3.3 The African Diaspora

Part II: The Middle Passage

Diaspora → the dispersion (or scattering) of people over time from the continent of Africa
The Middle Passage

a) For weeks, months, sometimes as long as a year, Africans waited in the dungeons of the slave factories scattered along Africa's western coast.

– Out of the roughly 20 million who were taken from their homes and sold into slavery, half didn't complete the journey to the African coast, most of those dying along the way.
The Middle Passage

b) Africans who had made the Middle Passage to the plantations of the New World did not return to their homeland to tell what happened to those people who suddenly disappeared.

- Sometimes the captured Africans were told that they were to work in the fields.
- But this was difficult to believe, since, from the African's experience, tending crops took so little time and didn't require many hands.
Their "living quarters" was often a deck within the ship that had less than five feet of headroom.

- throughout a large portion of the deck, sleeping shelves cut this limited amount of headroom in half
- The slaves were branded with hot irons and restrained with shackles.
The Middle Passage

d) 300 to 400 people were packed in a tiny area -- an area with little ventilation and, in some cases, not even enough space to place buckets for human waste.

— disease on the ships was widespread.
e) From the captain's point of view, his human cargo was extremely valuable and had to be kept alive and, if possible, uninjured.

- A slave who tried to starve him or herself was tortured. If torture didn't work, the slave was force fed.
- Middle Passage mortality rates were high.
- It is now believed that between ten and twenty percent of those transported lost their lives.
The Middle Passage

Surviving the trauma of the Middle Passage was a kind of unifying experience for African who spoke different languages and came from different parts of the African continent.
The Middle Passage

**TASK:** Look at the packet of primary sources & the artifacts shown on this page. Determine which 3 primary sources (excerpts) and ONE artifact should be part of a museum display dedicated to remembering the Slave Trade.

1. Cut out of slave ship
2. 1789 engraving of Olaudah Equiano
3. Pewter jug from slave ship
4. 1720 Atlantic map