Travel Literature and History

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C O N N E X I O N S

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Chapter 1

Transported Labor, Indentured Servitude, and Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Approach[1]

1.1 Transported Labor, Indentured Servitude, and Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Approach

While slave labor comprised the majority of the plantation workforce across the Americas, it was never the sole labor system in use. Historical records now show that slaves often worked alongside transported laborers and/or indentured servants. One document in the 'Our Americas' Archive Partnership[2] (a digital archive collaboration on the hemispheric Americas), James Revel's poem "The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account of His Fourteen Years Transportation, at Virginia, in America...," provides rare insight into life and labor in colonial America. As such, educators can use the document as a teaching tool within AP History or college introductory History courses.

Very little is known about Revel, but his account, composed at some point during the eighteenth century, traces his path from rebellious teen to Chesapeake tobacco laborer. In the document Revel states that he lived in England until he was caught stealing and was sentenced to transportation, which was, "A just reward for my vile actions base." As one historian notes, transportation was Britain's, "adopt[ion] [of] foreign exile as a punishment for serious crime" (Ekirch, 1). During their period of exile, felons could experience a wide array of treatment at the hands of their employers as, "Parliament enacted laws to prevent their early return home but took no steps to regulate their treatment either at sea or in the colonies"(Ekirch, 3). Revel's exile began in Virginia where he worked for a farmer who was abusive and cruel. Upon his master's death, Revel was sold to a "tenderly and kind" individual who eventually arranged for Revel to travel back to England as a free man. For a solid overview of transportation as a British punishment, see Frank McLynn's *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (2002).

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m32427/1.2/>.
[2] See the file at <http://cnx.org/content/m32427/latest/http://oaap.rice.edu/>

The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account

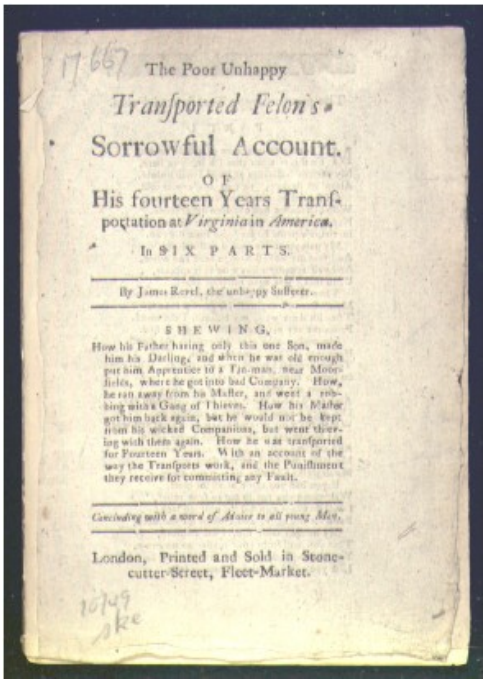
The Poor Unhappy
Transported Felon's
Sorrowful Account.
OF
His fourteen Years Transportation at Virginia in America.
In SIX PARTS.
By James Revel, the unhappy Sufferer.
SHEWING,
How his Father having only this one Son, made him his Darling, and when he was old enough put him Apprentice to a Tin-man, near Moorfields, where he got into bad Company. How, he ran away from his Master, and went a robbing with a Gang of Thieves. How his Master got him back again, but he would not be kept from his wicked Companions, but went thieving with them again. How he was transported for Fourteen Years. With an account of the way the Transports work, and the Punishment they receive for committing any Fault.
Concluding with a word of Advice to all young Men.
London, Printed and Sold in Stonecutter-Street, Fleet-Market.

Figure 1.1: The title page from an early version of James Revel's account.

To begin with, educators can incorporate Revel's poem into the classroom within a discussion of transportation as one method of colonial labor supply. Whereas AP and introductory courses often cover indentured and slave labor, transported laborers remain unacknowledged and this misses an opportunity to display the interconnectedness of the Atlantic economy. Specifically, a lecture on transportation would fit well within a U.S. course section on the late colonial period. The height of transportation was from 1718 (the passage of the British Transportation Act) to the early 1770s (the build-up to the American Revolution). One possible classroom exercise would be to read Revel's poem alongside another primary document set, such as the transported passenger lists printed within Peter Wilson Coldham's *Bonded Passengers to America* (full biographical details follow the module). While the poem attaches a personal face to this labor phenomenon, the lists present the broader picture of where the convicts departed from, the dates they departed, the arrival locations, and, on occasion, the crimes supposedly committed.

