

→ American History Play

From Slavery to

Kidnapped and sold into bondage at 11, a West African boy struggles to survive—and break free

Characters

Prologue narrator

*Kwasi, an African slave trader

Olaudah Equiano

*Jack Davis, slave ship crew member

*Folami, African woman held captive

*Auctioneer, at a slave market

*Charles Ford } merchants in

*Edward Kane } Barbados, West Indies

Dick Baker, a white teenage sailor

Michael Pascal, captain of
a British trading ship

Robert King, a merchant from
Philadelphia

Captain Thomas Farmer, commander
of one of King's trading ships

Narrators A-E

Epilogue narrator

* Indicates a fictional or composite
character. All others were real people.

PROLOGUE

Prologue narrator: Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the slave trade thrived. Merchants in Europe and the Americas became wealthy by selling kidnapped Africans into slavery. In the American colonies, most slaves went to Southern **plantations**. But until Northern states began to ban the trade in 1777, Northerners also owned slaves.

For the 12 million African men, women, and children sold into bondage, the slave trade brought unimaginable suffering. Olaudah (*oh-lah-OO-day*) Equiano was one of those slaves. He was taken by force from his home in West Africa (probably modern-day Nigeria). Here is his story.

SCENE 1

Narrator A: One day in 1755, while Olaudah is playing with his sister, a band of raiders kidnaps them. The children are soon separated and sold to different tribes. For several months, Olaudah, about 11, is enslaved to other Africans. But one day, a stranger grabs him.

Kwasi: Come with me, boy. Don't make a sound or I will hurt you.

Olaudah: I don't belong to you!

Kwasi: I don't care who you

belong to. You will make me rich.

Olaudah: Where are we going?

Kwasi: To the ocean. People there will pay me well for you.

Narrator B: When they reach the coast, Kwasi takes Olaudah onto a huge ship and sells him to European slave traders. Olaudah, seeing white people for the first time, is terrified of them.

Jack Davis: Come on, boy! You're going in with all the others.

Narrator C: The ship is crammed with hundreds of Africans, many chained together and moaning with fear or pain. One is a woman who speaks Olaudah's language.

Folami: Where are you from?

Olaudah: A village many months' travel from here. My father is an important man, a chief with servants and slaves of his own. But I was stolen, and now I'm a slave.

Folami: I was kidnapped too and traded to those pale people.

Olaudah: Are they ghosts? Will they eat us?

Folami: No. They just keep bringing more of us. We're packed in so close, we can hardly move!

Olaudah: Help! Let me out!

Davis: Cry all you want, boy. This ship is setting sail.

