of African descent.
- Learn more about the Franklin Research Center at <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/franklin>.

## QUESTIONS?

[special-collections@duke.edu](mailto:special-collections@duke.edu)

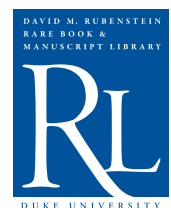
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