Educators can choose to incorporate one lecture focusing specifically on transportation, or they can take a more integrated comparative approach and make the evolution of labor systems a theme within their courses, as the College Board suggests. This comparative approach can be accomplished through exercises analyzing the similarities and differences between transported labor, indentured labor, and slave labor. For example, in the lecture section focusing on colonial development, educators can ask students to compare the lives of the three 'types' of laborers in one location, such as Virginia. For this exercise the Revel poem serves as the source on the lives of a transported laborer, while primary documents from Warren Billings's *The Old Dominion* provide personal accounts of indentured and slave life. Categories of comparison can include everything from daily diet to the nature of punishment. Revel facilitates this comparative approach by describing how, after his conviction, he was transported overseas "bound with an iron chain," was sold in Virginia like a "horse," and then worked with his "fellow slaves" among the "tobacco plants."

An Image of Transportation

Figure 1.2: Individuals sentenced to transportation heading to a ship that will carry them overseas.

In addition, from the mid-seventeenth-century until the late-twentieth-century, all three groups of laborers could be found throughout the hemispheric Americas. Revel's travels from Britain to Virginia and back again can serve as an entry point into a discussion of the movement of bodies to satisfy the labor needs of colonial plantation economies. In the course section on colonial development educators can focus on comparing the experiences of laborers across the globe. A wide variety of academic works feature essays on particular, local labor situations during the colonial period. One essay collection edited by Kay Saunders contains chapters describing colonial indentured labor in locations such as Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, Malaya, and Queensland. Asking students to compare the lives of the laborers described within these essays to the lives of laborers in colonial North America, including Revel, partially satisfies the emphasis on globalization recommended by the College Board.

After introducing Revel's account in the colonial section of the course, it could also be useful to revisit the poem during a discussion of emancipation in the U.S. Although it is an abstract concept the 1660s can be linked to the 1860s through the questioning of the historical nature of freedom. An educator can begin by discussing how transported laborers, indentured servants, and slaves all were granted freedom in right by the conclusion of the U.S. Civil War. Then, foreshadowing the upcoming discussions of sharecropping and African-American debt peonage, educators can explore how emancipation, across the globe, has not always led to what is commonly considered freedom. Historian Walton Look Lai finds that post Emancipation in the British West Indies meant that "the phenomenon of labor coercion, far from dying out, assumed new and diverse forms" (Look Lai, xi). In this same vein, educators can ask that students explore the continuation of indentured labor and the problems associated with it throughout the Caribbean during the twentieth century. *Maharani's Misery* (2002), the story of a young female Indian indentured laborer killed in 1885 on her way to Guyana, is an apt and appropriate work to assign to students at the introductory college level and upwards. Maharani's experiences are in many ways connected to Revel's account and together they offer an avenue through which students can understand labor patterns across place and time.

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Chapter 2

An "Atlantic Creole" Case Study: Olaudah Equiano[1]

2.1 An "Atlantic Creole" Case Study: Olaudah Equiano

Broadly construed, creolization refers to a mixing of cultures and beliefs. A creole society is one in which a variety of cultures and ideas coexist. Thus, historian Ira Berlin attempted to capture the impact of creolization on individuals in the late eighteenth-century Atlantic when he coined the term "Atlantic creole." Berlin's "Atlantic creoles" were economically active people who became "part of the three worlds" (Africa, Europe, and the Americas) "that came together in the Atlantic littoral" (Berlin, 17). For more information on Berlin's work see *Many Thousands Gone* (1998). Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavas Vassa (see figure 1), has now become the person whom historians first refer to when asked to identify a representative "Atlantic creole." Equiano is most recognized for his *Interesting Narrative* which is now available as part of the 'Our Americas' Archive Partnership[2] (a digital collaboration on the hemispheric Americas). This module traces how educators can use Equiano's life and *The Interesting Narrative* as an avenue through which to explore the nature of creolization, the activities of the Atlantic abolitionist and anti-slavery movements, and how historians approach and utilize primary source materials.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m33641/1.1/>.
[2] See the file at <http://cnx.org/content/m33641/latest/http://oaap.rice.edu/>