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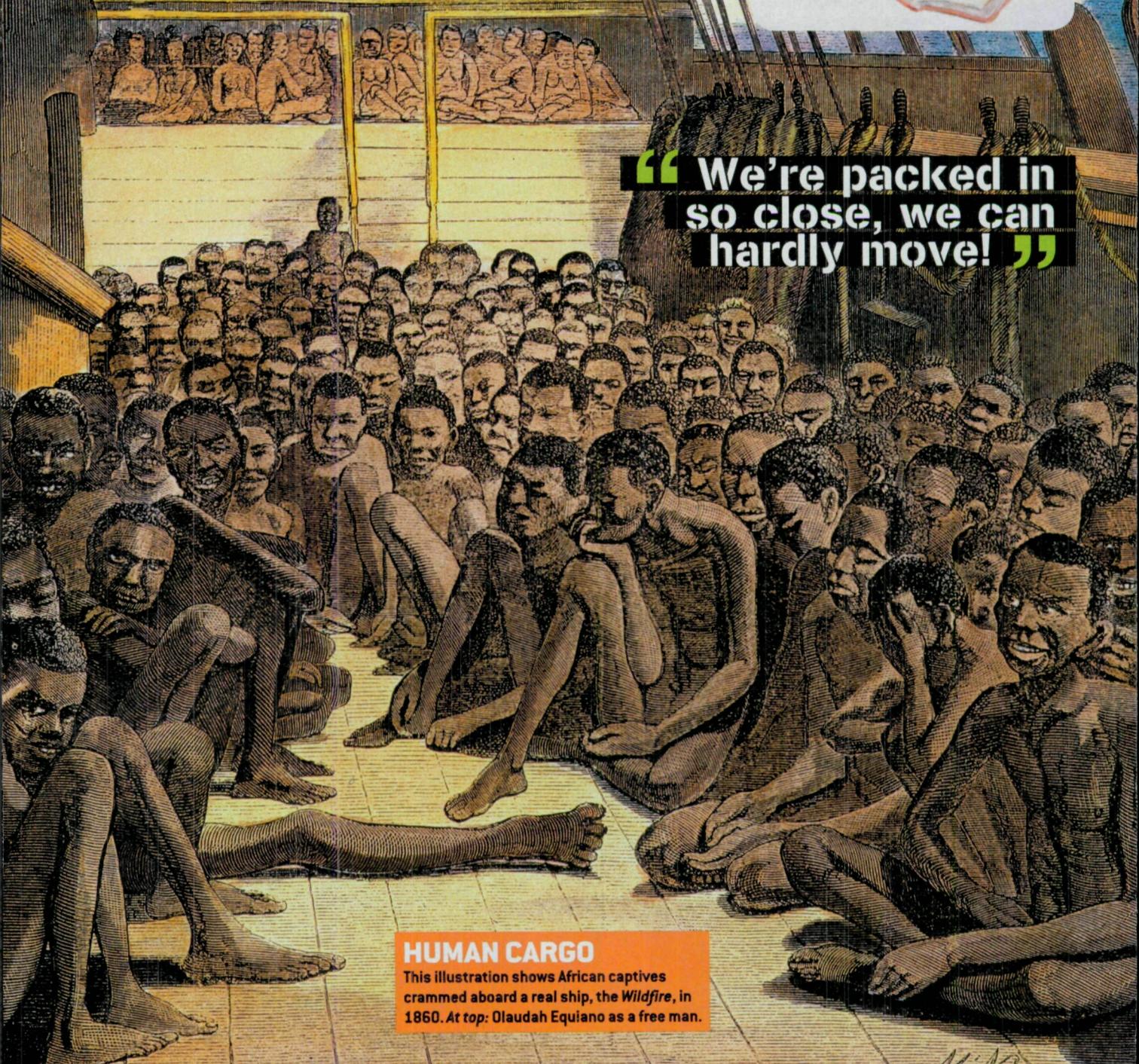
→ Words to Know

- **abolitionist** (*n*): a person who opposes slavery
- **manumission** (*n*): an act that frees someone from slavery
- **plantation** (*n*): a large estate on which workers produce crops for the owner's benefit
- **pound** (*n*): a unit of British currency (symbol: £) similar to the U.S. dollar

Freedom



“ We’re packed in so close, we can hardly move! ”



HUMAN CARGO

This illustration shows African captives crammed aboard a real ship, the *Wildfire*, in 1860. At top: Olaudah Equiano as a free man.

SCENE 2

Narrator D: For two months, the captives suffer in the filthy cargo hold. Many are beaten. Many die.

Olaudah: The slave owners in my country were never this brutal.

Folami: I fear what will come next.

Olaudah: It can't get worse!

Narrator E: But it does. When the ship arrives at Barbados [see map], Oludah and the others are put up for sale at a public auction.

Auctioneer: Who will buy this strong woman and her two kids?

Charles Ford: I'll take her. She'll make a good field hand. But I don't need useless young mouths to feed.

Edward Kane: I'll buy the children. They're a good size for housework.

Folami: No! Don't take my babies!

Olaudah: Men are being torn from their wives, children from their parents. What will become of us?

Narrator A: Oludah is shipped off to the colony of Virginia. A plantation owner buys him and puts him to work clearing rocks from a field.

SCENE 3

Narrator B: Oludah is soon sold to Michael Pascal, captain of a trading ship. A white crew member

soon befriends the frightened boy.

Dick Baker: Your English isn't bad!

Olaudah: Thanks. What are you doing?

Dick: Reading a story.

Olaudah: What do you mean?

How do books tell you stories?

Dick: This writing stands for the words we speak. Do you want to learn how to read and write?

Olaudah: Yes, please teach me!

Narrator C: Oludah works hard and Pascal treats him well. Oludah begins to feel safe. Then, in December 1762, while the ship is docked in England . . .

Michael Pascal: Come with me!

Olaudah: To stock up on supplies?

Pascal: No. I'm selling you.

