

Sowande' M. Mustakeem. *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016. Pp. 288. Paper. \$24.95.

Sowande' M. Mustakeem, Associate Professor of History at Washington University in St. Louis, presents a new perspective of transatlantic slavery by focusing on the unheard voices of bondpeople in the Middle Passage. The Middle Passage is the ocean journey that slaves endured when brought to the Americas. Mustakeem argues that the historical focus on bondpeoples' transformation once they worked on plantations in the Americas fails to recognize that the majority of their transformations took place while at sea. This book focuses on the commodification and treatment of black slaves in the Middle Passage, where terror was a key tool of enforcement. Using the diaries of ship captains, crew members, and testimonies of many slave traders from when the British House of Commons debated to end the international slave trade in the late eighteenth century, Mustakeem explains the horrors that took place on slave trading vessels. Her work gives voices to the terrorized millions human cargoes.

Mustakeem calls the process of enslavement the "human manufacturing process," focusing on the warehousing, transportation, and deliverance of slaves as products. Beyond those three phases of the Middle Passage, the chapters of the book are arranged in chronological order, from the beginning of the slave trade in Africa to the selling of slaves in America, with a focus on the late eighteenth century. The chapters can also be interpreted as body parts of the anatomy of slavery, transforming this book into an almost living creation through the horrors of slavery at sea. Mustakeem's work is part of group of scholars interrogating enslaved people's ocean voyage experiences; Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* and Marcus Rediker's *The Slave Ship: A Human History*.

Slavery at Sea skillfully pieces together the horrific tale of what happened from the kidnapping and sale of African people to their auctioning in the Americas. Brimming with grueling tales and practices at sea, the imagery is vivid, forcing the reader to envision exactly how inhumane the treatment of enslaved people was. With

each chapter, the unmaking of the enslaved person evolves: first with the kidnapping of people in their homelands, to the torture and malnutrition while aboard the ship, and then to the death and illness that surrounded slaves everywhere. In one example, Mustakeem details how a nursing infant was brutally beaten in front of its mother. After the child had been killed, the captain forced the mother to throw her child's body overboard. Captains and surgeons recorded these kinds of incidents with astonishing detachment in an increasingly industrial world, concerned solely with delivering and selling their human cargo.

Mustakeem's opposition against using quantitative data in her book is her only weakness. Specifically, her argument about bondpeople's medical ailments could have been even more convincing if she had included how many slaves died of scurvy, the "flux", smallpox, apoplexy, and parasites. Without quantitative evidence, these individual stories lacked the horror of the other chapters.

Overall, Mustakeem succeeds in proving that the transformation of slaves happened while aboard ships on the Middle Passage. This book serves as a glimpse into a history that has been long forgotten. Without an attempt to hold back any harshness of the realities at sea, Mustakeem shows the violence and horror bondpeople experienced during the human manufacturing process. Her work is an important addition to the study of early American history and how slaves were commodified.

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