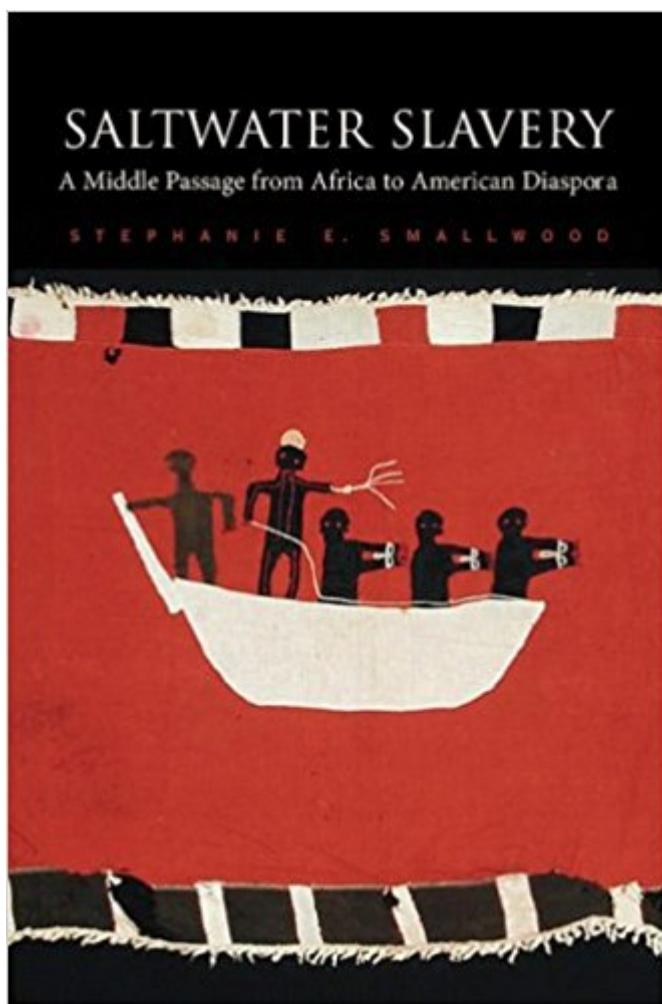


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Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage From Africa To American Diaspora



Synopsis

This bold, innovative book promises to radically alter our understanding of the Atlantic slave trade, and the depths of its horrors. Stephanie E. Smallwood offers a penetrating look at the process of enslavement from its African origins through the Middle Passage and into the American slave market. Smallwood's story is animated by deep research and gives us a startlingly graphic experience of the slave trade from the vantage point of the slaves themselves. Ultimately, *Saltwater Slavery* details how African people were transformed into Atlantic commodities in the process. She begins her narrative on the shores of seventeenth-century Africa, tracing how the trade in human bodies came to define the life of the Gold Coast. Smallwood takes us into the ports and stone fortresses where African captives were held and prepared, and then through the Middle Passage itself. In extraordinary detail, we witness these men and women cramped in the holds of ships, gasping for air, and trying to make sense of an unfamiliar sea and an unimaginable destination. Arriving in America, we see how these new migrants enter the market for laboring bodies, and struggle to reconstruct their social identities in the New World. Throughout, Smallwood examines how the people at the center of her story—merchant capitalists, sailors, and slaves—made sense of the bloody process in which they were joined. The result is both a remarkable transatlantic view of the culture of enslavement, and a painful, intimate vision of the bloody, daily business of the slave trade.

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; 11/15/08 edition (December 15, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674030680

ISBN-13: 978-0674030688

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #20,523 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > History > Africa > West Africa #7 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Africa #13 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Abolition

Customer Reviews

In this stark depiction of slaves and their "utter alienation from the most basic norms of everyday

life," Smallwood simultaneously delivers a lucid popular history and expands scholarly understanding of slavery with a thorough, clear-eyed look at the dreaded Middle Passage and how it shaped the slave experience. She begins by examining the economics, politics and logistics of capturing, and selling Africans. Taking on "The Anomalous Intimacies of the Slave Cargo," Smallwood is particularly adept at portraying, in detail, the unbearable conditions of the slave ships. Disease, violence and death loomed large over the tightly-packed human payload, as did the horrors of the unknown: well aware they would never return home, most were unsure where they were going-many expected to be eaten-and it was common for slaves to jump overboard to their certain deaths. Once on the opposite shore, of course, there were more humiliations to come, which Smallwood examines unflinchingly. Extensive research, much of it from primary sources, forms Smallwood's basis, but she has a storyteller's knack for well-pitched anecdotes and pointed examples, as in the simple, heartbreaking notation from a captain with a diseased, largely unsaleable haul: "the rest being Refuse and Boys & Girls soe very small that divers of them were under eight years old." Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery* sets a new standard. It is at once a harrowing evocation of the Middle Passage, a brilliant account of the ways that Africans and Europeans made sense of the bloody process in which they were joined, and a subtle critique of the categories of historical inquiry. Here we see realized the enormous promise of a genuinely Atlantic approach to the history of American slavery. (Walter Johnson, author of *Soul by Soul*)W.E.B. Du Bois called the African slave trade the 'most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history.' Stephanie Smallwood captures this drama in imaginative and innovative ways, offering a powerful account of the maritime origins of African-America amid the profound violence of the world market. (Marcus Rediker, co-author of *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*)No study of the Atlantic slave trade has attempted to penetrate the darkness of those ships' holds, to explore what might have gone on in the minds of the hundreds of nameless people trapped below decks—until now. Smallwood gets there through a tour de force of theoretical sophistication, sensitive informed imagination, and dramatic writing. Hers is the most original and provocative book on the Middle Passage in almost half a century. (Joseph C. Miller, author of *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730–1830*)Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery* is the new starting point for studies of the Middle Passage and required reading for students of the black Atlantic. (Ira Berlin,