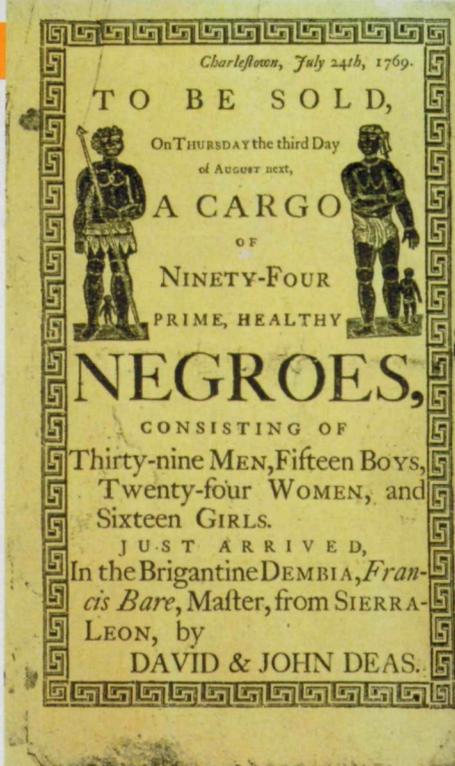
Olaudah: Haven't I served you well, Captain?

Pascal: You have. In fact, your new skills have made you even more valuable. That's why I'm selling you. Your new master is setting sail to the West Indies.

Olaudah: Please, no! Slaves are treated so cruelly there!

Narrator D: But Oludah is soon on a ship bound for Montserrat.

Olaudah: My friends and all my hopes are gone once again!

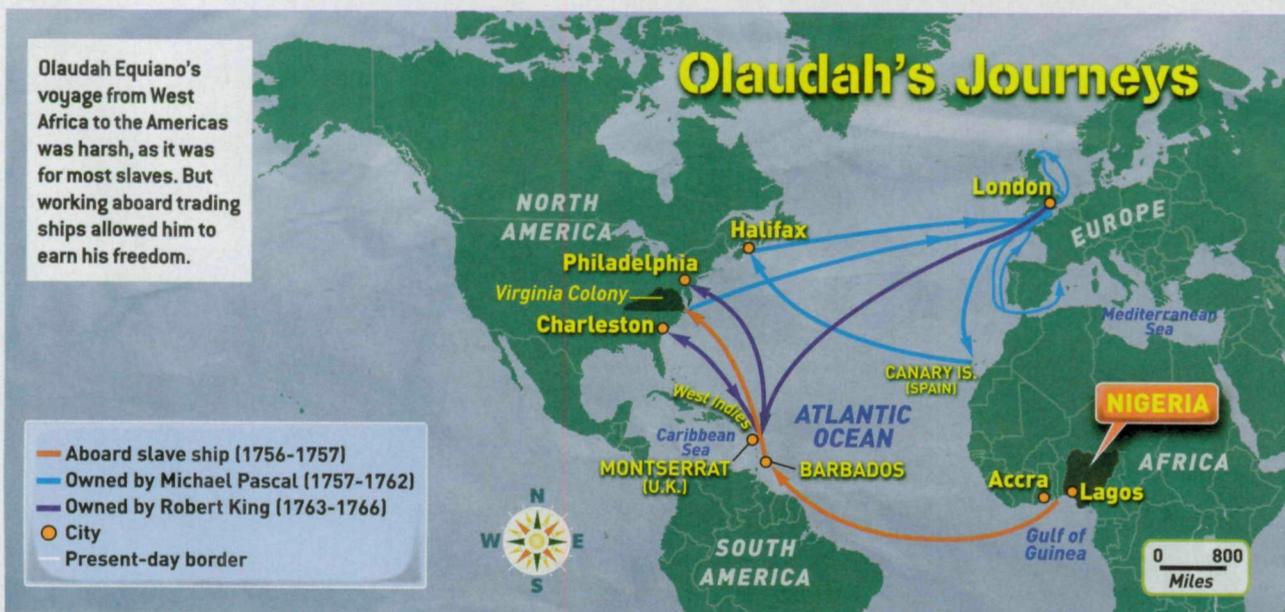


IMPORTED

Traders advertised the arrival of slaves as they would any other new merchandise. This 1769 ad was posted in Charlestown (now Charleston), South Carolina.