Olaudah Equiano

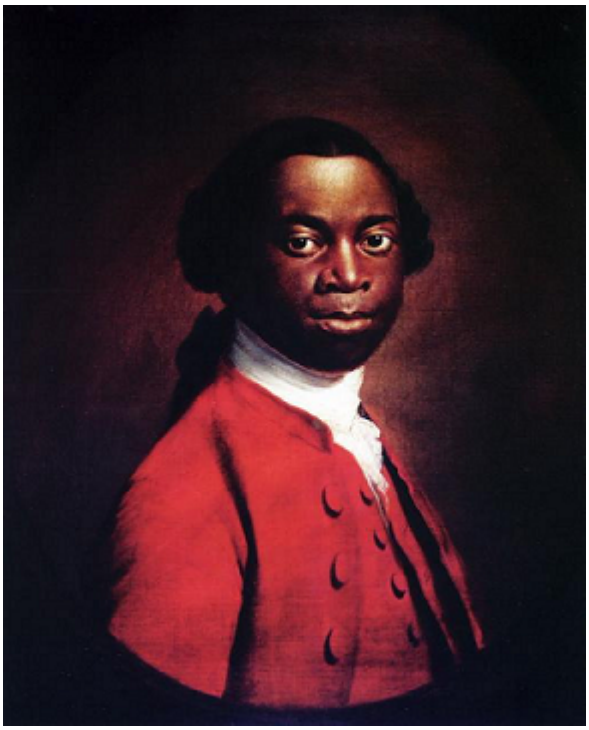

Figure 2.1: A portrait of Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa.

The Interesting Narrative conveys a version of Equiano's life story and, according to the work, he was born in Africa in 1745, was captured by slavers as a young man, and was eventually purchased by a British Royal Navy officer, Michael Henry Pascal. Equiano traveled the world on various ships that Pascal served upon. After being denied his freedom by Pascal in 1762, Equiano ended up working on various sugar plantations prior to purchasing his own freedom in 1766. The 1770s found Equiano in London, but he still took sea voyages to exotic locales, such as the Arctic. Finally, in 1789 his autobiography was published, which provided a much-needed first-hand account of the horrors of the slave trade. As much of the action in Equiano's tale takes place in the mid to late 1700s, a discussion of his life and works would best fit within a U.S. history or literature lecture on the Age of Revolutions or even the Early Republic. Educators could emphasize how he was representative of a large scale movement of ideas, often revolutionary in approach, and peoples during this period.

The Interesting Narrative

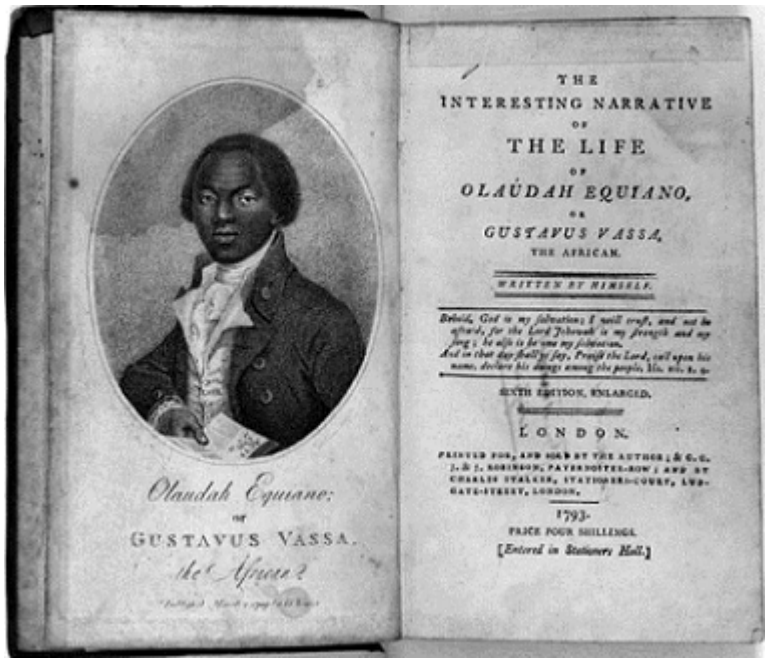

Figure 2.2: A title page image from a 1793 version of Equiano's Interesting Narrative.

In particular, educators could focus on Equiano's lifestyle as a sailor, the epitome of an "Atlantic creole" activity. To begin with, to get students familiar with his movements, an activity could ask students to read *The Interesting Narrative* and then to trace Equiano's movements on a map. The result will be multiple lines of travel crossing and converging in the Atlantic. For additional material on his movements as a sailor, see W. Jeffrey Bolster's *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (1997). Bolster explores "the Age of Sail" and argues that, "Before 1865 seafaring had been crucial to blacks' economic survival, liberation strategies, liberation strategies, and collective identity formation" (6). At this point educators can stress how black seamen were often seen by U.S. southerners as agents of radicalism. For example, South Carolina passed a law in the early 1800s requiring the imprisonment of any black seamen arriving at her ports. This begs the question, what elements of radicalism exist within *The Interesting Narrative*? When discussing Equiano's radicalism, it is useful to reference the entire text, but the early pages are particularly interesting as he states, "Does not slavery itself depress the mind, and extinguish all its fire and every noble sentiment?"