University of Maryland, author of *Many Thousands Gone*) Smallwood aims to move away from the numbers game that has ensnared so many other historians studying the Middle Passage. Instead of ledgers and account books, she uses letters, journals, and narratives from around the trade route to get closer to the slave experience itself. As the narrative follows the progress of the newly enslaved across the Middle Passage, Smallwood's use of quotes brings to life the everyday horror experienced by 'Saltwater Slaves,' as Africans first arriving in the Americas were described at the time. (Kathryn V. Stewart Library Journal 2007-01-15) In this stark depiction of slaves and their 'utter alienation from the most basic norms of everyday life,' Smallwood simultaneously delivers a lucid popular history and expands scholarly understanding of slavery with a thorough, clear-eyed look at the dreaded Middle Passage and how it shaped the slave experience. Smallwood is particularly adept at portraying, in detail, the unbearable conditions of the slave ships. Extensive research, much of it from primary sources, forms Smallwood's basis, but she has a storyteller's knack for well-pitched anecdotes and pointed examples. (Publishers Weekly 2007-02-19) This deeply researched, tightly focused, and skillfully evocative look at the Atlantic slave trade, 1675–1725, details the experience of crossing the ocean—an ordeal fatal to many of the slaves who were forced to undertake it. (The Atlantic 2007-04-01) Stephanie E. Smallwood's excellent book *Saltwater Slavery* has attracted less attention than it deserves. Making careful use of the primary sources at [the National Archives at] Kew, Smallwood follows 300,000 captives taken from what is now Ghana, between 1675 and 1725, to 'widening circles of the diaspora in the Americas.' An ambitious, innovative and highly successful feature of her book is to take what is known about the beliefs of the isolated societies from which slaves were taken—communities who in some cases had never seen white people, the ocean or a ship—to offer a carefully controlled imaginative reconstruction of how the embarked slaves may have conceptualized the 'saltwater' experience and attempted to reconcile what they saw with their existing world view. (William St. Clair Times Literary Supplement 2008-03-14)

In *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, Stephanie E. Smallwood examines the interaction between Europeans and Africans in the Gold Coast slave trade during the seventeenth through eighteenth centuries. Smallwood herself describes the subject, writing, "Saltwater Slavery brings the people aboard slave ships to life as subjects in American social history." Smallwood seeks to better understand the perspectives of slaves in the Atlantic World of the Middle Passage by reading between the lines of European documents to tease out the slaves' narratives. Smallwood writes,

Considering the dimension of slaves' lives allows us to piece together a picture of a place, a time, and an experience that does not otherwise figure into the archival record. Smallwood argues that the coasts represented a key boundary, for example, between slavery as Africans understood it in the interior of Africa and how Europeans commodified it at the littoral. Similarly between the world of the slave ship and the needs of plantation owners in the Americas. Smallwood writes, "On the coast, captives were marked as commodities both physically and figuratively." As a result, captives and those who claimed to own them understood that saltwater slavery menaced them with social death of unprecedented proportions. Once aboard the ships, slaves became, for the purpose of transatlantic shipment, mere physical units that could be arranged and molded at will. The ships represented the boundary where power dynamics turned people into objects. Having crossed the Atlantic, slavers found that "the commodities they sold to American buyers were not the same commodities purchased on the African coast" due to the ravages of disease and violence both physical and psychological. Smallwood's discussion of commodifying slaves draws a great deal from Michel Foucault. Broadly speaking, Smallwood's entire argument follows a Foucauldian discourse of power, especially when she describes relations of slaves to one another based on ethnic similarities or differences. Smallwood also relies heavily on African studies to supplement her analysis of the primary sources. For her method, Smallwood relies on official documents such as ledgers and more informal documents, comprising "internal correspondence between and among officials in London and agents stationed in Africa and the Americas." She also includes various journals and other marginalia to create a fuller picture, observing that "it is in the dissonances between these two accounts that we can discern something of the captives' own testimony."

Well written and insightful. The thoughts Ms. Smallwood proposes are revolutionary for me. As a young white girl, I was taught about the slave trade and the impact it had on human lives. I understood it was horrible but I was too young to conceive of all the social, political, international and personal aspects of its effects. As I matured, some things crossed my mind with understanding, but this book enabled all the loose thoughts to come together so that I could see a bigger, clearer picture of the effects of the unspeakable atrocities themselves and the wrongs that have continued long after the abolishment of slavery. I applaud Ms. Smallwood for her careful and deliberate work

towards delivering a clear and eye opening illustration of a matter so easily misunderstood and overlooked in its monumental significance.

Anyone who reads this great account of a forced journey can easily and fully understands why the history of forcing Africans to and enslavement in the U.S. cannot be buried nor lost in "alternative facts"!!!

Very engaging read!

The book is informative but it can be a real slow read at times.

Great historical reading. Stunningly well informed and impressive by any standard. Of great relevance and recommended reading for those interested in this subject matter.

Excellent insight on the Gold Coast slave trade.

This was a very interesting read on the Atlantic slave trade and its impact on the New World. There is much emphasis on the middle passage itself, slave ship conditions, and newly arrived Africans in the Americas.

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