SCENE 4

Narrator E: In the West Indies, Oludah, now about 17, watches as a British plantation owner beats his slaves until their bones crack. He fears for his life. But in May 1763, he is sold to Robert King. King imports sugar and rum from



Olaudah Equiano's voyage from West Africa to the Americas was harsh, as it was for most slaves. But working aboard trading ships allowed him to earn his freedom.

- Aboard slave ship (1756-1757)
- Owned by Michael Pascal (1757-1762)
- Owned by Robert King (1763-1766)
- City
- - - Present-day border



BEATEN

Slaves were often treated cruelly by masters and overseers. This man, who was photographed after the Civil War, bears the scars of repeated whippings.

the West Indies and exports various American goods to the islands.

Robert King: You cost me a lot of money, Olaudah, but you have been worth every bit of it and more. Your hard work is saving me more than 100 pounds a year!

Olaudah: Mr. King, may I ask what you paid for me?

King: Your slave price? It was £40*.

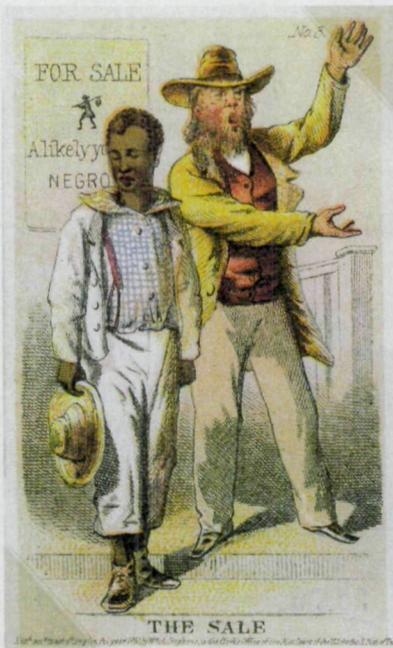
Olaudah: If I can earn that much, will you let me buy my freedom?

King: One of my ships' captains, Thomas Farmer, likes having you work with him. See what you can earn for yourself along the way.

Olaudah: I will serve you well, sir!

Narrator A: Off and on for several years, Olaudah sails with Captain Farmer. They trade Mr. King's goods between the American colonies and the West Indies. During their journeys, Olaudah finds ways to earn his own money on the side, once his regular tasks are done.

*roughly \$2,000 in today's money



BOUGHT AND SOLD

This young slave is being auctioned off to the highest bidder—the same fate suffered by Olaudah and his shipmates upon reaching Barbados.

SCENE 5

Narrator B: One day at sea . . .

Captain Thomas Farmer: How are you faring, lad?

Olaudah: I use money I get cutting crewmen's hair to buy small items. At the next port, I sell them for a higher price. I've saved up £47.

Captain: Mr. King is in for a surprise! I'll take you to see him when we get back to Philadelphia.

Narrator C: When the ship docks in 1766, the Captain keeps his word.

Olaudah: Mr. King, I'm ready to buy my freedom. I have the £40.

King: How did you get the money?

Olaudah: I earned it, sir.

Captain: It's true, Mr. King. He's a very smart and careful trader.

King: But he's valuable property!

Captain: You must keep your word. Olaudah has worked hard.

King: Very well. Olaudah, take this note to the office. The secretary will draw up your **manumission**.

Slavery: Key Dates

- **1619:** The first African slaves imported to the American colonies arrive at Jamestown, Virginia.
- **1808:** The United States bans trans-Atlantic slave trading.
- **1833:** The United Kingdom's Slavery Abolition Act bans slavery throughout the British Empire.
- **1863:** President Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in Confederate states.
- **1865:** The 13th Amendment abolishes slavery in the U.S.

Olaudah: Thank you, thank you!

Narrator D: On July 11, 1766, Olaudah, now 22, is finally free.

Olaudah: This morning, I was a slave. Now I am my own master!

EPILOGUE

Epilogue narrator: In 1767, Equiano settled in England and continued his education. He became an **abolitionist**, giving eloquent speeches against slavery. In 1789, he published his life story, describing the horrors of slavery.

In 1808, 11 years after Equiano's death, the United States made it illegal to import slaves (*see box above*). But owning slaves was not banned throughout the entire country until 1865, after the Civil War.

—Mary Harvey & Kathy Wilmore

➔ Think About It

1. How did learning to read and write affect Olaudah's life?
2. Why do you suppose Robert King treated Olaudah well and let him buy his freedom?