Undoubtedly, Equiano associated with anti-slavery and abolitionist individuals in England and this influence appears within his writings. He even mentions that "numerous friends" have pressured him to write his life story, presumably a few of these persons were involved in reform movements. As such, an exercise could require students to read *The Interesting Narrative* searching, in particular, for 'typical' anti-slavery imagery? The 'typical' nature of such imagery could be demonstrated through a comparative reading of a few of the slave narratives that would appear in later years, such as the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1999 ed.). Also, please view the following modules: Gender and Anti-Slavery in the Atlantic World[3] and Slavery, Resistance, and Rebellion Across the Americas[4]. This broader discussion of reform movements could extend the discussion of Equiano and his writings from the 1780s into the antebellum period or even the "Crisis of the Union" lectures of the 1850s/1860s. After an exploration of the term "creole" an educator could

[3]See the file at <http://cnx.org/content/m33641/latest/http://cnx.org/content/m32169/latest/>
[4]See the file at <http://cnx.org/content/m33641/latest/http://cnx.org/content/m22079/latest/>

also ask their students to explain how *The Interesting Narrative* is a "creole" text.

Early Map of West Africa

Figure 2.3: An early map depicting West Africa, an area that plays a critical part within Equiano's work.

Finally, historians have identified *The Interesting Narrative* as an important source of information on Atlantic and slave life in the late 1700s. However, scholars continue to evaluate the veracity of the claims that Equiano makes within the work. This debate offers a window into how historians wrestle with the constructed nature of autobiographical texts. In particular, Equiano's birthplace has become a site of scholarly questioning. To introduce students to this debate it is suggested that they read excerpts from the work of Alexander X. Byrd, who makes an argument for the African origins of the *Narrative*, or Vincent Carretta, who contends that a South Carolina heritage might be closer to the mark. Both of these scholars have marshaled ample evidence in defense of their claims and students can be asked to make their own determination at the conclusion of the readings. In addition, one interesting collection, *Olaudah Equiano & the Igbo World* (2009) presents a series of essays evaluating the Igbo heritage thesis. This is also a general opportunity to describe how historians feel a need to approach every source from a critical perspective. The scholarly productions surrounding *The Interesting Narrative* are cutting-edge history in the truest sense and exposing students to these ideas can only enhance the classroom experience.

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Chapter 3

Antebellum U.S. Migration and Communication[1]

3.1 Antebellum U.S. Migration and Communication

The nineteenth century in the United States was a period of movement. A wave of migration in the 1830s and 1840s witnessed easterners heading out from established states into unsettled territories and challenging new environments across the West and Southwest. These migratory adventures slowed significantly during the late 1850s, 1860s, and early 1870s, as individuals were drawn into the Civil War and its aftermath. However, by the 1880s, many people were on the move again, often trying to get to the west coast and finding themselves stranded in mid-America. Despite the military and social conflicts of the 1830s and 1840s, Texas, or the land that would become Texas, became a popular settlement point for migrants from a wide variety of backgrounds and with an equally diverse set of goals. Two letters and a travel diary, available online as part of the 'Our Americas' Archive Partnership[2] (a digital collaboration on the hemispheric Americas) and physically housed in Rice University's Woodson Research Center, can assist in teaching exercises focused upon the movement of peoples and ideas in the antebellum U.S.

Question of War

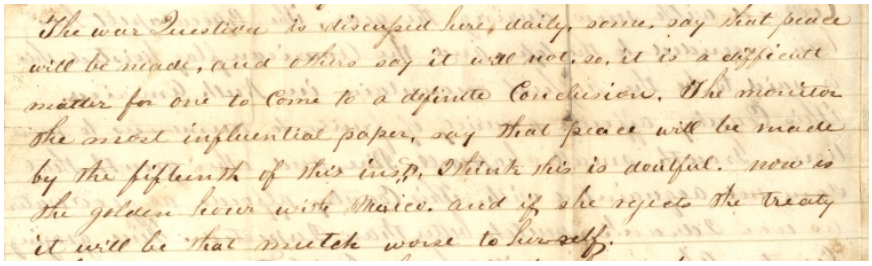
The war Question is discussed here, daily, some say that peace will be made, and others say it will not. so, it is a difficult matter for one to come to a definite Conclusion. The monitor the most influential paper, say that peace will be made by the fifteenth of this inst. I think this is doubtful. now is the golden hour with Mexico. and if she rejects the treaty it will be that much worse to her self.

Figure 3.1: A selection from a letter that M. Mattock sent to Major McEwen on May 7, 1848.[3] Mattock is in Mexico during the composition of the letter and considers the possibility of war.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m34483/1.3/>.
[2] See the file at <http://cnx.org/content/m34483/latest/http://oaap.rice.edu/>
[3] See the file at <http://cnx.org/content/m34483/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/9241>